THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF BANNERSTONES IN THE SAVANNAH RIVER VALLEY

Kenneth E. Sassaman and Asa R. Randall

In the early twentieth century, the late William H. Claflin Jr. of Belmont, Massachusetts, made regular forays to the middle Savannah River Valley of Georgia and South Carolina to collect artifacts from the area and occasionally dig at sites such as Stallings Island. Most of his artifact collection is now curated at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University. Among the relatively well provenienced items are 140 bannerstones from several locations in the middle Savannah. Informed by current archaeological knowledge of the region, the Claflin bannerstones register the history of group formation, interaction, and alliance over a span of ca. 1,300 years (5500–4200 cal. B.P.). During this time, three successive phases are marked by changes in bannerstone morphology, production, and distribution. Transitions between phases coincide with major changes in the distribution and alignment of regional populations. Summaries of the chief features of each phase are followed by observations on the historical circumstances accounting for such change.

Bannerstones are stone artifacts that were pecked and polished into various shapes and drilled lengthwise or widthwise with a hole roughly one centimeter in diameter. The use of such items has long been a topic of debate in eastern North American archaeology (Baer 1921; Knoblock 1939; Kwas 1982; Moorehead 1917; Webb 1957). The term “bannerstone” itself evokes a sense of ceremonial importance. Indeed, bannerstones occur in burials and caches of the Archaic period (e.g., Claflin 1931; Charles and Buikstra 1983; Doucette 2003; Douglass 1882; Fowler 1957; Hassan and Farnsworth 1987; Moore 1882; Webb 1946; Webb and DeJarnette 1942; Webb and Haag 1939) and they sometimes bear remarkable design qualities and exaggerated or hypertrophic forms (Sassaman 1998). But they also occur in simple, rough forms and are found broken in middens with the usual domestic refuse. Thus bannerstones appear to have had a dual existence in both mundane and ritual realms of Archaic life (Kwas 1982).

The “mundane” identity of bannerstones is the spear-thrower or atlatl weight, following from the functional inferences made by William S. Webb (1957). Having observed drilled prismatic stones with other spear-thrower parts in Shell Mound Archaic graves in the mid-South (Webb and Haag 1939:51–58), Webb not only inferred the function of these stones but also developed a model to explain the evolution of elaborate forms as a response to demands for increased spear-throwing efficiency (Webb 1957). Modern understanding of the mechanics of spear throwing undermines Webb’s model (Cotterell and Kaminga 1990:168–169). Spear throwers without attached weights were used by hunters worldwide and were most likely used throughout the Holocene in the New World before (and perhaps even after) bow and arrow technology appeared. Thus, although drilled stones and other media were no doubt attached to spear throwers by some Archaic hunters in the East, and were probably used to launch spears, the extraneousness of this attachment, combined with the otherwise elaborate, hypertrophic forms, warrants use of the term “bannerstone,” which is what we favor.

Bannerstones are a uniquely Eastern Archaic trait with tremendous spatial, temporal, and formal variation. Documenting the variation of bannerstones has been an ongoing project since the days of Webb. Knoblock (1939) and Lutz (2000) assembled the largest compendia on bannerstones, and Kwas (1981) provided one of the first analytical approaches to address temporal variations. Several of us have been working on the social implications of bannerstones in the south Atlantic slope (Blessing 2006; Sassaman 1996, 1998; Sassaman and Randall 2004). Bowen (1994) continues to amass a database for Ohio and vicinity, and Burdin (2004) recently compiled the data for Kentucky.

Bannerstones are affiliated most directly with populations of the Middle and Late Archaic periods and probably do not predate 8500 cal. B.P. If Clovis and its immediate descendants used spear throwers (and they most likely did), they did so without using recognizable stone weights. The earliest uses of bannerstones occur on two major fronts: in Shell Mound Archaic assemblages of the lower Midwest and mid-South, and in assemblages affiliated with the Stanley/Neville horizon of the Atlantic slope. The forms and contexts are similar enough to suggest a historical relationship. The dominant forms at this time include (1) those referred to variously as crescent-shaped (Kwas 1981), semilunar (Lewis and Lewis 1961:66), winged (Cross 1999), or simply the Stanley type (Coe 1964); and (2) cylindrical, prismatic, and tubular varieties (Webb 1946:221, 266). Forms diversified over the ensuing millennia, only to become less varied but more elaborate in the millennium before bannerstones.
disappeared altogether, ca. 3200 cal. B.P. Concordance between bannerstone forms and archaeological phases has not been possible in many regions, as certain forms saw coeval, widespread use, while others were made and used at vastly different times and places.

Changes in bannerstone form over time are evident in several subregions of the eastern North America. Unfortunately, for most subregions, too few contextual data are available to assess the degree to which changes in form are due to developments within a "continuous" cultural tradition (e.g., Webb 1957) or the result of historical disjunctures such as immigration, contact, and ethnogenesis (e.g., Knoblock 1939:27-28). Variables other than morphology certainly bear relevance in this regard, as variations in the context of manufacture and deposition, raw material preference, or patterns of dispersal from sites of manufacture can reveal processes of culture change not apparent in morphological variations alone. The inferential value of bannerstones, as a medium of cultural expression, is far greater than current data allow.

Among the subregions of eastern North America with large numbers of bannerstones and sufficient cultural-historical context for interpreting these items is the Savannah River Valley of Georgia and South Carolina (Figure 1). Large collections held in museums and by private individuals often include bannerstones from the middle Savannah area, centered on Augusta, Georgia. One of the largest is the William H. Claflin Jr. Collection housed at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University. From his home in Belmont, Massachusetts, Claflin regularly traveled to Augusta during winter months to collect artifacts and occasionally dig at sites in the area, notably Stallings Island. After digging at Stallings Island repeatedly between 1908 and 1925, Claflin participated in the 1929 expedition to Stallings Island led by Harriet and Burton Cosgrove, and he authored the report of that work issued two years later by the Peabody Museum (Claflin 1931). Along with artifacts from his own work at Stallings Island, Claflin bequeathed to the Peabody his personal collection of artifacts from scores of other sites in the middle Savannah area. Among the items are 140 bannerstones with at least county-level, but often site-specific provenience, including 71 from Stallings Island.

In 2003 we examined the entire assemblage of bannerstones in the Claflin Collection to record data on provenience, morphology, raw material, and condition. Coupled with observations from other collections and archaeological contexts in the region, the Claflin Collection offers a robust data set for interpreting changes in bannerstone morphology, production, exchange, and deposition. As we argue in this paper, changes in bannerstones coincide with major changes in the distribution and alignment of regional populatons over three successive phases. Before describing changes within these phases, we begin with a basic description of the Claflin Collection.

The Claflin Bannerstone Collection

The 140 bannerstones in the Claflin Collection are tabulated by provenience and morphological type in Table 1. As noted above, provenience information varies from site- or locality-specific, to county-level. Following the least-specific provenience, bannerstone tabulation in Table 1 is subdivided by four major counties of the middle Savannah area (Figure 1), with an additional miscellaneous subdivision for four isolated and dispersed finds, three with mixed county provenience, and three lacking provenience information. The vast majority of bannerstones (102 or 72.9 percent) came from locations in Columbia County, Georgia, and most of these specimens (71 or 69.6 percent of Columbia County specimens) were collected from Stallings Island. The adjacent, upriver county of Lincoln accounts for an additional 19 specimens, while much smaller samples are attributed to locations in Richmond County, Georgia and Edgefield County, South Carolina. Although South Carolina counties are underrepresented in the Claflin Collection, assemblages from the Moody site in Edgefield County and the Calhoun Falls locality in Abbeville County (Figure 1) figure prominently in the regional sample, as do excavated assemblages from the Mill Branch sites (Ledbetter 1995) and Lovers Lane (Elliott et al. 1994) in Georgia, along with lesser finds at numerous sites in the region. These additional specimens, particularly those collected from subsurface contexts in the modern era, provide the contextual basis for interpreting variations in the Claflin Collection, and we thus introduce them in sections that follow further below.

Typology

The morphological typology employed in this study follows closely the typology developed by Knoblock (1939:125-133). His scheme of 24 groups and 32 types was based on the explicit assumption that bannerstone forms evolved over time from simple to complex. Although modern data do not refute this assumption, some of the specific historical relationships Knoblock proposed are unsubstantiated (Kwas 1981) and many more remain untested. For instance, the seven "primary" forms defined by Knoblock were purported to have a southern origin centered on the state of Georgia. Modern dating places the earliest bannerstones in the Shell Mound Archaic and Stanly horizons, neither of which is centered in Georgia, but instead far to the west.
Table 1. Absolute Frequency of Bannerstones in Claflin Collection by Morphological Type and Provenience.

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Key: NSoO = Notched Southern Ovate; SoO = Southern Ovate; DE = Double Edged; SoH = Southern Humped; SoT = Southern Triangle; SoR = Southern Rectangle; MBut = modified Butterfly; WW = Wisconsin Winged; Hin = Hinge; BUT = Butterfly; StV = Stanly variant; TUB = Tubular; OTH = other; UID = unidentifiable.

and north, respectively. Despite these and other discrepancies with Knoblock’s “evolutionary” model, the typology remains useful because it is relatively comprehensive and replicable. A few deviations from Knoblock’s typology are noted below.

At least 104 of the Claflin bannerstones meet the morphological criteria for types Knoblock described as “Southern.” Dominant among these is the Notched Southern Ovate (n = 31), a form that is virtually unique to the middle Savannah area and very common to Stallings Island. With diameters as great as 20 cm, Notched Southern Ovates are among the largest and most elaborate bannerstones ever made. Second in frequency are specimens Knoblock would classify as Southern Ovate (n = 27). Averaging about 8.0 cm in diameter and lacking notches, the Southern Ovate has a broader distribution in the study area and across the greater Southeast (see below). Other “Southern” forms in the collection include Southern Double-Edged (n = 17), Southern Humped (n = 16), Southern Triangular (n = 7), and Southern Rectangular (n = 6).

With minor exception, the remaining bannerstones in the Claflin Collection conform to types Knoblock believed to be derived from the Southern forms. Among them are four Wisconsin Winged (a.k.a. Bowtie); four Hinge-type; three Butterfly; and two Tubular. In addition, five classified by us as “modified Butterfly” verge on a variant of Notched Southern Ovate, and three others are variants of the Southern Boat-Shaped form that might otherwise be described as variants of the Stanly type (cf. Coe 1964:81). Those given to the “Other” category in Table 1 consist of one Knoblock would classify as a Bottle, and another he may have assigned to the Tubular class, although in cross-section the form is actually subrectangular.

All of the 13 specimens that are unidentifiable as to morphological type are fragments from Stallings Island. All but two of the fragments are portions of wings from probable Notched Southern Ovates; the exceptions are portions of spines from similar forms.

Preforms

Slightly more than one-third of the Claflin bannerstones are unfinished (n = 51). In general, these preforms are sufficiently shaped to determine the
intended form, but in the case of Notched Southern Ovates, notches have not been completed, and in all cases, holes are either unfinished or not yet started. Not all preforms are whole, as 15 of the 51 specimens are fractured, two of which were refitted to form complete specimens. Every type in the Claflin Collection includes at least one example of a preform with one notable exception. Double-edged forms are all finished items, and only one of 17 is whole. This is not likely a matter of sample bias because all other types with double-digit samples each include at least six preforms. The lack of preforms among Double-Edged bannerstones suggests a nonlocal origin for these items, as does the high level of raw material diversity for the type.

**Raw Material**

At least 15 distinct types of raw material were used to fabricate bannerstones in the Claflin Collection. The classification of these rock types in Table 2 is a simplified scheme that glosses much of the actual mineralogical diversity of the parent materials. The vast majority of bannerstones are made from variants of basalt, notably greenstone, gabbro, and related mafic and ultramafic igneous rocks. Abundant too are examples of soapstone, a metamorphic talc-schist that was also drafted into use for cooking technology (perforated stones and, later, vessels). Other igneous and metamorphic materials (chlorite, schist, basalt, granite, gneiss, and quartzite) are represented in small to trace frequencies. All such materials, along with those that dominate the collection, occur in formations of the Piedmont province. Too little is known about the provenance of specific rock types to assess the geographical extent of procurement. It is certainly feasible that all Piedmont sources existed within catchments no greater than 50 km around middle Savannah sites. It is equally feasible that some of the materials came from much greater distances to the north and west of the middle Savannah. If the frequency of unfinished forms is taken as a proxy measure for distance to outcrops, then all types except the Double-Edged forms were made routinely on local raw materials.

The 17 Double-Edged bannerstones in the Claflin Collection include seven examples made from siltstone. This fine-grained material occurs in the Coastal Plain province, where cutbanks of the Savannah River and major tributaries have exposed ancient sedimentary formations. Other Coastal Plain materials, such as limestone, graywacke, and possibly limonite, occur in trace frequencies across bannerstone types. As with the Piedmont rocks, we cannot estimate the actual distance between geological source and specific find spots for any of the Coastal Plain varieties, although it seems reasonable to assert the distances exceed those of the Piedmont varieties.

In general, raw material diversity correlates with sample size across bannerstone type. A notable exception, however, is the relatively consistent use of dark igneous rock for the manufacture of Notched Southern Ovates. Despite the large size of this subsample (n = 31), only five distinct raw materials were used, and 87 percent of these were made from greenstone and closely related igneous rocks. The same can be said for the sample of 13 unidentifiable fragments, which, as we indicated above, are probable fragments of Notched Southern Ovates. This apparent selection for particular raw materials may simply be a practical choice for making hypertropic bannerstones, although we hasten to add that local soapstone could have easily met this demand, and, because of its softness, with much less effort. Rather, the selection for greenstone and related mafic rocks appears to be a matter of cultural preference.

### Table 2: Absolute Frequency of Bannerstones in Claflin Collection by Morphological Type and Raw Material

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Key: NSoO = Notched Southern Ovate; SoO = Southern Ovate; DE = Double Edged; SoH = Southern Humped; SoT = Southern Triangle; SoR = Southern Rectangle; MBUT = modified Butterfly; WW = Wisconsin Winged; HIM = Hinge; BUT = Butterfly; StV = Stanley variant; TUB = Tubular; OTH = other; UID = unidentifiable.
Having summarized some of the basic features of the Claflin Collection, we now situate these findings into the greater context of Late Archaic culture history. As we argue, variations in not only form and raw material, but also contexts of production, distribution, and deposition, reflect major realignments in the distribution of Late Archaic communities and the connections among them.

Bannerstone Chronology

Sufficient datable contexts are available for bannerstones in the middle Savannah River Valley to define three distinct temporal phases, which are summarized in turn below.

Phase I Bannerstones (ca. 5500-5200 cal. B.P.)

We cannot be certain when bannerstone production began in the greater Savannah River region, but it certainly did not become prevalent locally until after ca. 5200 cal. B.P., when Southern Ovate forms appear in abundance. The very earliest forms may date to the ninth millennium B.P., coincident with the Stanly Stemmed horizon as defined by Coe (1964:35) from work in North Carolina. A semilunate, picklike, or boat-shaped form of bannerstone was found in association with Stanly points at both Doerschuk and Hardaway (Coe 1964:52-53). Unfortunately, this association and its timing have not been verified by sound contexts in the Savannah River region, although both Stanly points and boat-shaped bannerstones occur in low frequency. Two of three Stanly-like bannerstones in the Claflin Collection are shown in the bottom row of Figure 2. These were recovered individually from locations across three counties in the region. Lacking better context for these forms, we are reluctant to comment further on their age or association, except to note that they do not occur in the more numerous Late Archaic assemblages that contain many bannerstones.

Bannerstones do not figure prominently over the ensuing millennia of the Middle Archaic period. None are found in assemblages of the Morrow Mountain horizon, the local manifestation of which is both temporally attenuated (ca. 8300-6600 cal. B.P.) and well represented (Sassaman and Anderson 1995:24, 108). The poorly defined millennium that follows is presumably occupied by local equivalents of the Guilford horizon, also devoid of bannerstones. The lack of bannerstones in late Middle Archaic assemblages that are otherwise well represented in the region provides a terminus post quem for bannerstones dating to ca. 5800-5500 cal. B.P. Thus, bannerstones in the greater Savannah River region appear to be a distinctly Late Archaic phenomenon, occasional Stanly forms notwithstanding.

The Claflin Collection includes 16 examples of a bannerstone form Kneblock (1939) refers to as the Southern Humped, six of which are shown in the top two rows of Figure 2, along with a lone example of a tubular form (Figure 2e). In overall morphology, these
forms are consistent with many of the oldest bannerstones known for the lower Midwest and mid-South, typically from early contexts of the Shell Mound Archaic. Six of the examples in the Claflin Collection come from Stallings Island, a site whose basal strata of shell has recently been dated to ca. 5500 cal. B.P. (Sassaman et al. 2006). Notably, five of the six Southern Humped bannerstones from Stallings Island are from mortuary context (four shown in the top row of Figure 2). Another six examples, including three preforms, came from the Uchee Creek area, several kilometers upriver from Stallings Island. The remaining specimens are distributed individually among three counties of the region. All examples of the Southern Humped are well made, and, unlike later forms, most are whole.

Other forms in the Claflin Collection may likewise date to Phase I as defined here, but generally they consist of winged varieties whose occurrence is securely dated to subsequent centuries. The most likely exceptions are the smaller specimens whose morphology conforms to Knoblock's (1939) Double-Edged, Hinge, and Butterfly types, examples of which are shown in the top row of Figure 3. Among these, only the Double-Edged variety occurs with appreciable frequency. Twelve of the 17 specimens in the collection came from Stallings Island, one from mortuary context. This item and the five Southern Humped noted above are the only bannerstones documented from burials in the region. Two of the other five Double-Edged examples were recovered from Walton Island, upriver from Stallings Island, and one each from Uchee Creek, Columbia County, and on the bank of the Savannah River opposite Stallings Island. It bears repeating that Double-Edged bannerstones are distinguished from other types in the prevalent use of siltstone and limonite. Of the 12 specimens in the entire Claflin Collection made from siltstone, more than half are Double-Edged forms. Thus, although Double-Edged bannerstones comprise only 12.1 percent of the assemblage, they account for 58.3 percent of siltstone specimens. Two other Double-Edged forms were made from limonite, the only examples in the collection.

Phase II Bannerstones (ca. 5200–4700 cal. B.P.)

Phase II as defined herein coincides precisely with the Late Archaic Paris Island Stemmed phase of the Piedmont (Elliott et al. 1994), and with the first few centuries of its Coastal Plain counterpart, the Early Stallings phase, known primarily for the first pottery in the region. Bannerstone manufacture takes off at this point, and knowledge of temporal associations of form is sound thanks to two decades of intensive field work in the area. Diagnostic of the Paris Island phase are the varieties of winged bannerstone Knoblock (1939) refers to as Southern Ovate, Southern Rectangular, and Southern Triangular. Six examples of the most prevalent form, the Southern Ovate, are shown in the bottom two rows of Figure 3. All of the Phase II forms are larger than the Southern Humped and Double-Edged forms of Phase I, owing mostly to the expanded width of wings. Raised spines are another distinctive feature of these Phase II forms, often on only one face, but sometimes both. Broken specimens are found routinely at Late Archaic sites in the middle to upper Savannah, while whole, finished products are much less common and never found in mortuary contexts. Whole preforms, on the other hand, are numerous at several locations in the region, notably the Calhoun Falls area of the Russell Reservoir (Figure 4), and at the Moody site in Edgefield County, South Carolina (Figure 5). Southern Ovate preforms in the Claflin Collection, such as the examples seen in Figure 3, are distributed widely across the region, with single examples from nine locations, three from Walton's Island, two each from Uchee Creek and the mouth of Big Kiokee Creek, and nine from Stallings Island. None of the latter specimens came from burials.

The association of Southern Ovate forms with early Stallings assemblages in the Coastal Plain is limited but seemingly secure. Single specimens were recovered from the Rabbit Mount site (Stoltman 1974), whose large assemblage of plain fiber-tempered pottery is estimated to date ca. 5100 cal. B.P., and from a lower layer of a Sapelo Island shell ring (Waring and Larson 1968), estimated to date ca. 4700 cal. B.P. Stallings fiber-tempered pottery begins to appear at middle Savannah River sites of the Fall Zone at about 4700 cal. B.P., signifying either the adoption of this innovation by resident Paris Island phase populations, or, more likely, the influx of Coastal Plain groups bearing this technology. Either way, the incidence of Phase II bannerstones in early Stallings assemblages of the Coastal Plain and coast signifies exchange among members of distinctive regional populations, an assertion bolstered by the more numerous soapstone cooking stones in early Stallings assemblages, such as Rabbit Mount (Sassaman 1993a). Marine shell beads may have been one of several media that flowed from the coast into the interior as a form of reciprocal exchange.

Southern Ovates and related forms occur occasionally at locations elsewhere in the Southeast, such as the middle Tennessee River Valley and northeast North Carolina. They also occur in Archaic mounds in Florida. Both Tomoka Mounds (Douglass 1882) and Thornhill Lake (Moore 1894) in northeast Florida yielded caches of bannerstones in mounds of the Mount Taylor culture, estimated to be as old as 6300 cal. B.P. If that old, these forms may have little
Figure 3. Phase II bannerstones and bannerstone preforms from the William H. Claflin Jr. Collection: (a) Double-Edged made from soapstone, Columbia County, Georgia; (b) Hinge preform made from gabbro, Lincoln County, Georgia; (c) Wisconsin Winged preform made from gabbro, Lincoln County, Georgia; (d) Southern Rectangular made from soapstone, Stallings Island; (e) variant of Southern Ovate made from siltstone, Edgefield County, South Carolina; (f–g) Southern Ovate preforms made from gabbro, Columbia County, Georgia; (h) Southern Ovate preform made from greenstone, Edgefield County, South Carolina; (i) Southern Ovate preform made from basalt, Richmond and Columbia Counties, Georgia; (j) Southern Ovate preform made from soapstone, Columbia County, Georgia.
Figure 4. Phase II bannerstones and bannerstone preforms from the Calhoun Falls locality of Abbeville County, South Carolina. Wiles Collection, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina.
historical connection to those from the Savannah River region. However, Mount Taylor culture continued into the fifth millennium, adding Orange fiber-tempered pottery by 4700 cal. B.P. that bears strong affinity to early Stallings wares. The senior author has argued elsewhere (Sassaman 2004) that Orange and Stallings pottery has a common source whose later diffusion was anticipated if not enabled by alliances involving bannerstone exchange. Although the actual source(s) of bannerstones in Florida mounds is unknown, we can be certain they were not made locally for lack of raw material, and it stands to reason that the scale of bannerstone production in the Savannah region may have supported extralocal, as well as local exchange.

Phase III Bannerstones (ca. 4700–4200 cal. B.P.)

Phase III coincides precisely with the Mill Branch phase, as defined by Elliott, Ledbetter, and Gordon (1994), and with the influx of early Stallings communities into the middle Savannah area. Mill Branch is historically derived from the Paris Island phase and is well represented at major shell-bearing sites such as Stallings Island and Lake Spring, as well as innumerable upland sites, most notably the type site (9WR4) in Warren County, Georgia, where Ledbetter (1995) uncovered a Mill Branch pit house dating ca. 4300–4200 cal. B.P. Included in and around the fill of the house were 14 bannerstone fragments of the elaborate variety Knoblock dubbed the Notched Southern Ovate. Broken examples of this same form are likewise conspicuous in the Mill Branch assemblages at Lovers Lane in Richmond County, Georgia (Elliott and Doyon 1981:158–163) and at Stallings Island, and they are routinely found in at least low frequency in any Mill Branch assemblage of appreciable size in the middle Savannah region.

Bannerstones in the Claflin Collection include several very large Notched Southern Ovate preforms, such as the Stallings Island example in the bottom right of Figure 6. A precedent for hypertrophic forms is seen in the large Southern Rectangular preform from the Moody site (Figure 5, bottom right), although such large specimens appear to be exceedingly rare during Phase II.

The Claflin Collection has 31 specimens of Notched Southern Ovate, eight whole and 23 broken. Eighteen came from Stallings Island, accounting for one-fourth of identifiable forms from this site. The hypertrophic example from Stallings Island shown in Figure 6 is matched by another from Columbia County; most of the others fall in the size range of the remaining three in Figure 6. Even these smaller varieties are roughly twice the size of most Phase II forms, suggesting perhaps a greater demand for elaborated and more labor-intensive products. Moreover, the craftsmanship of Notched Southern Ovates is generally remarkable. Many have very fine ridges and flanges on recessed spines, along with wings that taper to a fine tolerance. The large size and refined features of Notched Southern Ovates may suggest that bannerstones had taken on a greater value during Mill Branch times. Even so, Notched Southern Ovates have never been found in mortuary or cache contexts. In finished form they are almost always broken and discarded in general midden; whole specimens are dominated by preforms in various stages of shaping and reduction. It may be significant, however, that so many specimens entered the archaeological record in similar stages of manufacture. For instance, whole preforms often have wings, ridges, and recesses shaped but not finished (Figure 6, top row), or occasionally, one of the recesses will be removed (Figure 6, bottom row) and the longitudinal hole started.

Although Notched Southern Ovates dominate at Stallings Island, they do not appear to have direct association with the Classic Stallings assemblage so
Figure 6. Phase III bannerstone preforms from the William H. Claflin Jr. Collection: (a) Notched Southern Ovate preform made from greenstone, Columbia County, Georgia; (b–d) Notched Southern Ovate preforms made from greenstone, Stallings Island.
prevailing at this site. Classic Stallings culture (ca. 4200–3800 cal. B.P.) in the middle Savannah area is an outgrowth of the Early Stallings phase, with roots in the Coastal Plain. Arguably, Classic Stallings culture is the ethnogetic consequence of interaction between Paris Island/Mill Branch and Early Stallings groups (Sassaman 2006), which, as we noted above, involved exchanges of bannerstones, among other media. But the formation of Classic Stallings culture at ca. 4200 cal. B.P., known for its elaborate punctated pottery, coincides with the abandonment of the middle Savannah by Mill Branch groups. Bannerstone production and exchange appears to have ceased at this time. Support for this assertion is found in the lack of bannerstones in the sizeable Classic Stallings assemblages at Lovers Lane (Elliott et al. 1994) and Mims Point (Sassaman 1993b).

Another noteworthy aspect of Notched Southern Ovates is the consistency of raw material used in their manufacture. Specimens in the Claflin Collection are dominated by greenstone and related igneous rocks. Soapstone was also used frequently, but the preferred variety of this generally soft rock was a hard, green variety akin to chloritic schist. Also of note is the seeming lack of other bannerstone forms during Phase III. Except for two Double Bladed or Southern Ovate forms, bannerstones in the Mill Branch pithouse assemblage from 9WR4 are all Notched Southern Ovates, as are all the specimens from the Mill Branch component at Lovers Lane. Thus, this final period of bannerstone production is characterized by elaborate, hypertrophic forms with morphological and raw material consistency.

Bannerstones in Cultural-Historical Perspective

To summarize briefly the variations in bannerstones discussed above, three distinct phases in the greater Savannah River region are marked not only by changes in bannerstone morphology, but also by changes in the context and scale of production, exchange, and consumption. The Southern Humped bannerstones of Phase I are the only forms to occur in mortuary context, and the only appreciable cluster of these outside of Stallings Island (where the burials occur) is Uchee Creek, several kilometers upriver from Stallings Island. The winged forms of Phase II are the most diverse morphologically and the most widely distributed in the region and beyond. Two locations of high-volume manufacture are known (Moody and Calhoun Falls) and broken forms are found in midden contexts of Paris Island and Early Stallings phase sites. None have been found in mortuary contexts at Stallings Island or elsewhere. Phase II forms were exported to the Coastal Plain of the lower Savannah River Valley, and apparently to northeast Florida, where they were deposited in Archaic mounds. Finally, Phase III signifies the greatest level of morphological specificity and elaboration in bannerstone design. The Notched Southern Ovates of Phase III were a distinctively Mill Branch trait. Evidence of manufacture is found at the type site and at Lovers Lane, the latter a possible location of specialized production (see below). Although widely distributed among Mill Branch sites in the region, a disproportionate number of Notched Southern Ovates were deposited at Stallings Island, but never in mortuary context. Occasional hypertrophic forms underscore the elaboration of Phase III bannerstones, whose frequent deposition in unfinished states suggests preforms were commonly exchanged and/or cached locally. A few examples of Notched Southern Ovate have been found far afield, including Florida (e.g., Purdy 1996:71), but not with the frequency nor in the mound contexts of Phase II forms.

Having summarized the broad patterns of change, we turn to cultural-historical circumstances attending the evolution of bannerstone forms and associated contexts. The matter of origins for bannerstones is unresolved. The few Stanly-like forms in the study area, if coeval with similar forms elsewhere, would seem to have little to do with the more prevalent bannerstones of the Late Archaic period. Events surrounding the onset of Phase I, as defined here, are sketchy at best. This is the presumed apogee of the weakly defined Allendale Phase of the Coastal Plain (Sassaman et al. 2002:17–19), noted for its assemblages of well-made, lanceolate-bladed bifaces. A probable association between Allendale points and bannerstones is found at the Lewis-East site in Aiken County, South Carolina (Sassaman et al. 2002:141). Although independent dates for Lewis-East are not available, the two fragmented bannerstones at Lewis-East are consistent with forms herein assigned to Phase I, and one is made from hematite, a raw material exclusive to Phase I forms. The Lewis-East assemblage likewise contains a large number of perforated soapstone slab fragments, a medium of exchange between Piedmont and Coastal Plain groups.

Although Allendale sites like Lewis-East are devoid of pottery and shellfish, Allendale points have been recovered from the basal strata at Coastal Plain shell middens such as Rabbit Mount and Fennel Hill, both in Allendale County, South Carolina. It thus appears that the Allendale phase is the immediate precursor to Early Stallings culture, as well as the initial formation of alliance with Piedmont groups upstream. We note further that the basal shell strata at Stallings Island is now estimated to date ca. 5500 cal. B.P. (Sassaman et al. 2006). Devoid of pottery and other traits of Coastal Plain origin, the basal component at Stallings Island is a uniquely Piedmont tradition, almost certainly a pre-
It follows that the burials at Stallings Island containing Southern Humped bannerstones are of individuals who were indigenous to the Piedmont. Four of the five interments that are definitively Late Archaic involve females, according to 1930's analytical standards; the fifth was not sexed in the original report (Clafiin 1931).

Alliances between provincial groups continued to involve the exchange of bannerstones and soapstone into Phase II. At this point, the distinction between interacting groups is accentuated: Early Stallings populations and their Piedmont neighbors, members of the Paris Island tradition, shared many traits but were clearly distinct in a variety of practices, most notably the exclusive use of ceramic vessel technology by the former. It is not enough to argue that material differences between the two are merely a function of distance, or adaptations to distinct microenvironments. Rather, we understand the accentuation of difference as a matter of interaction in the sense that distinct cultural identities rendered unambiguous the roles of interacting parties. It is in this regard that the elaboration of bannerstone morphology during Phases II and III bears relevance: that is, individual makers were asserting cultural identities as a matter of interaction with "others." During Phase I, "others" may very well have been ethereal, as bannerstones were interred with the dead. During Phase II, however, bannerstones became an active medium of social interaction among the living, and rarely, if ever interred with the dead.

The transition between Phases II and III is marked by the influx of Early Stallings groups into the middle Savannah area and the genesis of Mill Branch culture. We will likely never know if existing alliances between Early Stallings and Paris Island groups encouraged the displacement of Coastal Plain groups inland, or if their increasingly permanent occupation of the middle Savannah was an imposition to resident groups. Either way, the eventual consequence for Mill Branch groups was diminished use of riverine locations and increased use of sites in the adjacent uplands, followed by abandonment of the middle Savannah by 4200 cal. B.P. Limited evidence suggests that certain descendants of Mill Branch tradition relocated westward to locations in north-central Georgia (Stanyard 2001), while others were likely assimilated into emergent Classic Stallings culture of ca. 4200-3800 cal. B.P. As noted above, bannerstone production appears to have ceased after 4200 cal. B.P., the time of Mill Branch abandonment and Classic Stallings genesis. In the centuries leading to these events, bannerstone forms became more specific and more elaborate than ever. It would appear that the Notched Southern Ovates, especially the hypertrophic forms, were designed to make an emphatic statement about cultural identity. That so many show up at Stallings Island is not surprising given its occupational history to this point. And yet, this central site was not occupied regularly by Early Stallings groups during Phase III, despite their obvious intensive use of nearby sites in the middle Savannah. It follows that Stallings Island may have been a locus of traditionalism, not in the sense of conservative, unchanging cultural practice, but rather in the elaboration of tradition to emphatically assert difference with an emergent "other." The sense of alterity embodied in bannerstones at this point was likely contested and perhaps polysemic, but nonetheless emphatic.

Were Bannerstones Made by Specialists?

Given the multicultural landscape of Phase III, one might reasonably assert that bannerstones were not made by every able-bodied person, but rather by some select subset(s) of regional populations. The extent to which this involved craft specialization depends, of course, on one's definition of specialization. If by specialization we mean organization involving full- or part-time craftspeople who served clientele through tributary or market relations, then bannerstone production was not likely specialized. But if we allow that production of bannerstones transcended individual consumption to involve production for exchange, then, by definition, production was somewhat specialized. Patterns in the distribution of preforms and related production debris support this notion.

As we have seen, bannerstones during Phase I are clustered in distribution, with only two major locations of occurrence documented to date: the Uchee Creek area and in graves at Stallings Island. The occasional occurrence of Phase I forms at sites such as Lewis-East may attest to a wider, nonmortuary distribution, but on balance, the evidence suggests these were most often grave inclusions, and perhaps largely nonsubsistence items. As in the mid-South (Webb 1946) and southern New England (Cross 1999:65), Phase I bannerstones may have been interred in graves as parts of atlatl assemblages. The associated atlatl hooks, handles, and spear tips seen in these other regions have never been documented in mortuary contexts of middle Savannah sites, although this may simply be poor preservation or a bias of early excavation techniques. Indeed, the shape of Phase I bannerstones is consistent with tubular and ovate forms that were fitted to spear throwers elsewhere. Coupled with the obvious mortuary contexts of these forms, their limited occurrence in midden contexts in the Savannah region would argue against a strictly mundane purpose. Thus, even though we cannot begin to comment on the specialization of production of Phase I forms, we can tentatively infer from existing data that Phase I bannerstones had a
specialized role in mortuary ceremonialism, especially considering that the subsequent centuries of bannerstone production and use never involved mortuary contexts.

Evidence for surplus production begins to appear during Phase II, when locations such as Calhoun Falls and the Moody site became the loci of intensive manufacture. As noted earlier, the occurrence of these forms in Early Stallings assemblages of the Coastal Plain suggests that bannerstones had emerged as a medium of interprovincial alliances. However, these two locations of intensive production, especially Moody, are a bit remote from the major conduit of interaction, the Savannah River, and limited evidence suggests that Phase II forms made in the Piedmont were actually exported to locations well outside the domain of Early Stallings communities, notably northeast Florida. This may indicate that makers of Phase II bannerstones were actually on the social (as well as geographic) fringes of Paris Island communities. Being marginal to emerging alliances with Early Stallings groups downriver, these crafters may have spent disproportionate time and energy establishing alliances farther afield (Sassaman 1998). Specialization in this context is perhaps best regarded as an ethnic process, whereby assertions of new alliance and identity through craft production had the outcome of accentuating cultural variations within a generalized Piedmont tradition. We can also view this process as a form of cultural resistance (Sassaman 2001).

The most plausible evidence we have for craft specialization in a literal sense is the production of Notched Southern Ovates during Phase III. Dan Elliott explored this notion long ago after uncovering production debris in the Mill Branch component at Lovers Lane (Elliott and Doyon 1981:158–163). He found not only fragments of bannerstones, but also five drill cores from the cane drilling of bannerstone spines. Additional Notched Southern Ovate fragments and four more drill cores were found in later data-recovery operations (Elliott et al. 1994). Elliott reviewed the evidentiary criteria for emergent craft specialization listed by Evans (1978), concluding that production was likely geared toward exchange, but not unequivocally specialized. Nonetheless, when we consider the elaborate and occasional hypertrophic qualities of Notched Southern Ovates, it seems evident that the form itself was specialized. It is difficult to imagine that such exaggerated forms were fitted to spear throwers for the purpose of deer hunting, nor are there any obvious functional alternatives that would explain such great investments in time and energy (cf. Ledbetter 1995:149, 152). No such forms have ever been found in mortuary contexts, and few exist outside the middle Savannah region. On balance, the evidence suggests that both the form and locations of its production and consumption were specialized. That so many are found in unfinished states at Stallings Island and surrounding sites would suggest that the process of making Notched South Ovates was gradual, perhaps staged, and possibly transposed over a variety of events and even different locations. We would imagine, given our line of argumentation about assertions of identity, that events and locations of bannerstone making and using were highly public venues. Stallings Island may have been one such location, which, at the time when so many Notched Southern Ovates were deposited (abandoned?) there, was apparently the exclusive domain of Mill Branch culture and seemingly off limits to Early Stallings communities.

Conclusion

The rudiments of an explanation for variation in bannerstone design and use in the Savannah River region is enabled by an increasingly refined chronology that includes at least three distinct phases. Not only do forms change over the millennium in question, but so too do contexts of bannerstone production and consumption. We find it best to situate this variation in the larger contexts of Late Archaic culture history, especially in the emerging evidence for ethnic diversity, contested landscapes, and shifting alliances. In this regard bannerstones were always a specialized item of material culture, perhaps never produced by individuals who spent most of their time pecking and drilling, but likely by individuals whose intent in making them was to deliberately assert one particular cultural identity over a number of alternatives.

Notes

Acknowledgments. Analysis of the William H. Claflin Collection housed at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University was enabled by grants from the American Philosophical Society and the National Science Foundation. Our thanks to Peabody Museum Curator Diana Loren for access to the collection and support of this research. An earlier version of this paper (Sassaman and Randall 2004) was prepared for discussion at the 2004 Poverty Point Gathering, organized by Jon L. Gibson. Comments by Larry Kinsella, Mary Kwas, Randy Daniel, and Gayle Fritz helped guide this paper to its final form.

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