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A RIVER OF CONTINUITY, TRIBUTARIES OF CHANGE:
THE CHICKASAWS AND THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, 1735-1795

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLE

Table

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures

ABSTRACT

This project examines the relationships between the Chickasaw Indians and the Mississippi River between 1735 and 1795. Chickasaws imagined, managed, and manipulated the river in a number of ways. For them, the Mississippi was a metaphysical and physical boundary as well as a conduit. Its presence marked both time and place in their history. As the water flowed past Chickasaw Country it differentiated historical eras and demarcated the western bounds of their territory. More generally, waterways constituted a central place in the worldviews of Southeastern Native Americans. This influenced how they related to the riverine landscape and other peoples within that space. Environmental factors also determined when, where, and how Chickasaws interacted with the Mississippi River. Seasonal variation and weather conditions affected water levels, which in turn, altered resource availability and travel patterns. These became particularly important factors in the eighteenth century when colonial competition brought new people, products, and would-be empires to the Mississippi Valley. Those who built social, political, and economic relationships with the Chickasaws travelled the river unencumbered. However, Chickasaw warriors limited the mobility of their enemies, particularly at the Chickasaw Bluffs where topography and geography favored them. The Chickasaw Nation held a powerful place along the Mississippi River and used that position to its advantage. This made them valuable allies or influential adversaries for France, Britain, Spain, and the United States. Beginning to understand the connections between Chickasaw history, the riverine environment, and geopolitics gives new insight to the world in which eighteenth century Chickasaws lived.

INTRODUCTION

"Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years," as the legend is told, until one day just as the sun was settling on the horizon, the Indians "came upon a scene beyond their imagination. It was a great river, the likes of which they had never seen before, and the unexpected sight overwhelmed them." Recounting the Chickasaw migration legend, respected elder Reverend Jesse Humes continued, "For a long time the astonished people stood on the riverbank and stared in awe at the mighty watercourse….The homeless people saw that the kohta falaya [the sacred pole] still leaned toward the east, and they knew that 'home' was somewhere on the other side of the wide, wide river before them." [1] They eventually managed to cross the expansive waterway and the people found their homeland. The migrants settled just to the east of the Mississippi River, and there they became Chickasaws. As Humes recited the tale in the mid-twentieth century, crossing the Mississippi proved a watershed moment for the Chickasaw people. The river symbolized the boundary between what once was and what was to be. It offered a new beginning, hope for the future, and a definitive physical landmark denoting their transformation. In crossing to the other side, the Chickasaws arrived home.

In late 1796 esteemed headman Ugulayacabé told a story of another kind. Since their migration the Chickasaw people had called the Mississippi *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina',*

[1] Reverend Jess J. Humes, as told to Robert Kingsberry, "The Legend of the Big White Dog and the Sacred Pole," The Chickasaw Nation, https://www.chickasaw.net/Our-Nation/Culture/Beliefs/Legends.aspx (accessed 6/16/2014).

"meaning scored bluff waterway," after the rock walls of the Chickasaw Bluffs.[2] There, on a portion of that ground, the Chickasaw Nation had recently consented to a Spanish fort in the expectation Spain would safeguard the river and Chickasaw lands. However, Spain quickly transferred its title to the United States. According to the report of a Massachusetts newspaper, Ugulayacabé berated Spanish officials exclaiming:

> we had received [that land] from our fathers, and had sworn to them to preserve in the state in which the Master of breath had given it to them, and to preserve which we have shed our blood against the French, which we often refused to the English, which we had given to you over persuaded by your promises of keeping it, not only for the advantage accruing to yourselves, but as we also thereby secured to ourselves the possession of the rest and a supply of our wants, which our own industry was incapable of furnishing.

In attempting to resist the worst manifestations of colonialism they had ceded part of that all-important place to the Spanish, only to be betrayed. The Americans now possessed it, and Ugulayacabé contended, "we could perceive in them the cunning of the rattlesnake, who caresses the squirrel he intends to destroy."[3]The Fourth Chickasaw Bluff had been a Chickasaw stronghold along the Mississippi River, but that would not continue.

The events described in these narratives bookend a transformative era in Chickasaw history. In the intervening period the Mississippi River had come to play a critical role in Chickasaw lives. People have always mythologized, identified with, and ascribed meaning to waterways.[4] The Chickasaws, and other Native American polities,

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[2] John P. Dyson, "Chickasaw Village Names From Contact to Removal: 1540-1835," *Mississippi Archeology* 38:2 (2003), 118; John P. Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland* (Ada, OK: Chickasaw Press, 2014), 7, 99, 154.

[3] "The Talk of the Chickasaw Chiefs, At the Bluffs, represented by Ugalayacabe," MASSACHUSETTS SPY, OR WORCESTER GAZETTE, 1 November 1797, 2-3. For a different translation of this speech see Charles A. Weeks, "Of Rattlesnakes, Wolves, and Tigers: A Harangue at the Chickasaw Bluffs, 1796," *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 67, no. 3 (July, 2010), 511-513.

[4] Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller, eds., *Rivers in History: Perspectives on Waterways in Europe and North America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 1-10.

were no different in this regard. Rivers were simultaneously boundaries, paths, resource bases, dangers, and forces unto themselves.[5] The Mississippi assumed all these roles at once. Laying near the center of North America it twists, turns, and doubles-back over the course of 2,320 miles while its voluminous currents gradually gather speed as they travel southward.[6] For Chickasaws it divided past from present, split West from East, and linked disparate peoples and environments. In the eighteenth century these connections metaphorically bound Chickasaws to one another and their homeland. In a literal sense, the Mississippi also linked Natives and non-Natives from one end of the Mississippi Valley to the other.

Migration legends, like the one told by Rev. Humes, demonstrate the Mississippi River oriented Chickasaws in both place and time. As the tale unfolds an unspecified people travel from west to east and become Chickasaws after crossing the river and entering their preordained land. From that point on, the Mississippi served as the western boundary of their territory. It also marked a historical moment, a break between eras, not unlike Christ's birth separates 1 BC from 1 AD in Western History. The foreignness of the Chickasaws' past resided in the West and gave way to the familiar modern age of the East at the Mississippi River. Each time a storyteller recited the

[5] Lisa Tanya Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1-50; Robert Paulett demonstrates how the Savannah River functioned "both as an idea and as a physical presence" for Indians, Europeans, and African Americans during the eighteenth century. See Robert Paulett, *An Empire of Small Places: Mapping the Southeastern Anglo-Indian Trade, 1732-1795* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 49-77.
[6] The Mississippi's length has varied with time based on the river's shifting course. The length given is based on a current assessment from the National Park Service. See National Park Service, "Mississippi River Facts," http://www.nps.gov/miss/riverfacts.htm (accessed 7/11/2014).

legend he or she reinforced these ideas underlying Chickasaw concepts of sovereignty, chronology, and geography.

More generally, rivers constituted a central place in the worldviews of Southeastern peoples. In a complex and interrelated belief system, they thought of the cosmos as having three parts: an Upper World, This World, and an Under World. Water, the fundamental element in the Under World, literally underlaid This World and the Upper World.[7] Bodies of water could be transcendent, acting as a conduit between This World and the Under World. Animals, people, and animated beings that crossed between them were both valued and feared.[8] Snakes possessed this capacity and were often associated with rivers and the Under World. This must have been important to Southeastern Native Americans given that they decorated pottery and other material goods with serpentine designs and patterns. [9] The theoretical implications of traveling on a body of water as large as the Mississippi help to further inform our understanding of the river as a cultural space.

While the waters of the Mississippi may have posed a metaphysical hazard, they certainly presented tangible dangers as well. Traveling by water entailed risk. The threat of being swept downstream, losing one's belongings, capsizing, or even drowning loomed large. Weather conditions had to be analyzed. Seasonal changes affected annual flood stages, and storms could swell water levels and send whole trees careening

[7] Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 122-131.
[8] Mary C. Churchill, "The Oppositional Paradigm of Purity versus Pollution in Charles Hudson's: 'The Southeastern Indians,'" *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (Summer-Autumn, 1996): 582-584.
[9] F. Kent Reilly III, "The Great Serpent in the Lower Mississippi Valley," in *Visualizing the Sacred: Cosmic Visions, Regionalism, and the Art of the Mississippian World*, eds. George E. Lankford, F. Kent Reilly, and James F. Garber (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 118-134.

downstream at any time.[10] All river travel shared these perils, but they were particularly acute on the mighty Mississippi. Given the sheer volume of muddy water, keen knowledge and sturdy equipment were essentials. Although the Chickasaws did not consider themselves a nation "on the great River Mississippi," they acquired the skills necessary for successful waterway navigation.[11] Men and women routinely traversed the Mississippi from St. Louis to New Orleans in addition to plying the Ohio, Tennessee, Yazoo, and other rivers.

In addition to knowing where it led, navigating the Mississippi required an understanding of how the land bent the river and the river shaped the land. Natural changes in the waterway necessitated perpetual assessment in order to set a safe course. The depths of the current hid supernatural forces, but water near the surface moved in predictable ways. Chickasaws studied these and positioned their pirogues in the river accordingly. Their ability to do so, combined with a collective mental map of the Mississippi River System, transformed rivers into paths.

This became an important factor in the eighteenth century when colonial competition brought new people, products, and would-be empires to the region. As a contested space no one enjoyed unencumbered navigation of the Mississippi River. Native and non-Native polities, as well as individuals, took a keen interest in

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[10]Le Page du Pratz, *An Account of Louisiana Exhibiting a Compendious Sketch of its Political and Natural History and Topography*(Newbern: Franklin & Garrow, 1804), 116; Nancy M. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime, 1699-1763* (New York, 1916), 42-49; Frances Elle Coughlin, "Spanish Galleys on the Mississippi: 1792-1797" (Master's thesis, Claremont Graduate School, 1945), 47-51.

[11] John T. Juricek, ed., *Georgia and Florida Treaties, 1763-1776*. Vol. 12 of *Early American Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2002), 301.

monitoring and curbing its use. In this regard the Chickasaws were no different from their neighbors. Even though their village life centered on Coonewah Creek and Town Creek located more than a hundred miles east of the river (near present-day Tupelo, MS) they remained cognizant of events up and down the river.[12] With the skills to traverse the Mississippi and the capacity to limit others' abilities, the Chickasaw Nation exerted power well beyond the water's edge.

At *Sakti Lhafa'*, the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff—in today's Memphis, TN—these dynamics converged. Chickasaws used practical naming conventions and their term for the Mississippi followed suit. The scored bluff defined the watercourse linguistically, in part, because it did so physically. In the Central Mississippi Valley, between Cairo, IL and Vicksburg, MS, the Chickasaw Bluffs were the only steep cliffs bordering the river. The sheer heights of the Fourth Bluff towered over the river and reached into the sky. An island also narrowed the Mississippi's channel creating a whirling effect in the current.[13] This water hazard forced pirogues and other boats traveling north-south to pass near the shore at the base of *Sakti Lhafa'*. There Chickasaw warriors gained a military advantage allowing them to intercept watercraft. Martial benefits along with social, political, and religious connotations made the heights and the Mississippi River invaluable to the Chickasaws. Foreign travelers passing through this space infringed on Chickasaw territory and threatened Chickasaw cultural constructs. For "outsiders" gaining access required entering into a reciprocal relationship which entailed ceremony, gift-giving, and an acknowledgement of certain rights and responsibilities. Once

[12] Wendy Cegielski and Brad R. Lieb, "Hina' Falaa, 'The Long Path': An Analysis of Chickasaw Settlement Using GIS in Northeast Mississippi, 1650-1840," *Native South* 4 (2011): 24-54.
[13] D.C. Corbitt and Roberta Corbitt, eds., "Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest," *East Tennessee Historical Society* 9-49 (1937-1977), 32 (1960), 88.

"outsiders" became "insiders", integrated into the social relations which overlay *Sakti Lhafa'* and *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'*, they could travel the river freely. Allies moved easily along the waterway, those who had not forged similar bonds suffered the consequences.

This dynamic was significant considering the Chickasaws inhabited a pivotal geopolitical locale and had done so for a long time. They lived in the southeastern portion of what Stephen Aron has labeled the "confluence region." Here the Missouri and Ohio rivers emptied their contents into the Mississippi River.[14] During the Mississippian Period (900 C.E. to 1700 C.E.) these river systems brought exotic trade goods, diverse ideas, and various American Indian peoples into the Lower Mississippi Valley.[15] This trade network, combined with maize agriculture, supported an urban chiefdom at Cahokia, near present-day St Louis. Smaller polities strategically aligned themselves along the Mississippi to participate in this canoe-based trade.[16] The Chicaza, ancestors of the historical Chickasaws, were part of this world when they confronted Hernando de Soto during his march (1539-1542) through the Southeast Culture Area. In the aftermath Mississippian society changed drastically: hundreds perhaps thousands of individuals died, entire chiefdoms disappeared, and the practice of mound building was abandoned. Far less hierarchical "coalescent societies" formed in their wake as survivors merged their cultures and languages producing new polities in the process. Much had changed by the time Europeans returned to the Southeast, well over a century

[14] Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2006), xiii-xxi.
[15] Marvin D. Jeter, "From Prehistory through Protohistory to Ethnohistory in and near the Northern Lower Mississippi Valley" in *The Transformation of the Southeastern Indians, 1540-1760*, eds. Robbie Ethridge and Charles Hudson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 177-223.
[16] Mark Joseph Hartman, "The Development of Watercraft in the Prehistoric Southeastern United States," (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas A&M University, 1996), 136.

later. Between 1542-1682 the Chicaza reconstituted themselves moving north along the Tombigbee River, into what is currently northeastern Mississippi, where they became known as the Chickasaws.[17]

When French and British colonies gained footholds in Louisiana and Carolina, respectively, a new array of cargo, belief systems, and peoples infiltrated the continent.[18] The Mississippi River System again produced opportunities for cross-cultural trade and communication, although the waterway also spread new hazards. Now situated near the nexus of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee rivers, the Chickasaws took advantage of their station. Anthropologist Robbie Ethridge astutely observes, "there is little question that the Chickasaws understood this place to be a strategic economic and political location."[19] They found France and Britain willing trade partners. By the start of the eighteenth century glass beads, blankets, bolts of cloth, metal tools, and most importantly, guns, entered Chickasaw Country in exchange for Indian slaves and deerskins.[20] The rise of the Native slave trade and the spread of European diseases "shattered" Native communities, and in the fallout, access to guns

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[17] Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 89-115; Jay K. Johnson, "The Chickasaws" in *Indians of the Greater Southeast: Historical Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, edited by Bonnie G. McEwan (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 85-121; James R. Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People: The Chickasaw Indians to Removal* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 1-24; Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis: 1500-1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 27-74; Ned J. Jenkins, "Tracing the Origins of the Early Creeks, 1050-1700 CE" in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South*, eds. Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 188-249.
[18] Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 11-24; Aron, *American Confluence*, 11-26; Verner W. Crane, "The Tennessee River as the Road to Carolina: The Beginnings of Exploration and Trade." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (Jun., 1916): 3-18.
[19] Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 153.
[20] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 28; Jay K. Johnson, John W. O'Hear, Robbie Ethridge, Brad R. Lieb, Susan L. Scott, and H. Edwin Jackson, "Measuring Chickasaw Adaptation on the Western Frontier of the Colonial South: A Correlation of Documentary and Archaeological Data," *Southeast Archaeology* 27, No. 1 (Summer, 2008): 22.

and ammunition became a necessity.[21] This put the Chickasaws in a precarious position. Despite their limited population, perhaps numbering 5,000-7,000 individuals in 1700, their location among North America's fluid arteries made them particularly valuable allies and especially dangerous enemies.[22]

Geography helped place Chickasaw warriors at the business end of French gun barrels, but location also worked to inspire the allegiance of British colonies huddled along the Atlantic coastline. As Jay K. Johnson points out, "Both the English and the French recognized the importance of the Chickasaws in their strategic position between the French colonies in Louisiana and Illinois and dealt with them accordingly."[23] Chickasaw slave raids against the Choctaw, Quapaw, Illinois, and other neighboring nations created animosity and spurred cycles of escalating violence.[24] Flanked by French settlements in Louisiana and Illinois, Chickasaw tacticians could not ignore that France's fledgling colonies traded with enemy nations. The Natchez Revolt of 1729 soured the Chickasaw-French relationship still further as the French suspected Chickasaw involvement, and resented their protection of some remnant Natchez.[25] As

[21] Robbie Ethridge, "Creating the Shatter Zone: Indian Slave Traders and the Collapse of the Southeastern Chiefdoms" in *Light on the Path: The Anthropology and History of the Southeastern Indians*, eds. Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Robbie Ethridge (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 208. For more on the "shatter zone" see Ethridge and Shuck-Hall, *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 1-62.
[22] Peter H. Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685-1790," in *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, eds. Gregory A. Waselkov, Peter H. Wood, and Tom Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 95; Daniel H. Usner Jr., *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 35.
[23] Johnson, "The Chickasaws," 85.
[24] Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 58-67.
[25] Joseph L Peyser., ed. *Letters from New France: The Upper Country, 1686-1783* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 114-115.

relations deteriorated, the French joined their Native allies in opposition to the Chickasaws.[26]

The Chickasaw Nation held an influential place on the continent and British officials wanted them to continue doing so. South Carolina sent traders overland along the Lower Trade Path and the Upper Trade Path which both extended east-west from the Atlantic to Chickasaw villages and beyond.[27] Initially predicated on the Indian slave trade, and sustained by exchange of deerskins thereafter, the British-Chickasaw partnership developed into a military alliance over time.[28] For their part, British officials encouraged Chickasaw raids on French river traffic and sent aid when massive French and Indian armies threatened to destroy the embattled nation in 1736 and 1739. The duo again collaborated during the Seven Years' War (1754-1763) and to a much lesser extent during the American Revolution (1775-1783). Chickasaw historiography and that of Southeastern Native Americans traditionally place a great deal of emphasis on the endurance of the Chickasaws' alliance with Britain.

Geopolitics has played a major role in these discussions, and rightly so. Arrell Gibson's book, *The Chickasaws*, documents the interplay of Chickasaw relations with non-Native nations. One after another, France, Britain, Spain, and the United States sought Chickasaw allies, creating competing factions within the nation, which he argues "contributed to the subtle conquest of personal and public Chickasaw honor and

[26] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 30-31; Usner, *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 23-32; Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 42-57.
[27] Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 153.
[28] For the development of initial Chickasaw-British trade relations see Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 167-168; Johnson and others, "Measuring Chickasaw Adaptation," 4-7; Dawson Phelps, "The Chickasaw, the English, and the French 1699-1744" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XVI (1957): 119-120.

independence."[29] James Atkinson's history of the Chickasaws, *Splendid Land, Splendid People,* chronicles the details of these competing interests. Much of Gibson's overview and Atkinson's narrative focus on the Chickasaws' location between competing European empires.[30] The brief articles in *Chickasaw Lives*, compiled by tribal historian Richard Green, often touch on this subject, as well as on the "indivisible" nature of Chickasaw culture and religion.[31] However, the format does not allow for thematic connections to emerge. For her part, Wendy St. Jean adopts a "path-centered analysis" to explore the geopolitical realities shaping Chickasaw alliances. She demonstrates how intercultural exchange and networking assured "unhindered access to European trade."[32] These histories all consider the Chickasaws' position along the Mississippi River and certain socio-religious aspects of their lives.

What has gone unseen are the ways the Chickasaws' own history and their understanding of the Mississippi River helped to shape foreign and domestic relationships. As elsewhere in Native North America, land did not function as a definitive asset bound to one particular nation. Historian Michael Witgen astutely points out, "It was instead a shared resource where use rights were claimed, negotiated, and exercised as part of the lived relationships that people forged with one another in the process of creating landscape and social identity."[33] Indian polities did not own land or

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[29] Arrell M. Gibson, *The Chickasaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 58.
[30] Situated on the "contested boundaries between colonial domains" the Chickasaws could engage with multiple colonial powers. This makes their homeland a quintessential "borderland" although they certainly would not have felt that way. Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June, 1999): 816.
[31] Richard Green, *Chickasaw Lives* vols. 1-3 (Ada, OK: Chickasaw Press, 2010): III, 217.
[32] St. Jean, "Trading Paths," 13.
[33] Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 20.

rivers per se, but rather maintained specific sections as their domain. Around the Great Lakes, according to Heidi Bohaker, "who had access to which land and to which resources, who could pass freely through a given space, and who was subject to taxes or tolls was answered by a complex nexus of kinship connections and alliances."[34] These same principles applied in the Southwest as well. Native polities defined territorial boundaries using rivers and woodlands throughout the region. "Everywhere lay zones and lines to be crossed only at great peril," Juliana Barr states.[35] Like street signs, environmental features oriented those who could "read" them.

Rivers delineated bounded spaces in Chickasaw Country as well. The Mississippi marked the inception of their nation and its western limits. Having gained an intimate appreciation for the river's seasonality, its movements, and its impact upon the land, they were able to defend their claim to the Mississippi River. At times Chickasaw warriors policed the waterway, stopping those who did not heed signals proclaiming 'Do Not Enter.' Yet the Mississippi was not a historical precursor to the modern-day border fence. Non-Chickasaws were not barred from its waters. Those who built social, political, and economic relationships with the Chickasaws could share the riverine landscape. In these cases the Mississippi became a conduit, rather than a partition, providing a physical link and an imaginative bond. Chickasaw ancestors became one people at the Mississippi and so too might others join with them and share in the practice of place making.

[34] Heidi Bohaker, "'Nindoodemag': The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes region, 1600-1701. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Jan., 2006), 42.
[35] Juliana Barr, "Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the 'Borderlands' of the Early Southwest," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jan. 2011), 44-45.

The Chickasaw Nation had its claim to the Mississippi River challenged by colonial competition. European rivalries spilled into the Mississippi Valley and altered Chickasaw actions on the Mississippi. In the 1720s Chickasaw warriors began conducting raids, between Louisiana and Illinois, on individual French voyageurs as well as official government convoys. Some of these attacks occurred extemporaneously, but others were part of coordinated military and diplomatic strategies. Chickasaws struck French travelers during periods of discord to impede the delivery of goods and weaponry to colonial outposts and their Native nemeses. The use of force also reaffirmed Chickasaw authority and provided a means to end hostilities.

Chickasaws, at times, intentionally captured Frenchmen on the Mississippi River and marched them back to Chickasaw villages where the captives were ceremoniously spared. Such efforts symbolically transformed the French outsiders into insiders. Detainees were often delivered to French officials and acted as proxies for Chickasaw headmen. Former captives became cultural mediators bearing specific messages from the Chickasaws offering instruction on the reciprocal rights and expectations of those who traversed the Mississippi River.[36] The return of such prisoners marked the initial salvo in a process of relationship building intended to restore peace, establish commercial exchanges, and define communal space within the riverine landscape.

People and rivers could transform relationships as might the places associated with them. Chickasaw warriors utilized the topographical advantages at *Sakti Lhafa'* to

[36] My thinking on the subject of go-betweens is greatly indebted to James H. Merrell's award winning book *Into the American Woods*. See James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 28-41.

target French pirogues in the 1740s and 1750s after peace overtures failed. When their British allies requested the same service during the American Revolution they proved hesitant. The strategic benefits of *Sakti Lhafa'* might be shared with allies, but they served Chickasaw interests first. Knowing the Bluffs' military value Spain and the United States both vied for Chickasaw allegiance after the war. Factions within the Chickasaw Nation exploited this rivalry to receive annual presents and build trade relations but neither would agree to part with *Sakti Lhafa'*. That place lent its name to the Mississippi which, in turn, gave definition to their history. Unique environmental features there combined water, earth, and sky like no other place in Chickasaw Country, and warriors defended the people there. However, in 1795 when events seemed to threaten their existence, a majority of the Chickasaw Nation agreed to cede the lower portion of *Sakti Lhafa'*. In doing so they entrusted the Spanish with an invaluable place, a portion of their very being, so that it might continue to define their home east of the Mississippi River.

The significance of Native Americans' place-based histories cannot be overstated, and yet they have largely been relegated to cameo appearances in the stories we historians tell. For example, Richard White challenged us to appreciate the "cultural conventions" at the heart of *The Middle Ground*. Through "cooperation or consent of foreigners" rather than "force," he argued, people from diverse cultures lived together and maintained political relations in the *pays d'en haut*.[37] Since that time historians have uncovered, or imagined, middle grounds throughout North America.[38] In addition,

[37] Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 52-53.
[38] Philip J. Deloria, "What is the Middle Ground, Anyway?" *The William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 63, no. 1 (Jan., 2006), 15-22.

we have debated *The Divided Ground*, *The Native Ground*, and points in between.[39] This discussion has been extremely fruitful for better understanding colonial interactions, but in the process we have all too often overlooked *the* ground itself. Of course the work of Alfred Crosby and William Cronon in *The Columbian Exchange* and *Changes in the Land*, respectively, have made environmental factors a facet in how we theorize about colonialism.[40] Historians have come to recognize the divergent ways Native Americans and Europeans utilized land and natural resources. More recently, in *Comanche Empire*, Pekka Hämäläinen masterfully demonstrated how the grasses of the southern plains fueled "a formidable equestrian power," and James Rice has shown the insights to be gained when environmental, Native American, and colonial history are considered in unison.[41] However, Vine Deloria Jr. and Keith Basso each made it clear that it is essential to understand how Native Americans conceptualized the landscapes in which they lived. The socio-religious dynamics of Native homelands have yet to be fully integrated into Native American, American, or environmental history. Few scholars have tried to understand how the "sacred geographies" of Native peoples actually effected intercultural relations during the eighteenth century.[42] When we do

[39] Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knope, 2006); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).
[40] Alfred W. Crosby Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th Anniversary ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003); William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 20th Anniversary ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).
[41] Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1; James D. Rice, *Nature and History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).
[42] Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th Anniversary ed. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 121; Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

cover this "ground" it becomes apparent that we must consider the importance of water as well.[43]

With more focus placed on Native Americans' engagement with their landscapes-- how they thought about, created, and utilized places—we can better understand "Native perspectives." This is a daunting task, but by concentrating on a distinctive feature or two within a particular people's homeland, historians can produce a fuller vision of these Native worlds. A methodological approach that treats environmental dynamics, oral traditions, Native cosmologies, and American Indian religions equal to social, political, and economic considerations is necessary to accomplish this goal. Though difficult, and gaps are sure to remain, piecing together these worldviews will be like discovering a lost trove of documents in the archives. Old queries will receive new answers and original questions will arise.

Therefore, I set out to investigate eighteenth century Chickasaw relations with the Mississippi River. Although most Chickasaw villages were clustered around modern-day Tupelo, MS, Chickasaws routinely travelled over a hundred miles to the waterway. Despite the distance they were skilled canoeists, and the muddy river remained a mainstay in the Chickasaw migration legend. Why? To find the answers necessitates employing the multidimensional approach described above. The Chickasaws have the reputation of being the least documented of the "Five Civilized Tribes," and the primary sources that do exist are written in French, English, and

[43] The insights to be gained when we consider water seriously is evident in recent scholarship by Lisa Brooks, Matt Bahar, and Joshua Reid. See Brooks, *The Common Pot*; Matt Bahar, "People of the Dawn, People of the Door: Indian Pirates and the Violent Theft of an Atlantic World," *Journal of American History* vol. 101 no.2 (September 2014), 401-426; Joshua L. Reid, *The Sea is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

Spanish. Chickasaws were also reluctant to accept Christian missionaries in their midst, so the available records are dominated by economic, political, and military concerns of European traders, diplomats, and soldiers. Nevertheless, compiling snippets from these sources in addition to serious consideration of Mississippi River hydrology and topography, Chickasaw legends, and the cosmological and religious beliefs shared by Southeastern Native Americans produces an assemblage of evidence that speaks to Chickasaw conceptions of the Mississippi River. This knowledge leads to a richer understanding of the Chickasaw homeland and Chickasaw history. Furthermore, the fruits of this research demonstrate the advances historians can make when we consider the multidimensional relationships Native peoples maintained with their environments, and how these too impacted the intercultural exchanges that occurred during colonial expansion.

If we acknowledge the Mississippi River's place in Chickasaw society, as well as the Chickasaws' position near it, then several different histories emerge. Two thematic and two chronological chapters document some of these stories. They are meant to be illustrative, rather than comprehensive, to showcase the diverse ways Chickasaws imagined, managed, and manipulated the Mississippi River. Therefore, chapter one utilizes sources from four centuries to explore the Mississippi's role in the creation of Chickasaw geography and history. This shaped ideas about their own distinctiveness and the world(s) in which they lived. Chapter two investigates environmental components of the Mississippi, Chickasaw recognition of such, and the ways both impacted pirogue travel. In particular, two Chickasaw maps, from 1723 and 1737 respectively, illustrate these issues and render geopolitical statements about

Chickasaw capacity to utilize the Mississippi River System. Chapter three highlights two specific instances of Chickasaw river diplomacy. In 1735 and 1743 Chickasaw war parties intentionally captured French travelers on the Mississippi River in order to redefine the Chickasaw Nation's relationship with France and, in the process, create a shared landscape. While these events took place within a decade, chapter four covers a more extensive timeframe. In the second half of the eighteenth century how Chickasaws utilized the topographical advantages of *Sakti Lhafa'* changed. Though the threat of military force remained, the Chickasaw Bluffs became a bargaining chip as factions within the Chickasaw Nation pursued alliances with Britain, Spain, and the United States. Eventually the Chickasaws were forced to part with a portion of *Sakti Lhafa'* as they fought to safeguard their homeland along the Mississippi River.

As a whole these chapters underscore the importance of the Mississippi to the Chickasaws and its multifaceted roles in their history. As James Taylor Carson points out, the "native landscape" consisted of more than just bordered space; it was "a cultural and a moral space, a place where mythical beings, ancestral spirits, daily life, and geopolitical concerns coexisted and interplayed."[44] Chickasaws invested significance in a myriad of rivers, rocks, trees, and prairies throughout their country. It was the place their ancestors were buried and their memories lingered. For Chickasaws, the Mississippi River was a boundary and an intermediary that served as an integral part of their cultural geography.

[44] James Taylor Carson, "Ethnogeography and the Native American Past," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Fall 2002), 783.

Though visually striking, the riverine landscape was far more than a scenic backdrop. Reverend Humes said that upon its discovery "the astonished people stood on the riverbank and stared in awe at the mighty watercourse. They called the giant river *misha sipokoni* (beyond all age)."[45] Thereafter, it became an active participant in their lives. It influenced how they thought about their ancestors and the world in which they lived. They learned how it moved and the course it took, effecting when, where, and how they traveled as well as the natural resources available to them. Its distinctive environmental features, particularly *Sakti Lhafa'*, became a part of their place-world too. Ugulayacabé even went so far as to declare he and other Chickasaws "love[d] that place." He identified the Mississippi with the Bluffs and all they stood for. Encompassing aspects of history, philosophy, geography, theology, potamology, politics, economics, and military strategy, there is no doubt the Mississippi River bore influence on Chickasaws' perspectives. Knowing the past Chickasaws shared with *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* helps us understand their relationship with the Chickasaw homeland. This knowledge, in turn, provides new insights into the ways Chickasaws attempted to maintain control of that space throughout the eighteenth century.

[45] Humes recounted the Chickasaw people called the Mississippi *misha sipokoni*, which is translated as "beyond all age" in "The Legend of the Big White Dog and the Sacred Pole." Pamela Munro and Catherine Willmond did not include this terminology in *Chickasaw: An Analytical Dictionary* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). Linguist John Dyson claims the Chickasaw name for the Mississippi was *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* meaning "scored bluff waterway." See Dyson, "Chickasaw Village Names From Contact to Removal," 118; Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 7, 99, 154.

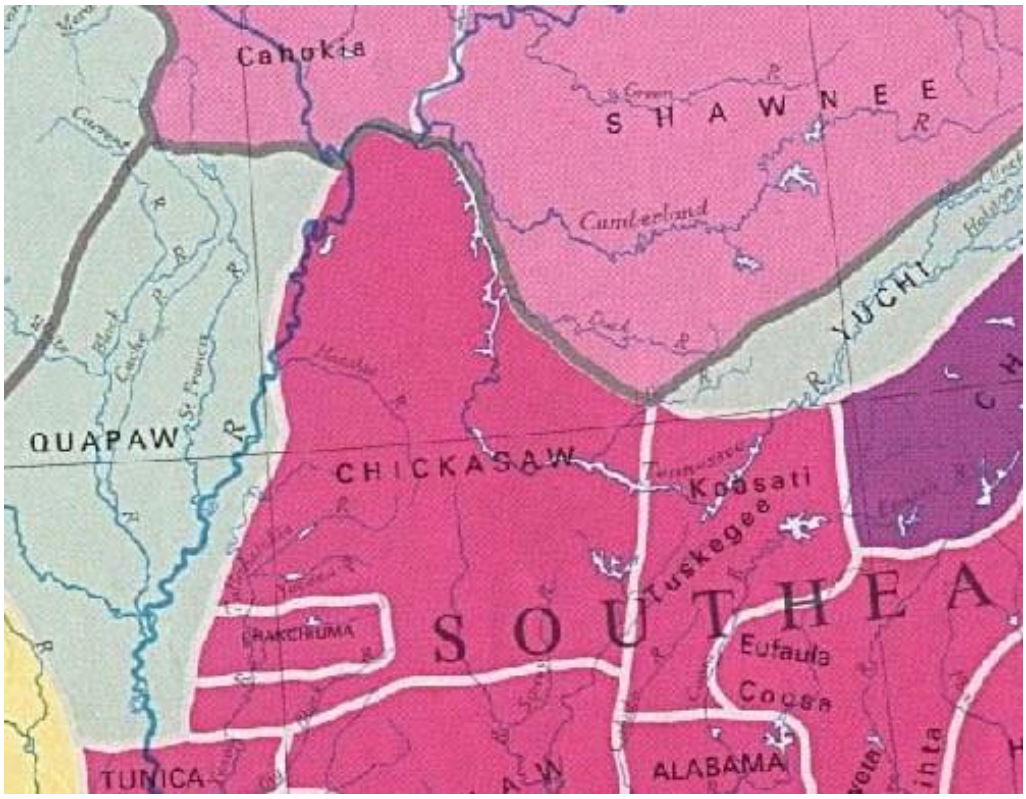

Figure 1: Chickasaw Nation Map, ca. 18th century. William C. Sturtevant, National atlas. Indian tribes, cultures & languages: [United States] / William C. Sturtevant, Smithsonian Institution, 1967. Reston, VA: Interior, Geological Survey, 1991. The Mississippi River delineated the Chickasaw's western border and other rivers similarly demarcated the extent of Chickasaw Country. The Ohio River bordered the nation to the north, the Tennessee River to the east, and the headwaters of the Tombigbee River marked their southern terminus. For more on Chickasaw borders see Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 6; Cegielski and Lieb, "Hina' Falaa, 'The Long Path,'" 28-29; Wendy St. Jean, "Trading Paths: Chickasaw Diplomacy in the Greater Southeast, 1690s-1790s" (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 2004), 3-4 and Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 1-1.

CHAPTER ONE

Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'

"This Chickasaw legend of The Beginning goes like this," esteemed elder Reverend Jesse Humes began. Although migration legends varied by orator Humes's description of how the Chickasaws came to reside in their northern Mississippi homelands is a fairly standard account. As with his telling, the legend typically follows a similar format and proceeds something like this: In the primordial past their ancestors "lived somewhere in the West." Under duress "they sought guidance from *Ubabeneli*, The Creator of all things" who "made sacred" a long pole to direct them to "a new home where they could find peace and happiness." Each night when they camped their leaders placed the pole erect in the ground. Invariably the next morning, "the long pole was closely inspected and found to be leaning toward the east" indicating their course of travel. This scene repeated itself for a long time until "one day, just as the sun was setting" the people "came upon a scene beyond their imagination. It was a great river the likes of which they had never seen before, and the unexpected sight overwhelmed them." They had come to the Mississippi River, or as eighteenth century Chickasaws called this river *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'*. Still the long pole "leaned toward the east" and so the people "knew that 'home' was somewhere on the other side of the wide, wide river before them." Soon afterwards "the sacred long pole stood straight as an arrow," signaling "that at last they had found their new homeland and that their long journey was at an end."[1]

[1] Humes, "The Legend of the Big White Dog and the Sacred Pole."

Rev. Humes' version of the migration legend has been preserved and perpetuated by the Chickasaw Nation, although it is not the first or only rendition of this journey. Since time immemorable Chickasaw people have told and retold of their ancient expedition. It may have once been passed down in a single narrative form, but written accounts vary considerably in detail. Nevertheless, these legends share certain tenets and are a testament to the endurance of oral traditions. These were not just stories. They were Chickasaw truths--their history.

Chronological time and cultural distance unquestionably obscure far more than these legends reveal. Written accounts were individually recorded over the course of the last three centuries. Throughout that time authors, in diverse locations, penned versions for various audiences. The writers' personal sentiments, cultural values, and religious beliefs undoubtedly colored how they heard and then documented the legend. Language barriers also filtered many of the descriptions we are left with. Such critical information is all too often missing from the historical record. Driven by their own motivations traders, missionaries, settlers, anthropologists, and Chickasaws put pen to paper chronicling the tradition. As this process unfolded newer accounts may have been influenced by older reports, compounding the problem of transmission. Therefore, scholars face serious limitations when employing these legends to envision the past.

Yet when comprehensively analyzed and utilized in conjunction with other sources, Chickasaw migration legends offer exciting new angles from which to view history. By comparing these legends to one another it becomes evident they share common topographical references, spatial orientation, and cultural themes. The consistency with which the Mississippi River is referenced demonstrates the waterway's

importance to the Chickasaw people. Their migration legend contains multiple associations layered and submerged within the content. As such, concepts from geography, anthropology, linguistics, and astronomy produce diverse insights. It is true that records of this legend have not reached the present "untainted" by various means, but they are not devoid of value. Enough continuity exists to explain how eighteenth century Chickasaws might have related to the Mississippi River.

Native peoples throughout North America employed physical references in storytelling. According to Vine Deloria Jr., Indian nations merge history and geography creating "sacred geography" throughout their lands.[2] Topographical features were ascribed meaning transfiguring the environment into a visual mnemonic. For those who knew the stories, the landscape invoked moral tales, social frameworks, triumph, and tragedy. As anthropologist Keith Basso contends, "instances of place-making consist in an adventitious fleshing out of historical material that culminates in a posited state of affairs, a particular universe of objects and events – in short, a *place-world* – wherein portions of the past are brought into being."[3] Southeastern migration legends are not an exact historical account—few sources are—but they were central to this production of place.

For the initiated, the landscape merged home and history, the sacred and mundane, at once communal and deeply personal. In a sense the people and land become one entity. Basso explains, "For Indian men and women, the past lies embedded in features of the earth– in canyons and lakes, mountains and arroyos, rocks and vacant

[2] Deloria, *God is Red*, 121.
[3] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 6.

fields– which together endow their lands with multiple forms of significance that reach into their lives and shape the ways they think. Knowledge of places is therefore closely linked to knowledge of the self."[4] Though scholars have overlooked the Mississippi's importance to the Chickasaws, they invested the river with the same kind of historic significance Basso identified among the Western Apache people.

Perpetuating the collective memory of their migration helped define Chickasaw homelands relative to the Mississippi. At the same time, it secured political and social bonds within the nation. They were not the only Southeastern polity to use oral traditions in this way. From the trauma of the sixteenth century arose many migration accounts. "As etiological myths pertaining to social entities," Patricia Galloway argues, "the migration legends explaining the formation of southeastern tribes must explain also the origins of their political economies, establishing their claims to nationhood through cosmological references and claims to land through geographical ones."[5] Angela Pulley Hudson has shown Creeks employed such accounts to construct "a mental map that combined geography and history and coded the landscape according to their experiences within it."[6] The Choctaws similarly followed suit. A mound called Nanih Waiya "gave birth to the Choctaws" and, James Carson explains, for them "there is no more important place on earth."[7] Throughout the Southeast legends worked to demarcate territorial, political, and social boundaries.

[4] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 34.
[5] Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis*, 324-325.
[6] Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 14.
[7] James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 8.

Chickasaw migration legends demonstrate the Mississippi situated them in both place and time. As the storyteller gradually progresses the river comes to separate West from East. Traditionally, once the people crossed the muddy waterway they reached lands destined for them. At this point a new era of history began. The Mississippi's rushing currents swept away their old lives, literally and figuratively separating the Chickasaws from their past. Ancient history dwelled in the West while the modern age unfolded east of the Great River. Thereafter the Mississippi conjoined topography and history, creating a Chickasaw place-world.

Sovereignty and identity were closely related to geography and chronology. According to their origin stories the migrants became recognizably "Chickasaw" after crossing the Mississippi and settling to its east. As an independent political body they established the river as a border. Anthropologists propose socially distinctive clan and house names also marked this transition. Likewise, Chickasaw terms differentiating segments of the Mississippi outlined their autonomy along the river's channel. Combining insights from the fields of history, ethnography, and linguistics highlights the political and social importance of the Mississippi for Chickasaws.

Each telling of their migration story staked a physical claim to the river, but the legend's implications extended into metaphysics too. In general bodies of water were important to the worldview of Southeastern Native Americans. As corridors to the Under World, located beneath the earth, they commanded respect. The Great Serpent ruled these waterways and could make crossing them untenable. Furthermore, this same being reigned over "the white dog's road" which ushered deceased Chickasaws to the hereafter along the Milky Way. Several migration legends claim the Chickasaws lost a

white dog in the Mississippi River while trying to pass over. Striking associations link this tragedy to the Great Serpent, thereby further embedding spiritual affairs within the Mississippi's muddy waters.

It is impossible for us to see the past with certainty, but migration legends help give shape to Chickasaw constructs centered on the Mississippi River. They provide a glimpse of the real and imagined landscapes comprising the homeland of those who knew it best. For them, the river split terrain and time, defined places and people, and transcended worlds. This imagery adds needed depth and dimension to Chickasaw history. From this vantage point, the Chickasaws' "sacred geography" began on the banks of *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'*.

Table 1:

Chickasaw Migration Legends

Storyteller/ Author	Original Publication	Tribal Account	Mississippi River	Sacred Pole	White Dog
Thomas Nairne	1708	Chickasaw	Y	N	N
Bernard Romans	1771	Chickasaw	N	N	N
James Adair	1775	Chickasaw	Y	Y	N
Joseph Colbert (Chickasaw)/ Joseph Bullen	1800	Chickasaw	N	N	N
Henry Schoolcraft	1851	Chickasaw	Y	Y	Y
H.B. Cushman	1899	Choctaw	Y	Y	N
Peter Folsom (Choctaw)	1899	Choctaw	N	Y	N
Gideon Lincecum	1904	Choctaw	Y	Y	N
Molly Gunn (Chickasaw)/ Cyrus Harris (Chickasaw)	1904	Chickasaw	N	Y	Y*
T.C. Stewart	1904	Chickasaw	Y	Y	N
Benjamin Hawkins	1904	Chickasaw	N	N	N
Charles Carter (Chickasaw)/ James Malone	1922	Chickasaw	Y	Y	Y
Zeno McCurtain (Chickasaw)	1928	Chickasaw	Y	Y	Y
Jesse Humes (Chickasaw)/ Robert Kingsberry (Chickasaw)	2003**	Chickasaw	Y	Y	Y

Y = The detail is included. N = The detail is not included.

* = The Chickasaws had a large war dog that protected them from the French.

** = The legend was recorded in the mid-twentieth century. John Paul included it in his dissertation on Chickasaw identity in 2003, although without citation. For the present study, the version of Humes' story available on the Chickasaw Nation website was utilized.

“This Chickasaw legend of The Beginning goes like this”

Chickasaw storytellers commonly oriented their migration legends around the Mississippi River. In these narratives the waterway transforms lateral movement into place. The Mississippi becomes the defining feature allowing listeners to conceptualize the migrants’ location. What had been merely directions, west and east, transforms into destinations, West and East, after the people reach the river. Imagining the migrants’ whereabouts is impractical before this momentous juncture. Recalling their crossing also produced chronology, although absent a concrete day, month, or year. Organizationally the Mississippi became an unforgettable “date” in history. Their passing symbolically denoted the end of one era and the dawn of another. For Chickasaws who told and heard the story, the riverine landscape created spatiality and marked time. Orality and geography combined to invoke faraway places of bygone eras and local haunts in contemporary times. As such the Mississippi River served as both a map and historical text. While Chickasaw migration legends varied, in certain regards, the river's primacy remained a constant.

Chickasaw origin stories are not unlike that of the Creek and Choctaw. These Muskogean nations share a common understanding of their migration from west to east in another age.[8] In some versions the legend relates how the Muskogeans trekked eastward as one, only to separate and become individual nations. Explanations of how this division occurred diverge widely, but the course of their movement from west to

[8] James F. Barnett Jr., *Mississippi’s American Indians* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 89-90.

east is unwavering. Each nation maintains it once lived in the west but moved east where they adopted new homelands.

The cardinal directions generally held great significance for Native Americans and the inhabitants of the Southeast were no different. They associated each direction with a particular color and certain defining characteristics. For the Cherokee, as other Southeastern peoples, blue often represented cold, defeat, and the North. In contrast, whiteness, warmth, and peace existed in the South. They also correlated the West with blackness, since the souls of their ancestors resided in that direction. Alternatively, the color red symbolized the blood of life that sprung from the sun's rays in the East.[9] As the point of the sunrise that direction embodied birth, just as the location of the sunset represented death. These correlations were common throughout the Southeastern cultural area and shared by the Chickasaws. Orienting the migration legends according to this directional understanding, Muskogeans left their old lives behind to begin again in the East.[10] Those who moved towards the sunrise experienced a rebirth along the way, assuming new identities as distinct peoples in the process.

The earliest written records of the Chickasaw migration legend demonstrate the Mississippi's importance to the Chickasaw people. The first description of the Chickasaws' account comes from Thomas Nairne. On April 12, 1708 he wrote in his journal, "They (as all others) came over the Missisipi from the N: West and cane give

[9] Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 20; John Dyson recently argued the color red associated with the east is a lighter "peace red" than the dark red often associated with blood in Muskogean societies. This "second redness" represented the sun's warmth that gave and sustained life on earth. See John Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 75-77.
[10] Amelia Bell Walker, "The Kasihta Myth," *Anthropology Tomorrow* 12 (1979), 56; Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 35.

little more Account of their Originall but have been here a considerable time."[11] Nairne's barebones description leaves much to the imagination, yet it reveals what must have been considered essential information. The Chickasaws originated from the nebulous northwest before crossing the Mississippi River, the sole topographical reference in an otherwise Spartan description.

Two generations later this form continued to hold true. While living amongst the Chickasaws between 1744 and 1768, British trader James Adair heard told how they followed a "sanctified rod" moving "towards the sun-rising, till it budded in one night's time" indicating they had reached the right spot. Although he personally doubted the story's legitimacy Adair noted, "the miracle took place after they arrived to this side of the Mississippi, on the present land they possess."[12] The land he mentioned, the ground on which he and the Chickasaws resided, lay east of the Mississippi River. Another eighteenth century account from Bernard Romans recounts, "they [Chickasaws] themselves have a tradition that they were a colony from another nation in the West" before moving near the Ohio River and on "to their present site."[13] The Chickasaws made a brief stop, according to Romans, but the initial move west to east remains the same.

The legend recorded by Henry Schoolcraft in the first half of the nineteenth century positioned the Chickasaw similarly. He claimed, "By tradition, they say they

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[11] Thomas Nairne, *Nairne's Muskhogean Journals: The 1708 Expedition to the Mississippi River*, ed. Alexander Moore (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 36.
[12] James Adair, *The History of the American Indians; Particularly Those Nations adjoining to the Missisippi, East and West Florida, Georgia, South and North Carolina, and Virginia* (London: Printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775), 163.
[13] Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (New York: R. Aitken, 1776), 69.

came from the West" moving eastward guided by a pole. "They continued their journey in this way until they crossed the great Mississippi River," moving several more times until they reached "what is called the Chickasaw Old Fields."[14] All of the stories explain how the Chickasaws came to occupy their homelands in present-day Mississippi. Three of these legends oriented the listener using the Mississippi River to divide west from east, while Romans cited the Ohio, the major tributary of Sa*kti Lhafa' Okhina'* which formed the northern border of Chickasaw Country.

Two legends chronicled in the 1820s also place the Chickasaws' migration on either side of the Mississippi River. One of the accounts, derived from "facts" gathered by Rev. T.C. Stewart, names the Mississippi as the only landmark during their entire trek. Stewart began work as a missionary amongst the Chickasaws in 1821 and according to his notary Rev. F. Patton, "tradition says that the Chickasaws and Choctaws were once one tribe and lived in the West." Determining to move, "they divided into two parties, under the head of Chickasaw and Choctaw, two brothers. The brothers, after crossing the Mississippi River, separated, but settled in contiguous territory."[15] In this transitory account the river clearly defines west from east.

Like Stewart, Gideon Lincecum moved to Mississippi prior to the Indian Removal Act (1830) and socialized with Choctaw and Chickasaw individuals. After settling in the region around 1818, Lincecum and his family had frequent contact with members of both Indian nations. In the early 1820s Lincecum attempted to make a

[14] Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co. 1851), 309.
[15] Harry Warren, "Chickasaw Traditions, Customs, Etc." *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, VIII (1904), 547.

record of "traditional" Choctaw history as told to him by Chahta Immataha.[16] Lincecum's informant maintained that the Chickasaws and Choctaws separated in the west during their migration eastward. The Choctaws were said to have gone their own way while "the Chickashas [sic] diverged widely to the left, found an extremely rough and scarce country for some time, but at length emerging from the mountains on to the wide spread plains, they found the buffalo and other game plentiful." They continued onward, "until they came to the great river, at the place called by them, *sakti ahlopulli*" where they crossed and continued until finally "the leader's pole came to stand at a place now called Chickasha Old Town in a high and beautiful country."[17] Lincecum's documentation traces the migration west to east specifying only the Mississippi River in an otherwise nameless expanse of mountains and prairie grass. Though longer than Stewart's story, this account still depends on the river to provide spatiality.

In extended versions of the Chickasaws' migration legend, the Mississippi River frequently serves as the sole reference point in an otherwise formless landscape. "For weeks and months [the Chickasaws and Choctaws] journeyed toward the east," H.B. Cushman relays, "passing over wide extended plains and through forests vast and

[16] Greg O'Brian, "Gideon Lincecum (1793-1874): Mississippi Pioneer and Man of Many Talents," Mississippi History Now: An Online Publication of the Mississippi Historical Society (Posted Sept. 2004) accessed Jan. 22, 2015 http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/82/gideon-lincecum-1793-1874-mississippi-pioneer-and-man-of-many-talents. Lincecum's complete history of the Choctaws often drawing doubts about its authenticity. Patricia Galloway has even referred to Lincecum as an "accomplished con artist" whose manuscript compares to the "remedies of a medicine-show scam with mysterious Indian cures." However, other historians have been more willing to place faith in Lincecum's work. See Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis*, 332-333; Greg O'Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 12-14, 19, 45, 115-116; James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path*, 143.

[17] *Sakti ahlopulli* identifies the place where the Chickasaws crossed the Mississippi River according to Lincecum's informant. The term is discussed in greater detail on p. 54. Gideon Lincecum, "Choctaw Traditions and Their Settlement in Mississippi and the Origin of Their Mounds." *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* 8, (1904), 539.

abounding with game." And then unexpectedly, "after many months of wearisome travel, suddenly a vast body of flowing water stretched its mighty arm athwart their path. With unfeigned astonishment they gathered in groups upon its banks and gazed upon it turbid waters. Never before had they even heard of, or in all their wandering stumbled upon aught like this." Having arrived at the Mississippi the people were sure they had finally reached their new home. Cushman's informants tell how the people fell "silent and motionless" when the sacred pole directed them across the currents. "Whence again was resumed their eastward march" until the sacred pole finally stood straight near the Yazoo River.[18] The amorphous plains and forests provide a backdrop for the migration, but only the Mississippi positions the story in topographical space. Ill-defined expanses in the West give way as the people cross the river and find their new homeland just to the east.

John Swanton's interpreter Zeno McCurtain transcribed one of the lengthier versions of the Chickasaw migration legend while doing fieldwork amongst the nation in the first decades of the twentieth century. His rendition of the story begins on "the continent of Asia" where the Chickasaws' ancestors began migrating eastward crossing the Bering Strait into North America before settling in "the neighborhood of Montana." McCurtain's story is clearly influenced by historical and archaeological theories of the time concerning the peopling of the Americas during the last Ice Age. However, the second half of the legend returns to a more familiar form. Having determined to move east the proto-Chickasaws "came to a prairie country" filled with "numerous wild

[18] H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 19-21.

animals." This nondescript grassland is only broken by an unmistakable geographical reference. "When they reached the Mississippi River they camped upon it banks for some time," we are informed, before the people constructed rafts and crossed over. Given this cue the listener intuitively locates the prairie environs west of the river. Having passed over the waterway, "they kept on…for many days, until finally the pole was found standing perfectly erect."[19] The sacred pole directed the Chickasaws to their new country, but only reference to the Mississippi situates that territory in the East for listeners and readers alike.

While certain aspects of the migration legend have changed over time, Chickasaw movement in relation to the Mississippi River has remained constant. Twentieth century versions told by Charles Carter and Jesse Humes explicitly detail the Chickasaws' arrival at the river. Carter wrote to James Malone informing him that the Chickasaws began their trek "west of the Mississippi" and "that when the traveling hosts first saw the great river, they were amazed." Directed by the leader's pole to cross over, the Chickasaws soon found their place. Here in the East the sacred pole "finally stood erect, and the medicine men interpreted this as an omen that the promised land had been reached." [20]

Humes also describes the impression the Mississippi made on the people after passing through an otherwise characterless landscape. The Chickasaws and Choctaws began traveling "in the direction of the rising sun" moving gradually each day "through the homelands of other red people" and "foreign domains." This generic description

[19] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 6-7.
[20] James H. Malone, *The Chickasaw Nation* (Louisville: J.P. Morton & Co., 1922), 22-23.

creates the sense of a lengthy journey through space and time without specifying either. "Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. And then one day, just as the sun was setting, the two parties of Indians came upon a scene beyond their imagination. It was a great river, the likes of which they had never seen before, and the unexpected sight overwhelmed them," Humes said. After rafting across and continuing east "some weeks later" the Chickasaws split with the Choctaws and found their "place in the vicinity of the present-day towns of Pontotoc and Tupelo, Mississippi."[21] Humes demarcated the experience of crossing the Mississippi River from all other stream and river crossings that, presumably, took place over years of travel. The site of the people's journey only becomes clear on the Mississippi's muddy banks. As with the other legends discussed, this river is the only defining geographical feature separating west from east in Humes' telling.

In fact, nine of the fourteen migration legends [told over the course of several centuries] orient Chickasaw movements via the Mississippi River. This represents a great deal of continuity despite the length of time and changing circumstances surrounding their collection. As with most forms of storytelling a certain degree of variation is expected.[22] Joseph Colbert and Molly Gunn, for example, each provide exceptionally short accounts of the legend. Neither individual used topographical references, but both utilized the cardinal directions to align their versions on the east-west axis. Peter Folsom, a Choctaw man, named Nanih Waiya Creek as the sole landmark in his rendition of the joint Chickasaw-Choctaw migration. Choctaw versions

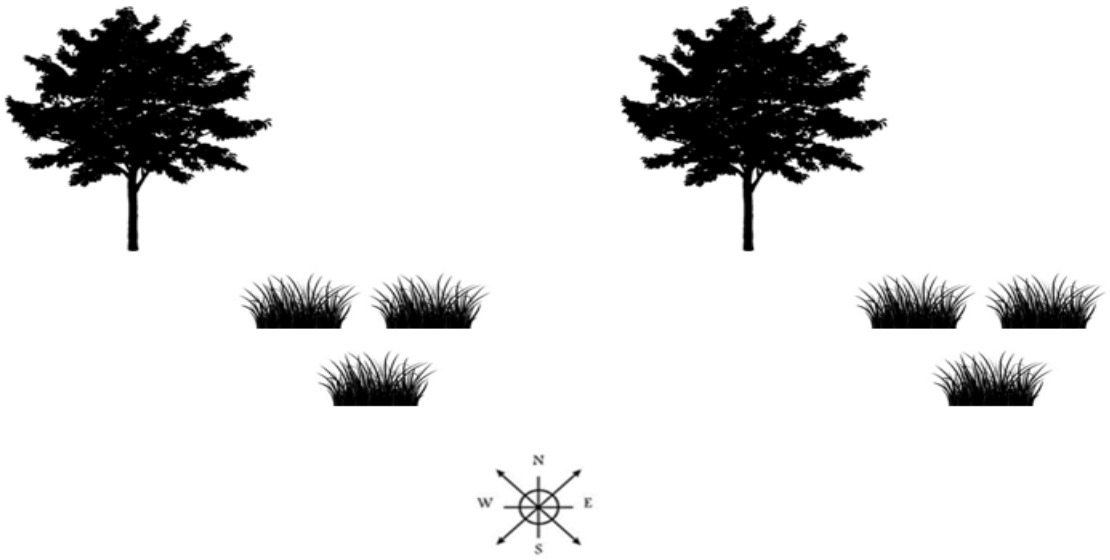
[21] Humes, "The Legend of the Big White Dog and the Sacred Pole."
[22] Tom Mould, *Choctaw Prophecy: A Legacy of the Future* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 24.

sometimes use Nanih Waiya, a sacred mound, to ground the story in a particular place.[23] However, most Chickasaw stories rely on the Mississippi River to serve this purpose. For over three hundred years, from the eighteenth through the twentieth century, Chickasaw storytellers have defined their ancestors' migration relative to the Mississippi River. This is not a historical anomaly.

Orators create a narrative map while telling the migration legend, but it only takes shape after they delineate the Mississippi as a definable place in the landscape. From that point on, the Chickasaws' movements come into focus. The Mississippi River is the singular physical landmark and splits the story. In this discourse the waterway is aligned between west and east situating Chickasaw Country just right of center. All of the initial action occurs west of the river while the story culminates to its east. To the west lay their former homelands and the lengthiest portion of their trek. Across the river, eastbound, mere days or weeks separate the travelers from their new home. Orienting the story via the waterway creates a perceptible space for the listener to imaginatively accompany the migrants. The audience then begins to track the people's movements in a way that had been known to the speaker alone. With this mental map established, the Chickasaws' location becomes more defined. It is not a stretch to suggest that Native American audiences became part of this legend, in a similar fashion, during the protohistoric and colonial era as Chickasaw storytellers explained their nation's place in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

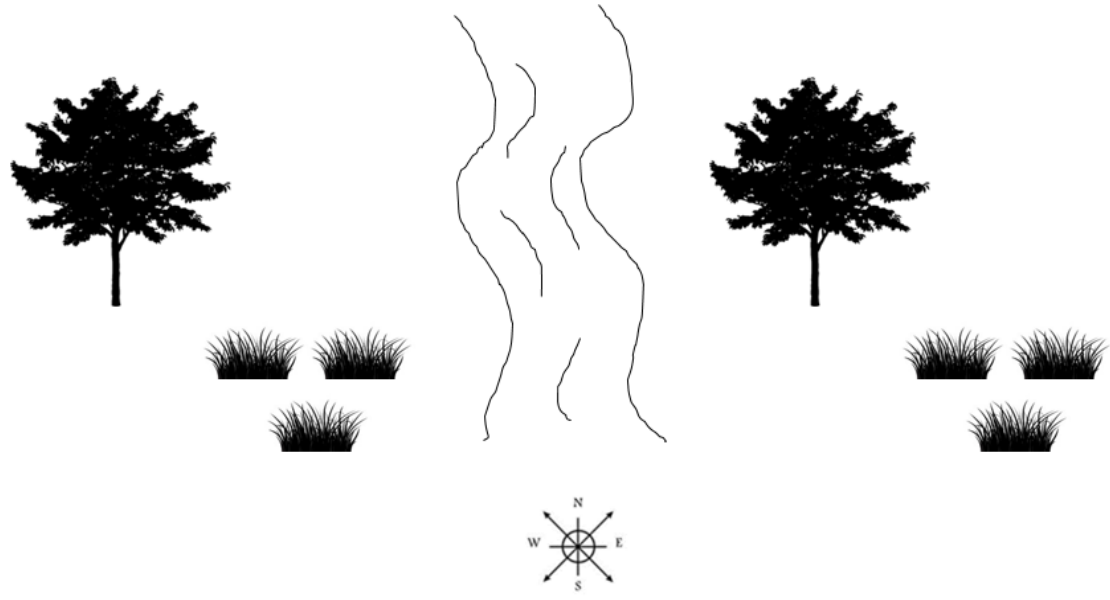
[23] Like the Choctaws, the Chickasaws have an origin story centered at *Nanih Waiya*, but this myth seems to have been far more prevalent among the former. See Green, *Chickasaw Lives*: I, 2-7.

Figure 2: The Mississippi River Defines the Landscape.



Above: Before the Mississippi is specified west and east are directions in an indistinguishable landscape.

Below: After the Mississippi is introduced West and East become distinct points in space and time.



West/Foreign/Past East/Domestic/Future

Muddy Mississippi water served to define time in Chickasaw history as well. The river separated them from their ancient past and signaled the beginning of a new era. According to the legends, having crossed the waterway the migrants became distinct from other peoples. It was only then that they became Chickasaws, officially severing the bonds with those they left behind as well as their Choctaw travelling companions. As such, the Mississippi River positioned the past just as it oriented them spatially. This conflation of space and time was, and continues to be, common in American Indian traditions. Vine Deloria Jr. asserts most tribal religions have a "sacred center" located at a definable geographical landmark. "This center enables the people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands, to relate all historical events within the confines of this particular land, and to accept responsibility for it."[24] The Mississippi may have been part of Chickasaw religious beliefs, but the river unquestionably helped Chickasaws measure time.

Many accounts of the Chickasaw migration legend commence the history of the Chickasaw Nation on the east bank of the Mississippi River. James Adair heard how the Chickasaws and Choctaws "came together from the west as one family" before the nations split into separate entities.[25] While the reason for the division goes unspecified, Adair's writings suggest their division occurred after arriving east of the Mississippi River. Rev. T.C. Stewart also fails to mention why this separation transpired. As cited earlier, his account states the brothers Chickasaw and Choctaw "settled in contiguous territory" with their respective followers "after crossing the Mississippi River."[26]

[24] Deloria, *God is Red*, 66.
[25] Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 352.
[26] Warren, "Chickasaw Traditions, Customs, Etc.," 547.

Adair's story reflects Chickasaw, and perhaps Choctaw, explanations for their linguistic and cultural similarities. Stewart's version introduces familial heritage into the national geneses. Ancestry structured many aspects of Southeastern Native Americans' lives including foreign affairs. Therefore, Stewart's account expands Chickasaw-Choctaw intertribal affiliations into the realm of kinship and politics. This division is not marked by a particular date, but rather by the river itself.

Unlike these legends, those told by Charles Carter and Jesse Humes unequivocally articulate the cause of the Chickasaw-Choctaw division. Carter and Humes each attribute the partition to a heated debate over the cosmological directives of the sacred pole. According to Carter the pole wobbled and stood erect on the east bank of the Mississippi River. "Scouting expeditions were sent out" as the people attempted "to ascertain the exact character of country to which the Great Spirit had led them." After a lengthy debate no consensus could be reached as to whether or not they had come to the right location. Finally "a vote was taken" and "a large majority" determined "no further move was necessary." In outrage, the leader of one clan declared "'All those who believe the promised land is further towards the rising sun follow me.' His entire clan arose and went with him, but few others….Thus the division of the Choctaws and Chickasaws into two separate tribes came about."[27] Near the Mississippi the Chickasaws became their own people and a separate nation, as Carter tells it.

Humes recalled the story somewhat differently although no less dramatically. He stated that upon reaching the opposite side of the Mississippi the people continued

[27] Malone. *The Chickasaw Nation*, 22-23.

eastward until they camped at, what would become, Nanih Waiya. In the morning the people startlingly found the sacred pole "wobbling around crazily, leaning first in one direction and then another" before it finally stood "perfectly straight." The party had split into two groups for traveling, one following chief Chickasaw and the other trailing his brother Choctaw. The siblings had always been in agreement but now they could not reach a consensus on the meaning of the pole's quivering. Disgusted with the impasse, "Chief Chickasaw pulled the sacred pole from the ground and commanded all those who believed the promised land lay further to the east to pick up their packs and follow him. That was the beginning of the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indian Nations." Although Humes pinpointed the birth of the Chickasaw Nation at Nanih Waiya, the presence of the Mississippi River had already signaled a new beginning for the migrants. When the people had arrived on its western bank and saw the sacred pole direct them onward, Humes remembered, "they knew that 'home' was somewhere on the other side of the wide, wide river before them." [28]

Migration origin stories are clear on the direction of travel and the location of Chickasaw lands east of the Mississippi. Less consensus exists over how exactly they became a separate nation. Regardless of those details a new era began once their ancestors crossed the Mississippi River. This holds true today as the Historic Preservation Officer for the Chickasaw Nation, LaDonna Brown, explains. Chickasaw ancestors travelled east where they came upon the Mississippi, "once they got to the other side of the river that's when major things began to happen." The brothers Chata (Choctaw) and Chikasa (Chickasaw) quarreled over whether or not the sacred pole

[28] Humes, "The Legend of the Big White Dog and the Sacred Pole."

stood plumb and decided to separate. “When Chikasa and his group left,” Brown contends, “we can think of this as the beginning of Chickasaw history, culture, and language because we believe that was the beginning of the Chickasaw people.”[29] This is not a presentist interpretation. Chickasaw migration legends recorded over the past three hundred years employ the Mississippi River to define space and time. Understanding this relationship is critical to learning more about eighteenth and early nineteenth century Chickasaw worldviews.

“Their Bank of the River Boundary”

Origin stories helped explain geography and chronology as well as Chickasaw sovereignty and identity. The Mississippi River not only demarcated West from East but also distinguished foreign and domestic lands in turn. It literally divided who they were before from the people they became. The collective memory of this event created and then remained important to Chickasaw group identity.[30] Migration legends worked with naming patterns to express these sentiments. Clan and house groups were said to have adopted new names in recognition of the occasion. According to anthropologist Frank Speck’s findings one such appellation, *Insaktaɬáɲf*, even defined the Mississippi as a boundary. Place names, like *Sakti Lhafa’ Okhina’* and *Balbásha’*, also identified the limits of Chickasaw homelands along the river. These designations for the

[29] LaDonna Brown, *The Chickasaw Migration Story* (Chickasaw History & Culture, accessed 5/19/2015) 2min., 43 sec. https://www.chickasaw.tv/history/video/the-chickasaw-migration-story
[30] John Michael Paul, “Collective and Collected Memories: The Construction and Maintenance of Chickasaw Identity” (Ph.D. diss., Oklahoma State University, 2003), 81-173.

Mississippi distinguished between familiar and unfamiliar sections north to south. Linguistics fused home and history with the landscape, while places and people symbiotically defined one another.

According to tradition, the Chickasaw people received a new set of names in recognition that their migration had come to an end. John Swanton recounted custom dictated house names "were established just after the Chickasaw had crossed the Mississippi from the west and occupied their historic seats." Although doubting it himself, Swanton relayed how Chief Chickasaw visited the peoples' campsites christening "each from some peculiarity he observed connected with the camp or its surrounds" while also bestowing their "war names."[31] Names possess cultural, social, and personal meanings for groups as well as individuals. Changing a name can represent an internal change or public recognition of a transformational event. In the eighteenth century Chickasaw children received "names expressive of their tempers, outward appearances, and other various circumstances," according to Adair. After proving himself in battle for the first time a young man received a name commemorating his transfiguration into a warrior. "When the Indians distinguish themselves in war their names are always compounded," Adair wrote, "drawn from certain roots suitable to their intention and expressive of the characters of the persons, so that their names, joined together, often convey a clear and distinct idea of several circumstances—as of the time and place where the battle was fought, of the number and rank of their captives, and the slain."[32] A fresh name celebrated a boy's transition as he

[31] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 31.
[32] Adair, *History of the American Indian*, 191, 193.

assumed a warrior's status, or memorialized an established combatant's deeds. Each recitation of that name thereafter marked the time and location of this transformation.

Indian nations throughout the Southeast observed life changes in this way. Choctaw and Creek warriors also assumed a new persona in recognition of their deeds.[33] If captured and adopted, Indian men and women received names from their captors signifying their entry into the foreign culture. The same is true of Europeans and Americans adopted into Indian societies.[34] Not unlike the Christian names bestowed upon individual Native Americans throughout the colonial process, these Native names manifest a symbolic conversion reinforcing personal identity and social relationships. American Indian names also reveal individual experiences and cultural history. While Swanton's informant(s) probably oversimplified the origin of Chickasaw house and war names, their association with the migration legend is no less telling. The interviewee(s) denoted the significance of crossing the Mississippi with the application of these designations. In this way, the Chickasaw migration legend and Chickasaw names reinforced one another and helped tell Chickasaw history as Chickasaws remembered it. Therefore the derivation of their house and clan names probably marked place and time for the Chickasaws similar to the migration legend itself.

Such group names held a great deal of cultural significance in Chickasaw society. Clan and house associations helped structure the political and social system, infusing them with a sense of divinity. Each clan recounted its origin with a shared

[33] Barnett, *Mississippi's American Indians*, 98.
[34] Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 101-109.

animal ancestor that served as a totem protecting its members.[35] Anthropologist and ethnographer Frank G. Speck made a quick study of Chickasaws at the start of the twentieth century. He observed, "The Chickasaw social unit is the maternal clan, having its own special officials, its place in the tribal encampment, and its rank among the other clans."[36] These clans divided themselves into duel moieties consisting of white and red segments. Each moiety had divergent social and political obligations serving the greater common good. The color "white" designated the white moiety as the peace faction. Conversely, "red" symbolized conflict thus delegating matters of war to the red moiety. When the moieties assembled, Speck reported, "the various clans had assigned places of encampment on each side of an imaginary line running north and south, forming all together a square." The moieties which he called the *Imosakicàŋ* and the *Intcukwaɬipa*, sat opposite one another with the clans of each arranged by social status descending from north to south.[37]

This social organization in camp or a Chickasaw village created a visual representation of society. The *Imosakicàŋ* (red moiety) sat on the eastern half while the *Intcukwaɬipa* (white moiety) figuratively balanced them across the center-line to the west. According to Speck the "highest clan" in the *Imosakicàŋ* moiety was the *Insaktaɬáŋf* which he translated to mean "'their bank of the river boundary.'" He explains, "They are said to be the brightest and bravest of the Chickasaw. Their name refers to the Mississippi River, which is called *saktaláŋfa*."[38] Given that the red moiety

[35] Arrell M. Gibson, "Chickasaw Ethnography: An Ethnohistorical Reconstruction." *Ethnohistory*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring, 1971), 104, 109.
[36] Frank G. Speck, "Notes on Chickasaw Ethnology and Folk-Lore." *The Journal of American Folklore* 20, no. 76 (Jan.-Mar., 1907), 51.
[37] Speck, "Notes on Chickasaw Ethnology and Folk-Lore," 51.
[38] Speck, "Notes on Chickasaw Ethnology and Folk-Lore," 51.

organized military efforts, warriors from the *Insaktaɬáʸf* clan were respected for their martial capabilities. Moreover, their name implies they safeguarded Chickasaw Country along the Mississippi River.

As the leading clan of the red moiety their position within the assembly is also significant.[39] The river physically denoted the western limits of Chickasaw lands, and it may have been what symbolically separated the red and white moieties across the central divide. This would not have been inconsequential since, as historian James Barnett argues, "Village councils observed a strict order of seating and proceeded with formal speeches and debate."[40] Evidence from migration legends suggests the Mississippi orientated the Chickasaws geographically splitting west from east, so it might have metaphorically done the same as they arranged themselves for deliberations. With the waterway emblematically dividing the moieties, the *Insaktaɬáʸf* were in position along the riverbank to protect the Chickasaw Nation from threats coming downriver.

[39] John Dyson argues the name attributed to a clan by Speck actually denotes a house or family name. See Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 98-99.
[40] Barnett, *Mississippi's American Indians*, 100.

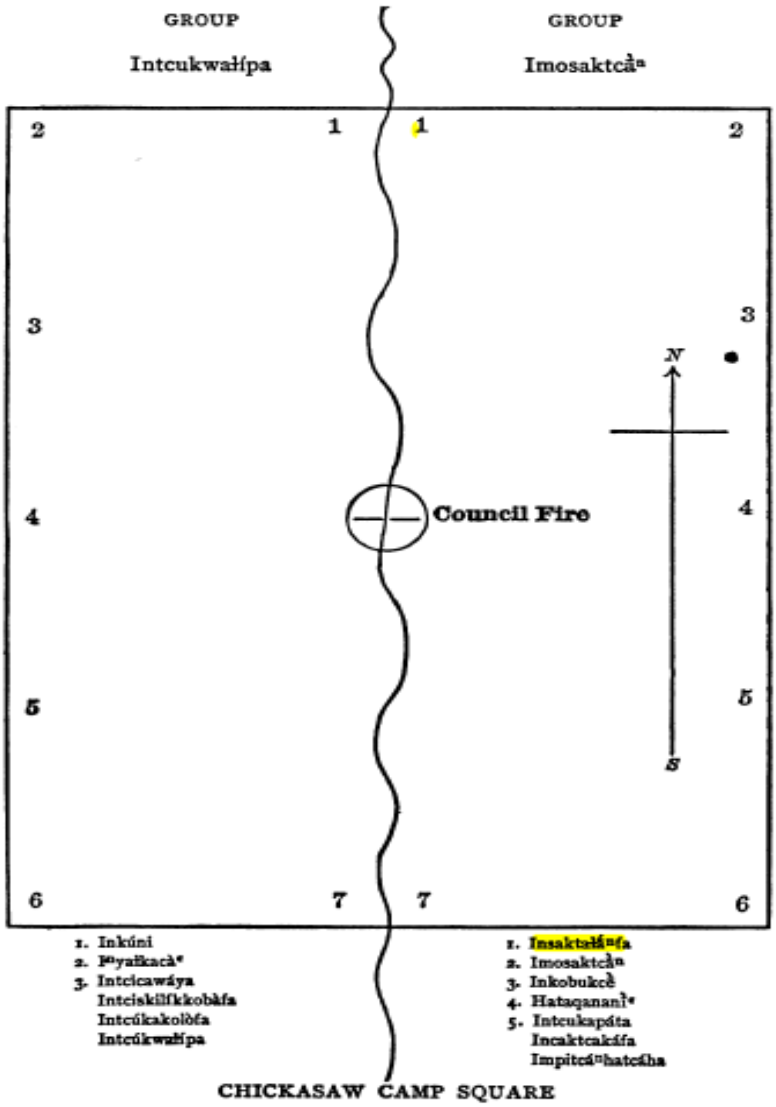


Figure 3: Chickasaw Camp Square. Speck, "Notes on Chickasaw Ethnology and Folk-Lore," 53.

The number, rank, and designations of Chickasaw clans and houses varied over time making it difficult to assess the applicability of Speck's observations. He collected this information while conducting fieldwork in Oklahoma among the Yuchi in 1904 and 1905. During the removal crisis of the 1820s-30s the Mississippi River took on added significance as a borderline for the Chickasaws who struggled to hold their place within

the expanding American empire. This experience and the process of reconstituting the Chickasaw Nation thereafter, may have led to the creation or elevated the importance of the *Insaktaɬáᵑf*, at least for Speck's Chickasaw informant Ca'bítci. Nevertheless, measured inferences about the Mississippi's significance to Chickasaw society in the eighteenth century are viable.[41]

The translation of the name *Insaktaɬáᵑf* bolsters the reliability of Ca'bítci's testimony. Speck deciphered the designation to mean "their bank of the river boundary" explaining *saktaláᵑfa* denoted the Mississippi River.[42] "Sakti," the root word of Speck's term, refers to a bank or hillside.[43] This definition corresponds with his translation, and the historical Chickasaw name for the Mississippi River is nearly identical. Eighteenth century Chickasaws knew the waterway as "*Sȧkti łaᵑfa okēna*" meaning "'Chickasaw

[41] John Swanton did not record the *Insaktaɬáᵑf* in his own collection of moiety and clan names. However, Swanton held Speck's scholarship in the highest regards. In his estimation it contained "valuable material which it seems impossible to duplicate out of the memories of the Chickasaw now living." Swanton valued "uncorrupted" knowledge of eighteenth century traditions above all else, judging sources against the influence of modernity and acculturation. As such, he respected Speck's assessments, incorporating them with older data and that of his own. Lists of clan and house designations, even the names of the moiety divisions, varied considerably amongst observers. That the *Insaktaɬáᵑf* did not appear in another list is not justification for disregarding it. Swanton attributed deviations in the inventories to the conflation of moiety, clan, and house names either by informants or the scribes themselves. In fact, Swanton's study of Chickasaw social units confirmed much of what Speck reported. See Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 18-41. Contemporary scholars have relied on both Swanton and Speck's identifications to inform their understanding of the moiety and clan structures. Arrell Gibson employs Swanton and Speck's works, but relies more heavily on the latter during his discussion of moiety and clan divisions, see Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 18-19. James Atkinson cites Swanton and Gibson on the matter although he completely misses the importance of the moieties and clans to the Chickasaws, see Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 5. Robbie Ethridge compared Swanton's information, including Speck's documentation, to that of Thomas Nairne's observations in her endnotes. Of the twentieth century reports on Chickasaw social systems Ethridge concludes, "anthropologists understand kinship to be a structure of the longue durée, and I therefore cannot dismiss the possibility that some of the twentieth-century system retained elements from the previous 200 years." See Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 298. James Barnett Jr. includes Speck's record of moiety names along with Swanton's identification without further comment; see Barnett, *Mississippi's American Indians*, 99. Most recently John Dyson concluded most of the names collected by Speck and Swanton should be categorized as house or family names. See Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 98-105.

[42] Speck, "Notes on Chickasaw Ethnology and Folk-Lore," 51.

[43] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 243, 310, 465.

bluff watercourse,'" according to Swanton.[44] Linguist John Dyson concurs with this assessment in principle, though he pronounces it *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* and translates the name as "scored bluff waterway" or "scored bank river." According to him the river received its label from the bluffs that surround present-day Memphis, Tennessee, which the Chickasaws called *Sakti Lhafa'*.[45] Swanton missed the origins of the Mississippi's name, but linked it to the correct location since the heights are known as the Chickasaw Bluffs today. Speck accurately correlated *Insaktaɬáŋf* and *saktaláŋfa* with the Mississippi River. His adaptation of Ca'bítci's pronunciation is not much different from either Swanton or Dyson's efforts.

Looking up from the river below, the "scored bluffs" were an imposing sight, and the waterway no less impressive from those headlands. Each constituted an important place for the Chickasaw people. Their names exhibit this significance, helping to further demarcate space in the Chickasaw place-world. Often rivers and streams received directional or destination designations. Depending on which way one traveled the same watercourse could be known by various names. This matter-of-fact convention left little to the imagination. Dyson argues, "with one or two doubtful exceptions there is no detectable lyricism in their early place names, nor are there any obvious poetic metaphors attaching to those places: locations are called what they seem to be and they seem what they are called."[46] For thousands of years the Mississippi's waters thrashed the ground along its course reshaping the landscape as it flowed. Where the current eroded the lower portions of the riverbank the earth gave way leaving steep

[44] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 8.
[45] Dyson, "Chickasaw Village Names From Contact to Removal," 118; Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 7, 99, 154.
[46] Dyson, "Chickasaw Village Names," 97.

rocky cliffs high above the water's edge. Logically the Chickasaws termed what is today the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff in southwestern Tennessee *Sakti Lhafa'* after its serrated western face.

Given their proclivity for terminus labels, christening the Mississippi River after *Sakti Lhafa'* speaks volumes about the bluff and waterway. The river's name suggests the heights were a defining point along the watercourse for the Chickasaws. A series of four such bluffs line the eastern bank of the Mississippi between the counties of Lauderdale and Shelby, Tennessee, all of which fell within the Chickasaw domain. These were the only bluffs along the river in the Central Mississippi Valley. As will become evident in chapter four, the topography of *Sakti Lhafa'* combined with the Mississippi's narrow channel allowed the Chickasaw to inhibit river travel from that location. This natural "checkpoint" granted them a tremendous degree of control over who passed over the water in either direction. The term *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* indicates the Mississippi functioned as an extension of *Sakti Lhafa'*. The bluff defined the river, and the waterway's name evoked the cliff. Knowing the Mississippi's importance as a geographical landmark, we can discern the significance *Sakti Lhafa'* must have had for the Chickasaws. Given the pragmatic nature of their naming patterns the term *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* invoked a particular sense of place along the watercourse. That location, the area around *Sakti Lhafa'*, may well have been every bit as important as the river itself.

Place names, like migration legends, created space for the Chickasaws along the Mississippi River. Those names helped to define locations within their nation, but just as importantly delineated those that fell outside. As *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* flowed

southward beyond *Sakti Lhafa'* and the rest of Chickasaw Country the river's name changed. According to an eighteenth century observer, Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz, Indians on the lower portion of the Mississippi called the waterway "Balbancha."[47] French governor Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville also noted a similar name during his voyages along the river.[48] Like the Choctaws and other nations in the Lower Mississippi Valley the Chickasaws referred to the final stretch of the Mississippi as *Balbásha'*.[49] Although it has several alternative spellings, scholar William A. Read concludes the term is from "the Choctaw substantive *Balbancha*, 'a place for foreign languages.'"[50] When Chickasaws spoke of *Balbásha'* they acknowledged the southern reaches of the Mississippi lay beyond their own nation.

The lower Mississippi was home to unfamiliar peoples who, after 1700, included the French and later the Spanish and Americans too. Exotic languages in this region evinced foreignness and a distinctly separate region. Whereas *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* signaled the river's familiarity of place, the distant *Balbásha'* seems to have had an aura of exoticism. The juncture where *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* became *Balbásha'* during the Mississippi's course to the sea is uncertain. Yet the designations demarcate space distinguishing the Chickasaws' locality from others downriver. Thus, the Chickasaws split the river north and south just as they used its waters to divide west from east.

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[47] Du Pratz, *An Account of Louisiana*, 100.
[48] Pierre Le Moyne D'Iberville, *Iberville's Gulf Journals*, ed. and trans. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 82, 89.
[49] Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 7.
[50] William A. Read, *Place Names of Indian Origin: A Collection of Works*, ed. George M. Riser (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2008), 43.

Sakti Lhafa' seems to have played a critical role in partitioning the Mississippi River latitudinally and longitudinally. The bluffs lent their name to the river in the Central Mississippi Valley and, according to one migration legend, even facilitated the Chickasaws' initial crossing. Gideon Lincecum's informant claimed a party of Choctaw hunters came upon a camp of Chickasaws about a generation after each reached their eastern homelands. Discovering they spoke similar languages, "The older men amongst them being familiar with the traditional history of the journeyings…took much pleasure in communicating to each other an account of their travels." Having split from one another in the West the Chickasaws recounted how they continued "until they came to the great river." Arriving "at the place called by them, *sakti ahlopulli* (bluff crossing)," the people "made shift to cross" and soon settled as their leader's pole directed. Where they passed over, Lincecum's source clarified, "white people call it now Chickasaw Bluffs."[51] Deriving its nomenclature *sakti*, from the bluffs, grounds the location in historical geography, while *aalhopolli*, *aalhopolli'*, and *aa-abaanabli'* are each contemporary Chickasaw words for crossings.[52] The name *sakti ahlopulli* is significant even if the Chickasaws did not intersect the Mississippi at that location during their migration. It suggests the crossing once served as an important corridor for the Chickasaws. Whether or not it serviced the first Chickasaws, *sakti ahlopulli* became a passageway spanning the east-west divide created by the Mississippi.

"The White Dog's Road"

[51] Lincecum, "Choctaw Traditions," 539.
[52] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 53, 107, 185.

Still the Mississippi's significance rose above spatial orientation or even tangible considerations. Since rivers were seen as critical pathways to the Underworld they constituted a central place in the minds of Southeastern Indians. The Great Serpent controlled the currents and waves that might permit or prohibit water travel. Appearing as a constellation at the foot of the Milky Way during summer months, the Great Serpent also watched "the white dog's road" to the afterlife. While crossing the Mississippi River, according to some migration legends, the proto-Chickasaws lost a white dog. The Great Serpent may have claimed the dog's life, and stars in the night sky might have reminded Chickasaws of this event. If so, the Chickasaw migration legend contains references to all three levels of the cosmos conceived of by Southeastern Indians. This adds a religious component to the Chickasaws' relationship with the Mississippi River.

Each portion of the cosmos exhibited different characteristics. The Cherokee, for example, conceptualized an Upper World in the sky where "purity, order, and past time" reigned. Conversely the Under World coupled "fertility, change, and future time" below the earth in a watery expanse. This World, where humans lived, separated the other two.[53] Many taboos and rituals were meant to help people keep the cosmos in balance and avoid disorder. Positive and negative forces coexisted in these worlds, but the initiated might neutralize or even harness these powers. This conceptualization of the cosmos derived from Mississippian culture and heavily influenced Chickasaws,

[53] Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 34.

Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, and other Southeastern peoples who shared similar understandings.

Though the three worlds where separate, boundaries between them could be crossed. Living between the other worlds, humans received or suffered from the powers-that-be above and below. Elevated topographical features helped people commune with the Upper World, while the Under World could be reached via rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. Southeastern Indians generally conceptualized This World to be floating on the Under World, and so bodies of water served as corridors for sentient beings passing between the worlds. The most powerful of these presences was the "Great Serpent" who ruled the lower realm. Its capacity for malevolence and prosperity earned reverence in Eastern woodland mythology. The ability to churn up river currents or pitch waves across lake waters made the Great Serpent influential and aquatic travel hazardous.[54]

Supernatural powers residing in river depths were not to be trifled with. The sheer volume of water flowing down the Mississippi generated sweeping currents and clutching undertows, making the river particularly dangerous for travelers. As a residence of the Great Serpent, the river commanded respect from Native inhabitants seeking to avoid such hazards. New Orleans merchant C.C. Robin seems to have interpreted this deference as trepidation. Making one of several voyages up the river at the turn of the nineteenth century, Robin could not help but trumpet the improvements made by "civilized man." Clearing the banks of "menacing trees" freed the currents of

[54] Lankford, Reilly, and Garber, *Visualizing the Sacred*, 119.

"tangled logs," allowing travelers to proceed "everywhere along the river in safety." He heartedly boasted, "Even the Indian, unafraid under our benevolent laws, no longer fears the river." Given our knowledge of Southeastern Indian conceptions of the cosmos, it seems Robin conflated their "fears" with respect for the otherworldly forces below the water's surface. Nevertheless, he recognized the river's influence on the mindset of Native inhabitants.[55]

The Great Serpent took many forms in eastern North America, but in the Southeast snakes were most commonly associated with this Under World. Southeastern Indians believed snakes demanded deference so as not to offend the deity and bring about human suffering. In one instance James Adair drew the ire of a fellow traveler and "astrologer, of twenty years standing among the Indians" for transgressing this custom at a key juncture. Adair scouted for wood to construct a raft in preparation for crossing a river through Creek territory in 1768. In the process he "chanced to stand at the end of a dry tree, overset by a hurricane, within three feet of a great rattle snake, that was coiled, and on his watch of self-defence, under thick herbage." Adair quickly "killed him" which upset his Native companion who "immediately declared with strong asservations" the party's "imminent danger."[56] Destroying a representation of the Great Serpent, particularly before crossing over the watery abyss of the creature's domain, was an ominous sign.

Snakes living along waterways presented dangers, but spying one could also be transformative. According to John Swanton's Chickasaw informants, "A horned snake

[55] C.C. Robin, *Voyage to Louisiana, 1803-1805*, trans. by Stuart O. Landry Jr. (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1966), 105.
[56] Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, 272-273.

called *sint-holo* (‘sacred snake’) lived along big creeks or in caves. Not all persons could see these snakes, but sometimes a boy would get near one of them or even see him, and when this happened people said the snake would cause him to be wiser than other people.”[57] Forces existed throughout each level of the cosmos. These powers remained neutral so long as they were properly respected. However, disparagement could prompt negative consequences while honorific acts might produce benefits. According to the Chickasaws, “These snakes often moved from one stream to another” and “would make it rain in order to raise the rivers so that they could leave their hiding place with more facility. Such snakes harmed neither people nor cattle.” Hence, serpents did not wish ill or blessings on human beings, but they could bestow either.[58]

Ethnoastronomical research suggests the Great Serpent and its representatives were not restricted to the lower two-thirds of the cosmos. Scholar George Lankford theorizes that the constellation Scorpio appeared as the Great Serpent to Native Americans east of the Mississippi River. Among his evidence Lankford cites another passage from Swanton on Chickasaw beliefs. Swanton reported, “Another big snake was called *nickin-fitcik* (‘eye-star’) because it had a single eye in the middle of its forehead. If anything passed in front of its lair the snake would catch it, but none have been seen in the western country [present-day Oklahoma].”[59] Ostensibly *nickin-fitcik* references the Great Serpent whom the Cherokee knew as *Uktena*. This horned snake had a single jewel on its forehead and powerful medicine, prized by hunters, within its horns and scales. Lankford speculates that Antares, the bright reddish star at the “heart”

[57] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 79.
[58] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 79.
[59] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 80.

of Scorpio, represented the jeweled eye in the Great Serpent's head. This master of the watery Under World appeared in many guises within tribal traditions across the continent, but "ultimately, the complexities of ritual and myth dealing with the Horned Serpent make it quite clear that it is a major figure in the religious and cosmological understanding of the Woodlands and Plains [peoples]."[60]

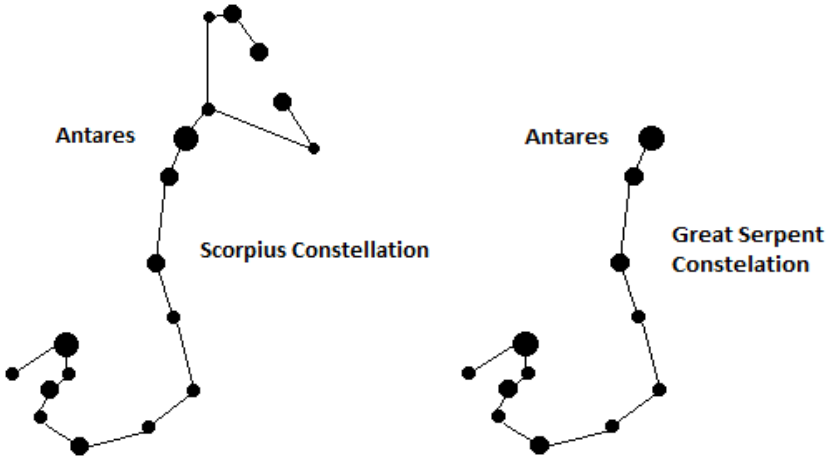

Figure 4: Scorpius and the Great Serpent

Looking up on summer nights, Chickasaws would have seen this figure suspended in the sky. The earth's orbit hides the constellation below the horizon in winter, but it gradually reappears each spring, becoming most visible in July, before fading with the fall. Consequently, its trek through the heavens mirrors the growing season. As the primary farmers in Chickasaw society, women planted and tended fields near their villages prior to harvest. They may have been able to assess the development

[60] George E. Lankford, *Reachable Stars: Patterns in Ethnoastronomy of Eastern North America* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 243-244, 253-254.

of their crops relative to this star pattern overhead.[61] During food preparation, women may have been reminded of this being's presence as well. In the Mississippian Period, Chickasaw ancestors decorated ceramics with depictions of the cosmos, including the Great Serpent.[62] Historic-era Chickasaw pottery was far less ornate, though their modern artists have adopted Mississippian iconography even incorporating celestial symbols into the design of the Chickasaw Cultural Center.[63] Representations of the Great Serpent in the sky or on land symbolized the watery realm's ability to take, as well as give, life.

Water begets existence on earth, so the liquidity of the Under World conjured reproductive powers. Women too were life givers cultivating corn, beans, and squash to feed their families, and their blood flowed through the children they bore. For this reason, throughout the Southeast, women were commonly associated with the lower level of the cosmos. The faculties of menstruation and childbirth made these moments in women's lives especially potent times. [64] Taboos required Chickasaw women to isolate themselves during menstruation and childbirth in order to contain the transcendent forces of their bodily fluids.[65] Similar concerns prohibited stories of the

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[61] Agro-astronomical calculations were made by farmers throughout the Americas, often accompanied by rituals marking seasonal cycles. For example, the Navajo use the Seven Sisters constellation, which they call *Dilyéhé,* to begin and end planting season. See Nancy C. Maryboy and David Begay, *Sharing the Skies: Navajo Astronomy* (Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2010), 40-41. Recent agro-astronomy research has greatly enhanced our understanding of Pre-Columbian societies. For a good example see Susan Milbrath, *Heaven and Earth in Ancient Mexico: Astronomy and Seasonal Cycles in the Codex Borgia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

[62] See chapters by David H. Dye, "Mississippian Ceramic Art in the Lower Mississippi Valley: A Thematic Overview" and F. Reilly III, "The Great Serpent in the Lower Mississippi Valley" in Lankford, Reilly, and Garber, *Visualizing the Sacred*, 99-136.

[63] Janet Rafferty, "A Seriation of Chickasaw Pottery from Northeast Mississippi," *Journal of Alabama Archeology* vol. 42 (1994): 180-207; Verna Todd, "The Use of Iconography at the Chickasaw Cultural Center," *Journal of Chickasaw History and Culture* vol. 12 (Spring, 2010): 44-50.

[64] Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 36.

[65] Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 16.

Under World from being told during summer months. According to Lankford, "The explanation that is usually given is that the master of the serpents can overhear any disrespect during those months and will communicate his displeasure to his representatives who are nearby the erring humans, with dangerous results."[66]

Celestial and subaquatic beings were not isolated in their respective domains. Though conceptualized in three parts, the cosmos operated as a network of interrelations. Each component could only be understood within this holistic world. Thus when Adair killed the rattlesnake prior to crossing a river, his traveling companion feared an earthly punishment. The man's anxiety may have been particularly acute given they travelled in May when the Great Serpent's constellation would have been a nightly presence. He feared "imminent danger" and explained his objections based on "a combination of second causes in the celestial regions, actuating every kind of animals, vegetables, &c. by their subtil and delegated power." Furthermore, their travel had already been slowed "on account of a very uncommon and sudden flow of the river, without any rain." Perhaps snakes had swollen the waterways to facilitate their movements or due to some other agitation? Either way the rivers "swept along with an impetuous force," making travel hazardous even prior to Adair's faux pas. Though the party crossed safely, the Native man did not relent. He "kept pointing to the river, and his wet clothes, and to his head," protesting "the great danger he underwent in crossing the water, which gave him so violent a head-ach."[67] Taboos and rituals were in place to

[66] Lankford, *Reachable Stars*, 255.
[67] Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 271-274.

neutralize or win favor from forces emanating throughout the cosmos; they were not to be trifled with.

While prohibitions sought to safeguard people, myths and legends explained the universe around them. This assuredly included the stars forming the Great Serpent as it did the Milky Way. Viewed from Chickasaw Country, our galaxy arches across the heavens following the earth's rotation. Though the Chickasaw name for the serpentine constellation is unknown, they identified the Milky Way as *Ofi' Tohbi' Ihina,'* meaning "the white dog's road."[68] In Chickasaw, Cherokee, Natchez, Choctaw, and Yuchi mythology a dog is said to have created this hazy sight by spilling maize flour along his pathway through the sky. However, given the sophistication of Native belief systems this description seems meant as lighthearted entertainment rather than serious elucidation. More probably, eighteenth century Chickasaws understood the Milky Way as the Path of Souls by which the deceased passed into another life.[69]

This conceptualization of the galaxy was widely shared by diverse Native nations east of the Mississippi. Chickasaws along with their Shawnee, Quapaw, and Creek neighbors are among many who seem to have held this belief. Though variations abounded, it was generally understood the soul left the body at the time of death and travelled west. There the deceased had to transition into the sky and follow the Path of Souls to their final destination. Those that failed to ascend properly languished as ghosts in the West or perhaps descended into the watery depths of the Under World.[70] The

[68] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 79.
[69] Lankford, *Reachable Stars*, 204-213.
[70] Lankford, *Reachable Stars*, 212-215; Lankford, "The Raptor on the Path" in Lankford, Reilly, and Garber, *Visualizing the Sacred*, 240-250; Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 83-84.

location of the Great Serpent constellation at the southern end of the Milky Way seems to have been of great significance during the celestial journey. Lankford argues this position near the galaxy's base "makes him the guardian of the entry into the Realm of Souls….Thus the Great Serpent is a figure that is present in all levels of the cosmos—a permanent part of the life of humans."[71] There is little doubt the master of the Under World influenced some of the Chickasaws' earthly decisions and heavenly observations, but did they see this figure as part of the Path of Souls too? Why label the Milky Way "the white dog's road" if it was a corridor for the deceased anchored by the Great Serpent?

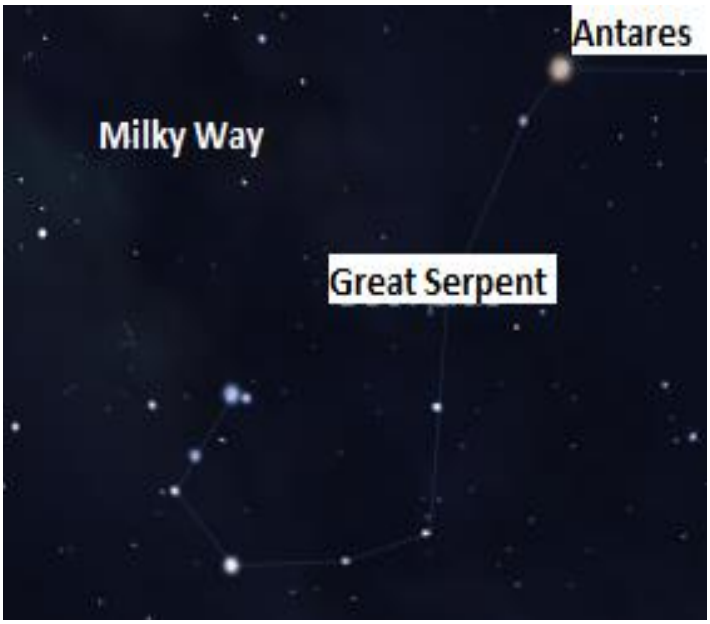

Figure 5: Milky Way and the Great Serpent

[71] Lankford, *Reachable Stars*, 256.

Returning to the examination of Chickasaw migration legends offers further insight into this belief system. Four versions of this story include reference to a dog that aided the people at various points along their journey. Two storytellers explicitly note the dog, at times known as Panti, was white, while no color is specified by the others. The earliest recorded description of this dog comes from Henry Schoolcraft's 1851 publication on Chickasaw origins. According to his version, when the people were preparing to begin travelling eastward, "they were provided with a large dog as a guard, and a pole as guide; the dog would give them notice whenever an enemy was near at hand." Their loyal companion remained vigilant until the people reached the Mississippi River and began crossing to the other side. Here "the great dog was lost in the Mississippi"; he was thought to have fallen "into a large sink-hole, and there remained."[72] In the early twentieth century, Charles Carter gave a succinct rendering of this event expressly mentioning the dog's hue. As he told it, upon arriving at the Mississippi, the people constructed watercraft to carry them over. Regretfully, tragedy ensued: "when the crossing was finally attempted, the little white dog which had so faithfully kept his course toward the rising sun was drowned."[73] Though the size of the dog varies in these stories, each specifies the Mississippi River as the site of his demise.

Two of the lengthiest versions of the legend also mark the waterway as the end of the dog's voyage. Zeno McCurtain stated that the migrants "had a dog who guarded their camp every night and kept the wild animals away." This canine played the role of protector and healer. Should one fall victim to a snake bite, "the dog would lick the

[72] Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information*, 309.
[73] Malone, *The Chickasaw Nation*, 22.

place and the person would get well." Having assisted them into North America, those who wished to continue east "took the dog Panti with them" for "they loved him dearly" as he was obviously "a great help to them." However, disaster struck in an instant as the people attempted to cross the Mississippi. "During the passage their raft came to pieces and they lost their faithful dog." [74] In McCurtain's version only then did the proto-Chickasaws resort to using a wooden pole as their guide. This late adoption of the sacred pole is an outlier among migration legends, though the story's fundamental elements are comparable with the more standard versions.

The most extensive story of the people's relocation also contains the greatest elaboration on their canine companion.[75] As Reverend Humes told it, the people split into two parties, one following Chief Chickasaw the other Chief Choctaw, migrating eastward as the sacred pole instructed. "Far in front of this procession of red people ranged a large white dog. He darted to the right, then to the left; he was everywhere, always on the alert. The people loved the big creature very dearly. He was their faithful guard and scout, and it was his duty to sound the alarm should enemies be encountered." Exposure to hardships during the journey took a toll on the people's health though the medicine men did their best. "But when sinti, the snake, struck any one of them, the big white dog was quickly summoned and had only to lick the wound to make the victim well again."[76] With the aid of their canine companion the people

[74] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 6-7.
[75] The title of Reverend Humes' story on the Chickasaw Nation website, "The Legend of the Big White Dog and the Sacred Pole," honors the dog's role in their migration by including it alongside the hallowed long pole.
[76] McCurtain and Humes are the only ones to include the dog's healing powers. In North America, "dog lick has been credited with healing wounds, sores, and snake bites." See Gabrielle Hatfield, *Encyclopedia of Folk Medicine: Old World and New World Traditions* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 123.

eventually reached the Mississippi River. The travelers fell speechless, nearly exhausted, when the long pole directed them to span the waterway. Humes continued:

> The tribesmen hurriedly set about constructing rafts, and soon the crossing was underway. Almost immediately a serious mishap occurred which left the Indians very sad. The raft carrying their beloved white dog came to pieces in the middle of the river, and though all the people were quickly rescued, the big dog, which managed to climb onto a piece of broken timber, could not be reached. The people could only watch helplessly as he was swept downstream and out of sight. That was the last the Indians ever saw of their faithful guard and scout.[77]

In these four legends, the Mississippi River marks the terminus of the white dog's journey. He helped protect the people as they travelled from the land of the dead in the West towards a rebirth in the East.[78] Having crossed the river the migrants experienced a new beginning as Chickasaws, while their faithful guardian met his demise at the same point. Throughout eastern North America human and animal drownings were widely understood as the malicious work of the Great Serpent.[79] Though unrecorded, the Chickasaws' stories may imply that the master of the Under World claimed the dog's life. He had shielded them and healed their snake bites, but his aid did not continue beyond the Mississippi River. On the border of West and East, death and life, the white dog metaphorically remained. The dog's life may have been sacrificed to the Great Serpent in the Mississippi to assure the people's safe passage.

Yet it is plausible the white dog's services aided deceased Chickasaws in the afterlife. Recall that John Dyson points out that Chickasaw place names eschewed the lyrical or poetic for descriptive terms. Their personal names as well as house and clan

[77] Humes, "The Legend of the Big White Dog and the Sacred Pole."
[78] I have adopted the use of male pronouns to describe the white dog as both McCurtain and Humes did.
[79] Lankford, Reachable Stars, 253.

designations seem to have followed suit.[80] Therefore, it is not presumptuous to suggest this sensibility would extend skyward. *Ofi' Tohbi' Ihina'*, "the white dog's road," might have been a direct reference to the white dog of migration legend. Perhaps here on the Milky Way, he again protected Chickasaws at a critical juncture on their way to a new homeland.[81] Souls of the dead had to travel west then ascend into the sky before passing the Great Serpent constellation to access the Path of Souls. Many Native American nations assigned a role for dogs in this process, including the Cherokees who identified Sirius and Antares as "dog stars" guarding either end of the Milky Way.[82]

Circumstantial evidence also suggests a connection between the white dog, the Mississippi River, and the Great Serpent. In 1736 Chief Paustoobee revealed to John Wesley that the Chickasaws "often heard cries and noises near the place where any prisoners had been burned," leading them to believe "the souls of red men walk up and down, near the place where they died, or where their bodies lie."[83] Yet these were apparently not the only sounds emanating from the departed. Having lost the white dog in the river "the Chickasaws said they could hear the dog howl just before the evening came," Schoolcraft reported. In fact, he claimed, "Whenever any of their warriors get scalps, they give them to the boys to go and throw them into the sink where the dog was."[84] Dismemberment or indecorous burial prevented the soul from achieving life

[80] Adair, *History of the American Indian*, 191, 193; Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 16-41.
[81] Dyson argues the white dog's role in the migration legend is a metaphorical reference to the Milky Way which the Chickasaws followed from northwest to southeast. "That the dog was lost at the river crossing seems to imply that his further guidance was not required from that point forward." While this assessment cannot be ruled out the evidence mustered in its support requires further analysis. Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 36-37.
[82] Lankford, *Reachable Stars*, 208-210.
[83] John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. by Nehemiah Curnock (London: R. Culley, [1909?]-1916), 249.
[84] Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information*, 309-310.

after death. Therefore, disposing enemy scalps in the Mississippi may have been part of the physical and spiritual preparation of future warriors.[85] Traditionally scalps were affixed on rooftops to appease aggrieved souls or tacked to war-poles as a display of martial virtue.[86] So, if accurate, flushing scalps downstream must have been a new phenomenon; as Schoolcraft concluded, "Some of the half-breeds, and nearly all of the full-bloods, now believe it."[87]

Enemy scalps may not have been the only sacrifice made to the Great Serpent at the Mississippi. In the *pays d'en haut*, dogs served practical as well as ritualistic purposes. Canines were trained for hunting and burden bearing, though their masters commonly drowned them in lakes and rivers to assure plentiful harvests or safe water travel.[88] Nearly all the peoples of the Eastern Woodlands presented gifts of tobacco and observed certain taboos to appease the Great Serpent before attempting to cross waterways.[89] Though it went by many names and took several forms the destructive powers of the Under World were widely recognized and offerings such as these were designed to offset its vengeance. In this light, the white dog's disappearance can be interpreted as a prophetic sacrifice enabling proto-Chickasaws to traverse the Mississippi's currents safely.

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[85] Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 83-85; Among the Alabamas, according to one report, "When a man kills himself, either in despair or in sickness, he is deprived of burial, and thrown into the river, because he is looked upon as a coward." See Jean-Bernard Bossu, *Travels through that part of North America formerly called Louisiana*, vol. I (London, Printed for T. Davies, 1771), 258.
[86] Adair, *History of American Indians*, 397; Walker, "The Kasihta Myth," 60.
[87] Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information*, 310.
[88] Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous & Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 52-55.
[89] Lankford, *Reachable* Stars, 253.

Like the migration legend itself, the white dog's significance goes well beyond actual events. His service on earth ushered the people eastwards toward a new life. Yet in the Mississippi he vanished. River rapids claimed him, symbolically merging his legacy with the Great Serpent's within the landscape. This interrelationship may have been reflected in a cosmic display when the Under World's master rose as part of the White Dog's Road waiting in the sky to pilot Chickasaw souls to the hereafter. The Milky Way splits the night sky as the Mississippi divides the earth, as legend would have it. Each separates the living from the dead.

Still, not all Chickasaws understood the intricacies of their society's beliefs equally. Occupied by warfare and other pursuits, young men generally knew less than their elders. Paustoobee explained to Wesley, "Our old men know more: but all of them do not know. There are but a few whom the Beloved One chooses from a child, and is in them, and takes care of them, and teaches them." He patiently elaborated, "They know these things; and our old men practice; therefore they know. But I do not practice; therefore I know little."[90] Chickasaws shared certain sacred axioms, though personal convictions varied. Precise sacrosanct knowledge required study and devotion. Religious specialists perpetuated inherited wisdom helping the laity navigate metaphysical forces beyond their command. Over time the ravaging effects of colonialism undermined this selective transmission process creating philosophical gaps.

Though the finer points of historic Chickasaw cosmology remain speculative, the importance of place in their universe is incontrovertible. Over three hundred years

[90] Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, 250.

stories of their migration have centered on the Mississippi River. For eighteenth century Chickasaws, the waterway physically split West from East. Likewise, its name demarcated north and south, domestic and foreign. The Mississippi divided time as well. Their crossing eastward marked a new era of history. Socio-cultural themes identify the river as important to Chickasaw unity, bonding the people to one another and the land to the nation. They passed from a place of darkness and death towards the sun's first light where they experienced a rebirth. Beyond the Mississippi's channel they became Chickasaws in a territory preordained for them. How, exactly, this occurred varies by storyteller but where it transpired does not.

Migration legends infuse the Mississippi with history and religion, producing a "sacred geography." The importance of the Mississippi has been overlooked by scholars, and clear interpretations of the past require contextualization within a particular place-world.[91] Knowing this necessitates a reevaluation of Chickasaw activities along the river during colonialism. Contemporary Chickasaw artist and historian Jeannie Barbour writes, "The great migration legend…was central in explaining the importance of the homelands….The stories of the elders had significance in describing tribal history, not in terms of chronological dates, but more in terms of how events and locations impacted nature and people."[92] To be sure, events effect nature and people, but so too do locations and nature influence people and events.

[91] Brooks, *The Common Pot*, xxii-xxiv.
[92] Jeannie Barbour, "Beliefs," The Chickasaw Nation, https://www.chickasaw.net/Our-Nation/Culture/Beliefs.aspx (accessed January, 13, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO

Navigating the Mississippi

Allegoric claims to the Mississippi River did not in themselves give the Chickasaws preeminence over the waterway passing their lands. Storytellers educated people on the social, religious, and historical significance of the river, yet in many ways, this must have been the easy part. Renditions of their migration created a place-world that would not have existed without the capacity to utilize that space. Asserting territorial sovereignty and affecting it are two very different things. Legend of their river crossing explained Chickasaw autonomy, but knowledge of the Mississippi environment made it possible. Due to their success managing the river's natural liabilities and exploiting its physical advantages, the Mississippi River became part of their domain. In short, Chickasaw practical knowhow backed their oratorical assertions.

If Thomas Nairne's assessment was accurate, then Chickasaws would not have engaged with the Mississippi. "The Chicasaws," he wrote April 12, 1708, "are no Watter people, [they] know nothing what belongs to Canoes." The Illinois, on the other hand, "and the others living on a Bank of the great [Mississippi] river" come "Down with the stream" to raid the Chickasaws. They often cross the Tennessee River "and in some Creek hide there Canoes," Nairne reported. "When persued they take them and away, but the river stops the Chicasaws from further persuete."[1] Though generally a trustworthy observer, he is badly mistaken in this case. Chickasaws were, in fact, comfortable navigating the Mississippi and traveling along its banks. They understood

[1] Nairne, *Nairne's Muskhogean Journal*, 37.

its relationship with the land and what that meant for them in practical terms. Chickasaw craftsmen built pirogues which men and women piloted. They too stashed canoes in slow moving water for safekeeping or quick getaways. Their maps offer a visual display of this aquatic acumen, and one even depicts a Chickasaw warrior crossing the Ohio River in pursuit of the same Illinois Indians who Nairne believed beyond reach. Other factors may have halted the chase in his experience, but an aversion to water, unfamiliarity with canoes, or diffidence around the Mississippi and its tributaries were not things that troubled the Chickasaws as they pursued their enemies.

Indeed, the waterway had a tremendous impact on Chickasaw society. Historian George Pabis argues that throughout history several themes have characterized the lives of people along the Mississippi. The environment is first among these as water shapes the land, producing dynamic ecosystems supporting human life and a seemingly endless variety of plants, animals, insects, and fish. Over time, technological advances and economic change have altered how people interacted with the river and, conversely, the river's impact on them. Community ties, ethnic identity, and cultural characteristics also frame how individuals and entire societies relate to the water course and other peoples near its banks. Though he only mentions them in passing, Pabis' analysis aptly applies to the Chickasaws as well.[2]

The river perpetually sustained and altered the land in which they lived, affecting their use of both. Chickasaw Country sat at the Mississippi's midsection,

[2] George S. Pabis, *Daily Life Along the Mississippi* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 1-7, 30, 31, 34, 40, 43, 45, 62, 65.

where its waters ran through large sweeping bends in a relatively wide and shallow channel. The waterway and its flood plain featured two distinct physiographic regions which host a rich tapestry of ecosystems. Each of these supported unique flora and fauna offering various foodstuffs, medicines, and supplies. Variable water levels accompanied seasonal change and influenced when and where these might be exploited. Chickasaws observed weather patterns and monitored the depth of interconnected waterways to assess conditions further afield. By doing this they capitalized on the available resources and avoided less amenable areas. The sheer volume of the Mississippi at flood stage produced routine shape shifting of landforms. Entire channels might alter course, outlets often appeared and disappeared, and bends widened or narrowed as water and dirt mixed. To exploit the landscape as they did, Chickasaws necessarily became "water people."

Crafting and plying pirogues was critical for to this lifestyle. The prerequisite building materials, cypress or pine trees, grew in abundance about the Chickasaw homeland. Generations of maritime experience perfected the manufacture of pirogues, known to Chickasaws as *piinoshi',* due to their trough-like appearance.[3] Difficulty transporting these vehicles overland meant they had to be constructed along navigable waterways. Geopolitical considerations further restricted where such vessels might be fabricated. Boat-builders needed a level of security in order to dedicate the time and energy necessary to complete their task. Yet educated on their surroundings and marine engineering, Chickasaw craftsmen made traversing the Mississippi River feasible. They

[3] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 306.

skillfully constructed watertight pirogues of various sizes capable of repeatedly covering vast distances.

Once afloat, men and women relied on their knowledge of the waterway, and a *piini' ishtoobli'* (paddle), to remain upright and pointing in the right direction.[4] In the river's straightaways, the currents midstream were generally strongest, and so navigating the center increased boat speed but also reduced maneuverability. Calmer water near the bank, meanwhile, brought stability at the cost of travel time. Currents propelled boats downstream but slowed those going in the opposite direction. The same was true within the Mississippi's many horseshoe bends, although the current operated much differently there. Faster water ran along exterior banks, while leisurely streams hugged the inside turn. Native men and women "read" these diverse currents, steering away from danger as their situation dictated. Even with the necessary equipment and skills, setting a course required knowing where one was headed.

A collective mental map of the Mississippi's route and its tributaries facilitated Chickasaw river usage. For better or worse these waterways bound them to enemies and allies far and wide. Chickasaw maps drawn in 1723 and 1737 offer a visual clue to their understanding of riverine geography and the political landscape. Situated between the Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee rivers, the Chickasaw Nation skewed the depiction of its relation to these rivers for British and French audiences, respectively. The first map emphasizes the overland paths connecting an embattled Chickasaw Nation to its British allies in the East. Though the artists downplay Chickasaw interaction with these rivers,

[4] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 306.

the map contains subtle hints that they were not as removed as the image suggests. Meanwhile, the second map highlights France's Indian allies on the waterway and the Chickasaws' potential to join or disrupt this river-path. Each map focuses on political relationships, and yet both include rivers. They are the only natural features that are drawn, highlighting both their role as regional "highways" and their bearing on geopolitics.

In all of these ways, Chickasaws navigated the Mississippi River. The place-world they built around the waterway would not have existed otherwise. Their villages stood at a remove, but Chickasaws knew the Mississippi well. They observed its patterns and discerned its environmental cues. This expertise enlarged their resource base and kept travelers safe. Sound pirogue construction and skillful manipulation of the current buoyed men, women, and children as they ascended, descended, and crossed the river. Their actions, words, and maps demonstrate they knew the water and the lands through which it moved. Nature's proclivities and sociopolitical networks each warranted consideration when maneuvering about the riverine landscape. With a firm grasp on these factors, one Chickasaw headman boosted in 1743, "We shall paddle our canoes on the Mississippi."[5]

[5] Dunbar Rowland, Albert G. Sanders, and Patricia K. Galloway, eds. and trans., *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, vols. IV-V (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), IV: 212.

Nature's River

Chickasaws relied on a keen understanding of the Mississippi River System to maximize its potential. It was not just a social construct but an intimate part of their lived environment. Therefore, knowing the river is, in a sense, to learn something of Chickasaw lives. Differing terrain altered the river channel, which, in itself, remade the land. Both affected ecosystems that relied on cyclical flood patterns, and these too acted upon the riverine landscape. Chickasaws discerned between such environmental features and recognized the system's organic interconnectivity. Familiarity with the river system increased the natural resources available to them, including cypress and pine trees used to make pirogues for water travel.

North America's largest river defies easy categorization. From its headwaters at Lake Itasca in present-day Minnesota to its terminus in the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River changes dramatically. Along its course, the river drains close to 41% of the U.S. mainland, adding water from the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains respectively.[6] Major tributaries from the Great Plains region such as the Missouri, Arkansas and Red River historically carried a proportionally large percentage of sediment, creating a muddy mixture. Meanwhile nearly half of the Mississippi's annual discharge originated from the Ohio River, its largest eastern tributary.[7] Adding these

[6] Jason S. Alexander, Richard C. Wilson, and W. Reed Green, *A Brief History and Summary of the Effects of River Engineering and Dams on the Mississippi River System and Delta*, U.S. Geological Survey Circular 1375 (Virginia, 2012), 3.
[7] Alexander, Wilson, and Green, *A Brief History*, 3.

rivers over a 2,350 mile journey, the Mississippi experiences major topographical and climatic transitions producing a tremendous degree of biodiversity.

Given its length, volume, and variability, scholars divide the Mississippi into three sections for more precise analysis. The Upper Mississippi River (UMR) begins at the river's inception and gives way to the Middle Mississippi River (MMR) at St. Louis, Missouri. Rolling bluffs characterize the river's northern extent before yielding to grassland prairies in central Iowa and Illinois. The UMR has a "definite meandering aspect", although in portions it takes "a braided character" as the channel splits to encompass islands and sandbars, rather than bending in S-curves around obstructions.[8] Continuing to meander through the landscape, the MMR passes plains and hardwood forests to the mouth of the Ohio River where it ends. Here the Lower Mississippi River (LMR) commences the final trek to the sea. It too eschews a linear route, continuing its curvaceous pattern for nearly 621 miles before splashing into the Gulf of Mexico. On this concluding leg, mild temperatures and lowland forests lead to the subtropical conditions of lower Louisiana.

Collectively eighteenth-century Chickasaws experienced each of these three divisions. As willing travelers or reluctant captives they observed the Mississippi top to bottom.[9] The majority of Chickasaws would have been most familiar with the river as it

[8] Daryl B. Simons and Fuat Sentürk, *Sediment Transport Technology: Water and Sediment Dynamics* (Chelsea: MI, BookCrafters Inc., 1992), 35.

[9] Indian slaves, including Chickasaws, were carried into bondage throughout the Mississippi Valley from the Great Lakes to New Orleans and beyond to the Caribbean. Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 281-282, 335-338; Yevan Terrien, "Baptiste and Marianne, King and Queen of the Runaways: Marronage in French Colonial Louisiana (1738-1748)," Circulated paper, History Department Work-in-Progress Series, University of Pittsburgh, March 4, 2015; Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 59.

passed by their homeland. From the mouth of the Ohio River south to a point opposite present-day Helena, Arkansas, the Chickasaw Nation reigned supreme.[10] In this span, the Mississippi passed through two dissimilar landscapes. Below its confluence with the Ohio, the enhanced LMR surged past the Chickasaw Bluffs, standing in stark contrast to the flatlands above and below them. For over forty miles, forming the southwest border of modern-day Tennessee, water wedged against these heights generally held course.[11] Constrained by geological conditions, currents thrashed against their captors for thousands of years working their way vertically into the earth. Landslides brought on by this action littered rocks, boulders, earth and trees throughout the riverbed, creating eddies. These swirling currents cut against channel flow and into the cliffs that dominated the skyline three-stories overhead. Below Memphis these barriers gave way to an open valley where the river was freer to choose its course. Following a path of least resistance the main channel widened and slowed, as before the Bluffs, looping through this basin until it passed out of Chickasaw lands.

This area is part of a distinct physiographic region known as the Alluvial Valley. The LMR is split between this valley in the north and the Deltaic Plain sprawling below Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Water levels in the former vary as the river winds past the Chickasaw Bluffs and subsequent flatlands, known affectionately as "The Delta," in northern Mississippi. Channel depths ran relatively shallow through much of the Alluvial Valley before entering the Deltaic Plain. Here the channel narrowed and deepened on its final approach to the Gulf, although the river bottom gradient decreases.

[10] Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 4-5.
[11] Chickasaw Bluff No. 1 is mapped at river mile 779.0 and the fourth and final bluff at 735.8. See Marion Bragg, *Historic Names and Places on the Lower Mississippi River* (Vicksburg, MS: Mississippi River Commission, 1977), iv-v.

Water not contained within the main channel splintered into crooked forks depositing upstream sediment around the river's mouth, forming the Mississippi River Delta.[12]

Though they would not have recognized these terms, Chickasaws historically divided the Mississippi River into similar sections.[13] They too acknowledged distinct environmental features in their naming patterns. In their minds the waterway transitioned from *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* into *Balbásha'* somewhere within the Alluvial Valley and the Deltaic Plain. Boat hazards, like turbulent water or menacing rocks, identified particular locations, and other place designations borrowed from the landscape as well.[14] After all, *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* is a reference to the sheer rock face of the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff. Consequently, *Balbásha'* probably communicated certain ecological characteristics, perhaps even foreignness, just as it signaled sociopolitical difference. For Native peoples, life on the Mississippi required an understanding of human *and* environmental relationships.

Southeastern Indians considered ecological dynamics in addition to making political calculations. These dynamics caused Spanish officials to reevaluate their proposal for a general conference with the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw

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[12] John A. Baker, K. Jack Killgore, and Richard L. Kasul, "Aquatic Habitats and Fish Communities in the Lower Mississippi River," *Aquatic Sciences* Vol. 3 No. 4 (1991), 314.

[13] John Robertson argues that since the Ohio has a stronger current and pushes the Mississippi aside where they meet, "the Indians held that the main channel was the Ohio-lower Mississippi combination." He does not offer any support for this assertion, but if true, then Chickasaws may have recognized the UMR and the MMR as a different waterway from the LMR. Some limited evidence does support Robertson's theory. In 1723 a delegation of Chickasaws presented a map to South Carolina's governor depicting the region's polities, paths, and rivers. The Mississippi and its tributaries are included south of the Ohio River. However, the Mississippi does not extend beyond that point. Instead, what appears to be, the Illinois River descends from the north. Meanwhile the Mississippi seems to bend northeast into the Ohio, although it goes unnamed until nearing the Seneca in western New York State. A more thorough analysis of Chickasaw mapmaking follows on pages 103-120. See John Robertson, "Fort Jefferson," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 71, no. 2 (April, 1973), 127.

[14] Dyson, "Chickasaw Village Names," 106, 115, 120.

nations in 1793. Cherokee chiefs wished to meet on the Tombigbee River to avoid conflicts with the Creeks. Meanwhile the Chickasaws and Choctaws favored the "Ball Ground" near the mouth of the Yazoo or the Spanish post further up the river. Speaking on their behalf, Chief Ugulayacabé said the first option was preferable since "the waters of the Mississippi are healthier than those of the Yazoo and in this way the illness of the Indians will be avoided."[15] Native peoples distinguished ecological factors along rivers and made choices accordingly.

In the Mississippi River Basin seasonal rhythms gave structure to the ecosystem. Today the river valley has been turned into dry land with levees, floodways, dikes, and dams which attempt to separate the Mississippi from its floodplain. Extensive engineering projects and the rise of commercial farming have limited flood pulses and reduced biological diversity. Yet as historian Christopher Morris makes clear, the history of "The Big Muddy" is disproportionally wet.[16] Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, before the land was drained for cotton fields and river cities, the LMR annually spilled over its banks saturating the land around it. According to a study by the U.S. Department of State, "Cyclical flooding was a fundamental ecosystem process that was essential to deliver nutrients to the flood plain, replenish off-channel wetlands, and regenerate aging riparian forest galleries."[17] This inundation supported a large variety of swamps, marshes, tall grass prairies, and dense woodlands.

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[15] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 32 (1960), 78 and 34 (1962), 94; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 160.
[16] Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples form Hernando de Soto to Hurricane Katrina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-23.
[17] Alexander, Wilson, and Green, *A Brief History*, 26.

Complex riverine ecosystems sustained an assortment of flora and fauna with differing amounts of Mississippi water. Within the river itself several distinct aquatic habitats existed, while six terrestrial ecoregions filled the LMR basin around it. Fast moving water in the depths of the main channel, steep banks, and sandbars each provided a haven for unique biotic communities. Slack water in sloughs and isolated oxbow lakes provided still more habitats, as did seasonal floodplains and the Mississippi's tributaries.[18] On land, dense forests and diverse grasslands thrived alongside these water forms. A variety of trees sprung from the landscape to produce Central U.S. Hardwood Forests, Ozark Mountain Forests, and Southeastern Mixed Forests with tall grass prairies scattered amongst them. Further south Western Gulf Coastal Grasslands and Mississippi Lowland Forests supported their own distinctive floral compositions and wildlife inhabitants.[19]

Within Chickasaw Country such ecosystems buttressed a wealth of native species. Aquatic insects and invertebrate thrived in these riverine environments, attracting fresh water fish and waterfowl who preyed on them. James Adair observed dense vegetation forming "evergreen thicket[s]" which sheltered "horses, deer, and cattle" in winter but attracted "panthers, bears, wolves, wild cats, and foxes" too. "Lands of a loose black soil, such as those of the Mississippi" sprawled with "fine grass and herbage" covered by "large and high trees of hiccory, ash, white, red, and black oaks, great towering poplars, black walnut-trees, sassafras, and vines." In "low wet

[18] Baker, Killgore, and Kasul, "Aquatic Habitats and Fish Communities," 327-334.
[19] Arthur V. Brown, Kristine B. Brown, Donald C. Jackson, and W. Kevin Pierson, "Lower Mississippi River and its Tributaries," in *Rivers of North America*, eds. Arthur C. Benke and Colbert E. Cushing (Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2005), 233.

lands adjoining the rivers" cypress trees thrived and grew "very large and of a prodigious height."[20]

Wildlife congregated near the river to take advantage of the foliage sprouting on the floodplain, and people came too.[21] In addition to tending the fields around their villages, Chickasaw women gathered natural resources along the river, within wetlands, and throughout lowland forests. Men took advantage of the diverse wildlife along the river. Spanish officials recognized the Chickasaw Bluffs were important "Hunting Grounds" for the Chickasaw Nation.[22] Chickasaw men also went "down the [Mississippi] River" towards Natchez during their hunts.[23] For thousands of years Native Americans had come to these bionetworks, timing their activities to harness as much energy within the systems as possible.[24] In this regard, Chickasaws were no different.

Before Chickasaws could exploit the Mississippi's natural resources, however, they had to forecast its stages. Local weather conditions had little impact on water levels in the main channel compared to contributions made upriver. Along the UMR and its tributaries winter months are generally the driest, but what precipitation does occur mostly accumulates in the form of snow and ice. Spring thaws release this moisture, some of which drains into the river. Regionally this coincides with the wettest months of the year when spring and early summer rains find their way into the

[20] Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 359-360.
[21] Usner, *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 150-154, 165-174.
[22] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 11 (1939), 85; 29 (1957), 147.
[23] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers of the Spanish Archives," 38 (1966), 72.
[24] Here I am indebted to Richard White's enlightening discussion of salmon runs and fishing on the Columbia River. See White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 15-24.

Mississippi. Snowmelt runoff and thunderstorms in the Upper Mississippi River basin raise the LMR each spring causing flooding for six to eight weeks. By mid-summer, fewer northerly showers reduce input, and rising temperatures continentally increase evaporation rates, thus lowering river stages. Water levels generally remain this way until fall rains lash the UMR valley and evaporation decreases. In response the LMR raises slightly before the winter freeze up North once again locks precipitation in place and reduces the river's flow until spring. [25]

Granted, the Mississippi's depth could vary significantly at any time throughout the year, but in principal it followed an annual discharge model. Before significant human intervention this sequence caused semiannual flooding in low-lying areas and inundated larger expanses during intense episodes.[26] These rises in the LMR altered water levels in streams far afield. According to ecologist Arthur Brown and associates, "The stage of the main channel of the Mississippi River is occasionally high enough to impound tributaries and essentially create temporary lakes upstream from the confluence of each of them."[27] Using this knowledge Chickasaws could estimate the Mississippi's water level at any given time. Absent local precipitation, swelling tributaries signaled a flood in the main channel. Conversely, average flow in subsidiary waterways indicated the Mississippi ran at or below par. Experience with the river's

[25] Michael D. Delong, "Upper Mississippi River Basin," in *Rivers of North America*, eds. Arthur C. Benke and Colbert E. Cushing (Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2005), 327-334; John O. Anfinson, *The River We Have Wrought: A History of the Upper Mississippi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 16-18.
[26] Alexander, Wilson, and Green, *A Brief History*, 26.
[27] Brown and others, "Lower Mississippi River and its Tributaries," 239.

cycles and an understanding of the interconnectivity of drainage systems made the Mississippi more predictable.

James Adair's experience living amongst the Chickasaw demonstrates they firmly grasp the interrelationship between water, land, and climate. His travels through Chickasaw Country in 1747 are a prime example. Leaving Chickasaw villages for Charles Town, in spring, Adair easily passed "many of the broad deep creeks" because they were "almost dry." On his return during the early winter these same streams "overflowed their banks" running at a "rapid rate" due to successive "frost, snow, hail, and heavy rains" throughout the area. "Within forty miles of the Chickasaw, the rivers and swamps were dreadful," forcing him to wade and even swim in several places. Safe within their homes Chickasaw villagers knew weather conditions and geography conspired to make travel virtually impossible at certain times of the year. "The people had been saying, a little before I got home," Adair wrote, "that should I chance to be on the path, it would be near fifty days before I could pass the neighboring deep swamps; for, on account of the levelness of the land, the waters contiguous to the Chickasaw, are usually in winter so long in emptying, before the swamps become passable." These conversationalists recognized that seasonal conditions, weather events, and topography affected drainage networks.[28] Experience told them the land was inundated and would be for some time. Without venturing forth they could surmise, as Adair put it, that the waterways "were unpassable to any but desperate people."[29]

[28] A Chickasaw map from 1723 is further evidence they understood the interconnectivity of regional waterways. No less than six tributaries are shown feeding into the Mississippi River. See map 2 on page 94.
[29] Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 325-326.

At times elevated water levels swamped parts of the Chickasaws' homeland, fundamentally transforming it in the process. Ecologists agree that, "Prior to major human modification, many locations in main-stem channels of the Mississippi River system were more complex and dynamic, exhibiting substantial planform alignment shifts from year to year that resulted in a physically and biologically diverse channel and flood-plain structure."[30] Currents whittled away at outer banks of meander loops while solidifying their interiors with sediment deposited by slower moving water. As these curves widened the Mississippi gradually moved itself horizontally across the valley floor. High water flushed from the UMR often overran land formations on the inside of these curves straightening, and shortening, the main channel. Left "cut off," former turns became oxbow lakes or backwater swamps trapped behind naturally occurring levees. This did not occur within the Chickasaw Bluffs where the Mississippi's currents were held in check, but between Memphis and Vicksburg the river methodically dissected the soft loess soil. Here in The Delta the river transformed itself and the land as it went. Course changes simultaneously destroyed and created channel configurations, landscapes, and microenvironments.[31] The river's course and surroundings changed annually, thus utilizing the Mississippi meant staying abreast of its alterations.

Despite this revisionism, or in some cases because of it, Mississippi waters supported trees that made traversing the river possible. Though a plethora of ecoregions existed in the LMR basin, forests covered a majority of the region. Hardwood species

[30] Alexander, Wilson, and Green, *A Brief History,* 36.
[31] Alexander, Wilson, and Green, *A Brief History*, 9, 17; Brown and others, "Lower Mississippi River," 234, 238; Baker, Killgore, and Kasul, "Aquatic Habitats," 315.

of oak, hickory, and birch grew in drier conditions while softwoods like cypress and pine preferred the moisture of low lying areas.[32] This biological distinction was critical to Native American water travel. Depending on which species grew in a given area, cypress or pine trees lent themselves to the construction of dugout canoes.[33]

Not all trees in the forest made suitable watercraft, and not every cypress and pine sapling sprung forth a boat in waiting. Fashioned from a single log with a trench running lengthwise, pirogues constituted the primary form of Native water transportation throughout the Southeast. They are still known as *piinoshi'* in Chickasaw, which can mean both "canoe" and "trough."[34] These boats varied considerably in length and width depending on their particular function. A tree's size determined its potential capacity, and only mature trees provided the requisite bulk. Several species of pine routinely top fifty feet at maturity and bald cypresses scrap the sky fifty feet above that. With girth to support such heights, both species are well proportioned for pirogue construction. Cypresses and pines of limited stature simply did not afford the surface area for construction or buoyancy to sustain additional weight. Therefore aged trees with long thick columns were chosen for manufacturing pirogues. These forest veterans had to stand upright without forks, bends, or twists so as not to distort a pirogue's shape. A quick study of the modern Chickasaw language suggests identifying these composite parts was quite important. Chickasaws distinguished pine trees (*tiyak api'*) from other species, and differentiated the midsection of a tree trunk (*itti' api'*) from the

[32] Brown and others, "Lower Mississippi River," 233-234; Baker, Killgore, and Kasul, "Aquatic Habitats," 318.
[33] Mark Joseph Hartmann, "The Development of Watercraft in the Prehistoric Southeastern United States" (PhD diss., Texas A&M University, 1996), 27-30.
[34] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 306.

portion nearest the ground (*itti'sokbish*). They also categorized trees without lower limbs (*fa'hha'ko*) from those with forked branches (*falakto*).[35]

Chickasaw craftsmen had to consider a tree's location in addition to its shape. Smaller canoes manned by one or two people could be transported overland some distance, but larger vessels were unwieldy and could not be carried very far. Crafting a mammoth pirogue from a perfectly formed pine deep in the forest made little sense if it could not serve its purpose. Consequently, a tree's proximity to a navigable waterway was key. A boat builder's own safety must have weighed on his or her mind prior to beginning construction as well. Trees growing on unstable ground, along cliffs, or in hazardous water were probably rejected due to the perilous working conditions. Geographic limitations and physical characteristics dictated where a pirogue might be fashioned.

Having found a tree of requisite size in a suitable location, crafting a serviceable boat then entailed a labor intensive process. In lower Louisiana, French carpenter André Pénicaut observed Native artisans constructing pirogues in 1699. According to him, their method required felling, coring, and shaping a tree in succession. Pénicaut explained, they:

> kept a fire burning at the foot of a tree called cypress until the fire burned through the trunk and the tree fell; next, they put fire on top of the fallen tree at the length they wished to make their boat. When the tree had burned down to the thickness they wanted for the depth the boat, they put out the fire with thick mud; then they scraped the tree with big cockle shells as thick as a man's finger; afterward, they washed it with water. Thus they cleared it out as smooth as we could have made it with our tools.[36]

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[35] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 342, 524, 85, 48.

[36] André Pénicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana*, ed. and trans Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1988), 8-9. Hereafter cited as *Pénicaut Narrative*.

The combination of burning and scrapping was a tried and true method of pirogue construction used throughout the Southeast. The introduction of iron tools made the process easier, and perhaps less reliant on fire, but these longstanding construction methods persisted.[37] For that reason a Chickasaw chief requested adzes from American officials while treating at the Chickasaw Bluffs in 1801. "We are about to raise cotton," he explained, "we shall want canoes to carry it to market, and adzes are necessary to build them."[38]

A painting by John White, when read closely, demonstrates the vulnerability of canoe-makers. The manufacturing process depicted by White necessitate that Chickasaw craftsmen remain onsite and potentially exposed. White painted this scene while in Virginia and it later served as the model for one of Theodor De Bry's famous engravings. One depiction shows four men hard at work in various stages of pirogue construction. In the forefront two men toil to refine a canoe already taking form on posts raised above the ground. One man scrapes the charred interior while another tends flames burning out the center. Meanwhile behind them, two more men use fire to fell trees and prepare them for fabrication. Mature pines range from two to four feet in diameter with cypresses bulging between three and six feet. To down a freestanding tree of this magnitude necessitated a large blaze or, more likely, a smaller sustained burn. A lesser fire would have taken longer but preserved the tree's length. Once on the ground flames again licked the trunk searing their way into the tree. This fire-hollowing

[37] Barbara A. Purdy, *The Art and Archeology of Florida's Wetlands* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1991), 279-283; Hartmann, "The Development of Watercraft," 29-30.
[38] *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, vol. I (Washington, 1832), 651.

technique demanded careful tending to ensure the flames did not devour more than their share. Large plumes of smoke accompany the men's labors in De Bry's depiction. Even if he embellished these clouds for effect, smoke generated from construction would have hung in the air for inquiring eyes to see or perceptive noses to detect. In addition, the sound of cockle shells or steal tools stinging the burnt remnants of the emerging vessel(s) would have echoed about as well. Given all of this, it is tempting to suspect that the craftsmen's weapons are leaning against a tree just outside the frame of White's picture.

Figure 6: Theodor de Bry, "Native Americans Making Canoes," engraving, 1590.
"Wunderbarliche, doch warhafftige Erklärung, von der Gelegenheit vnd Sitten der Wilden in Virginia . . ." [America, pt. 1, German], Frankfort: Theodore De Bry, 1590, p. 59. North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The time and energy required of Native boatmakers meant they needed a certain degree of security to accomplish their task.[39] Major rivers were North America's original interstate system and lesser watercourses served as subsidiary water-roads. Such well-travelled routes, and the involved construction process, discouraged unwelcome individuals from fashioning a pirogue in enemy territory. Most craftsmen necessarily employed their skills along navigable rivers in their own country or those of their allies. In fact, the Chickasaw called the northern portion of the Tombigbee River, *Piini' aaikbi'*, meaning "where dugouts are made." This segment was navigable by pirogue and lay safely inside Chickasaw Country.[40] But even within recognized water boundaries boatbuilders would have had to remain vigilant. Such waterways ushered ill-intentioned adversaries just as easily as they buoyed invited guests. The Chickasaw Nation in particular sat between the Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee rivers. With access to cypress and pine trees, Chickasaw artisans labored over pirogues along their banks. Yet at various times in the eighteenth century these rivers conveyed French armies, Iroquois raiders, and Cherokee war parties, all of whom threatened Chickasaw lives. To ensure their health and work did not suffer, canoe makers must have considered the state of geopolitics in addition to a tree's location and stature.

Those considerations notwithstanding, throughout the Southeast Native craftsman turned trees into pirogues of several sizes. Pénicaut reported, "These boats may be twenty-five feet long. The savages make them of various lengths, some much

[39] Research has shown "that a small dugout canoe carved using fire and stone adzes must have taken two people a minimum of 20 8-hour days to complete a dugout of about 2 meters in length." See Hartmann, "The Development of Watercraft," 218.
[40]Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 15. Spanish documents also pinpoint Cape Girardeau, "where there was no danger," as a favored place for "neighborhood" Indians to make pirogues. See Louis Houck, ed., *The Spanish Regime in Missouri* vol. II (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Co., 1909), 61.

smaller than others."[41] Short vessels were agile and quick but lacked speed and stability. They could be steered by a single person alternating strokes on either side or by two oarsmen coordinating their efforts. As a means of solo transportation, or for a small party, such craft proved capable of maneuvering the LMR and its congested backwaters. In sloughs or swamps, their shallow draft allowed boatmen to steer close to shore while avoiding obstructions.

Writing between 1803 and 1805, New Orleans merchant and trader C.C. Robin observed far larger boats. He noted pirogues on the Mississippi might reach "forty to fifty feet long by six feet wide and four to four and a half feet deep."[42] Massive crafts like this could seat thirty or more men and transport far more cargo.[43] After accelerating slowly, these steady behemoths travelled the river rapidly. Friction on the river bottom and slight drag from air on the surface slow water at the lowest and highest depths. This means water between those levels actually flows faster.[44] Since large pirogues sat lower in the river they sped along faster after gathering momentum. However, the size and velocity of these bulky vessels meant they were more difficult to control.

Even before getting into one of these boats, however, Chickasaws had to navigate the Mississippi's topographical and ecological diversity. They did this, in part, by labeling its composite parts according to identifiable environmental features.

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[41] Pénicaut, *Pénicaut Narrative*, 9.
[42] Robin, *Voyage to Louisiana*, 100.
[43] Rusty Fleetwood, *Tidecraft: An Introductory Look at the Boats of Lowers South Carolina, Georgia, and Northeastern Florida: 1650-1950* (Savannah: Costal Heritage Society, 1982), 43. Abraham Nasatir claims, "smaller pirogues could carry a ton, while larger ones, ranging up to forth or fifty feet long and as much as five feet wide, could carry fifty tons. Their passenger capacity ran as high as thirty men, although occasionally one meets references to pirogues that could carry fifty." See Nasatir, *Spanish War Vessels on the Mississippi, 1792-1796* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 49.
[44] Raymond Bridge, *The Complete Canoeist's Guide* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 159.

Detecting factors like water quality and biological variability kept them healthy and boosted the number of available resources. Annual flood patterns transformed the land, rejuvenating some areas while destroying others. By discerning the seasonal, and irregular, inundations of tributaries nearer their villages Chickasaws could estimate water levels in the main channel. This impacted hunting and gathering trips as well as pirogue construction. Boatmakers had to stay dry when selecting a tree and transforming it into a serviceable *piinoshi'*. This not only took a discerning eye, but technical knowhow to char and scrape a log into shape.[45] Depending on a pirogue's intended use, craftsmen constructed it to take advantage of differing river currents.

Riding the River

Pirogues of various sizes kept Native Americans afloat but they did not, by themselves, get them where they wanted to go. If left to its own devices a pirogue might drift one way and then another, spinning ahead, abeam, or astern as the currents shifted. Chickasaw canoeists relied on power generated from within the river and their own rowing prowess to reach their destination. Depending on the occasion, free flowing central channel waters or variable exterior currents might be employed. Men and

[45] Wood, being an organic material, decays quickly making archeological discoveries of Southeastern pirogues rare. An identifiably Chickasaw pirogue has yet to be found. Nevertheless, the Chickasaw Nation recently celebrated its tradition of boatbuilding and river travel with a yearlong exhibit, "Dugout Canoes: Paddling through the Americas," at the Chickasaw Cultural Center in Sulphur, Oklahoma. It featured archeological remains of pirogues and paddles discovered in Florida, not unlike the ones Chickasaws made in the eighteenth century. Canoe-making demonstrations also highlighted the labor intensive process necessary to craft a *piinoshi'*.

women, alike, exerted themselves, manipulating their boats over the water and dodging obstructions. And when disaster struck and Chickasaws were ejected into the Mississippi they swam for their lives. The Under World's depths posed undeniable risks, but also warehoused pirogues not in use. In spite of its power, Chickasaws not only observed the Mississippi River; they rode it.

The meandering character of the Mississippi River meant Native canoeists had to constantly interpret the water's movements. Shifts in the stream alerted them to where smooth and rapid currents ran. In a straightaway, contact with the banks slows water on the outer edges of the channel, so the fastest flow occurs midstream where the channel is deepest. However, the current simultaneously accelerates and decelerates around the Mississippi's countless bends. Heading into a U-turn, the swifter water carries its momentum into the outside of the bow, cutting into the bank before boomeranging downriver. Currents running along the interior curve simultaneously slow as the central waters rush to navigate the curve. With its motion disrupted these sluggish waters cannot continue to carry the sediment jumbled within them. They are forced to drop their cargo of soil, reinforcing the inside corner. Over time, a point or sand bar forms, pushing still more water to the outside bend where the river is deepest.[46]

Chickasaw canoeists exploited these shifting currents as they plied the Mississippi. When traveling southward and time was of the essence they moved into the channel to harness the river's pace. During an impromptu contest with a steamboat in 1811 more than fifteen Chickasaws maneuvered their pirogue from the shoreline in a

[46] Bridge, *The Complete Canoeist's Guide*, 162-163.

quest for speed. Witnesses aboard the *New Orleans* reported that below the mouth of the Ohio River "a large canoe, fully manned, came out of the woods abreast the steamboat." These Chickasaws gave chase and "there was at once a race!" While "for a time the contest was equal," the Chickasaws' arms gave out before the *New Orleans*' boiler, earning it the victory thanks to "the advantage of endurance." Though they utilized different power sources, strong currents ultimately enhanced the velocity of both vessels. Those on the steamer reported, "some miles above the mouth of the Ohio, the diminished speed of the current indicated a rise in the Mississippi." A fall flood had swollen the Big Muddy and backed up its tributaries, a sign that the Chickasaws would have certainly recognized. In fact, "the bottom land on either shore were underwater," but the channel's swift moving flood waters did not hold the Chickasaws' back. The crew still made a beeline for the steamer.[47] Experience with the Mississippi's flood patterns, combined with confidence in both their pirogue and their collective canoeing skills, allowed them to abandon safer slower currents near shore.

At other times Chickasaw boatmen positioned their pirogues to take advantage of leisurely currents along the Mississippi's banks. In one instance a small squad hugged the water's edge going down river only to return in similar fashion. On June 1, 1741, "seven men passed in a pirogue in open day," cruising past the French settlement of Pointe Coupée.[48] Located along the exterior curve of one of the Mississippi's characteristic horseshoe bends, the currents passing Pointe Coupée would have varied. "Letting themselves drift with the current of the river" the Chickasaws floated in

[47] J.H.B. Latrobe, *The First Steamboat Voyage on the Western Waters* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1871), p. 23-25.
[48] Dunbar Rowland and Albert G. Sanders, eds. and trans., *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, vols. I-III (Jackson, Miss.: Department of Archives and History, 1927-32), III: 756.

quicker waters nearest the colony, "even saluting with their heads several inhabitants who were at the water's edge." However, "when they were below the last plantation they went back upstream on the other bank" where the current moved slower.[49] The waning of the river's might in summer and their strategic positioning within its channel reduced the manpower necessary to travel upriver. Furthermore, this seven-man vessel would have displaced less water than the pirogue used to race the *New Orleans,* making its draft shallower and better suited for shoreline travel.

In both instances the Chickasaws, by all indications, were knowledgeable and accomplished canoeists. Though seven decades and nearly seven hundred river miles separated these crews, their actions speak to a shared comfort level.[50] Neither party shied away from the Mississippi's power. Rather, each used the river's anatomy to their advantage. The fifteen-plus racers manned a larger pirogue in adverse conditions. As the Ohio engorged the Mississippi, embarking on such a jaunt, would have been perilous without considerable experience. Together their brawn generated enough power to manage the swollen channel and test the *New Orleans*. Near Pointe Coupée, swings in the Mississippi's path did not shake their self-assured style either. River bends presented their own unique challenges, yet the Chickasaws conveyed "in every respect the attitude of men who were acquainted [with the river]."[51] By interpreting the movement of the water they expended little energy while riding the river. These types of excursions reflect a larger pattern of Chickasaw river use throughout the eighteenth

[49] MPA:FD III, 756. Although Bienville protested these were not Chickasaw boatmen he was mistaken. Evidence of this fact will become apparent in chapter three.
[50] The Lower Mississippi begins at the Ohio's mouth marked at river mile 953.8 while Pointe Coupée is mapped at 265.5. See Bragg, *Historic Names and Places on the Lower Mississippi River*, iii-viii.
[51] MPA:FD III, 756.

century. Despite its massive size, Chickasaws navigated the Mississippi trusting in their knowledge, watercraft, and skills.

River travel was neither a strictly male activity nor a solely Chickasaw phenomenon. Chickasaw women and children joined people of many Southeastern nations on the river. For example, Pierre George Rousseau commanded a Spanish galley, *La Fleche*, on the Mississippi in 1793. His log of a mission upriver to New Madrid testifies to the versatility of Native navigators. Midway between the Yazoo and Arkansas rivers on January 23rd, Rousseau documented a common sight. He observed "two pirogues loaded with skins, manned by two Indian men and four women," coming down the river. Finding them to be Choctaws, he conversed with a "half-breed who spoke very good English" and told him they had "been hunting on the west bank of the Mississippi." Having "crossed the river yesterday morning," they completed their hunt, and planned to return to their village on the opposite side.[52] By the late eighteenth century, commercial hunting had depleted deer populations east of the Mississippi River. This forced hunters, including Chickasaws, to travel across the Mississippi in search of game.[53] Shifting their focus west, where deer remained abundant, allowed them to maintain their role in the deerskin trade and retain access to manufactured

[52] Raymond J. Martinez, ed., *Pierre George Rousseau, Commanding General of the Galleys of the Mississippi, with Sketches of Spanish Governors of Louisiana (1777-1803) and Glimpses of Social Life in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Hope Publicans, 1964), 49-50.
[53] Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 92-94. Chickasaws increasingly hunted west of the Mississippi in the late eighteenth century, and they had a long tradition of warring on that side of the river too. James Adair explained, "they formerly went to war over the Mississippi, because they knew it best, and had disputes with the natives of those parts, when they first came from thence." See Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 196.

goods they had become accustomed to.[54] Women commonly accompanied men on distant hunting trips, and that tradition brought them over the Mississippi River too.[55]

In order to get there, however, men and women had to ferry their pirogues. This basic paddling technique requires setting a canoe at an acute angle against the current and rowing upstream to slow the downstream momentum as the boat crosses over. Maneuvering in this manner made east-west travel on the Mississippi possible and came in handy when aligning to run a particular section or avoid an obstruction.[56] The weight of the crafts rowed by the party Rousseau encountered would have made it difficult for them to ferry across the Mississippi. According to historian Richard White's calculations, in this instance, each pirogue carried between 250 and 350 deerskins or about 500-700 pounds.[57] Adding additional mass for each passenger's bodyweight means the canoeists had to operate pirogues weighing, conservatively, 800-1,000 pounds. And that's before accounting for miscellaneous supplies or even the heft of the boat itself! In addition, Rousseau noted "strong" currents coursed through the river the day before, which might have hampered their efforts to ferry across. Perhaps this is, at least in part, why the English-speaker asked Rousseau "to trade for their pelts." To move such a bulky cargo, it is safe to assume both the men and women "manned" their pirogues to make the crossing.[58]

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[54] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 145-146.
[55] Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians*, 271-272.
[56] Bridge, *The Complete Canoeist's Guide*, 173-174. With a body type comparable to canoes, pirogues would have handled similarly in the water.
[57] White does not account for the size of the pirogues, and assumes each hide is a deerskin while calculating the average weight of a deerskin at two and a half pounds. White, *Roots of Dependency*, 93.
[58] Martinez, *Pierre George Rousseau*, 49-50.

Even when not rowing, female passengers often played an important role in navigating waterways. Southeastern Indians ranged throughout the LMR and commonly employed its expansive tributary network. On the Ouachita River, near what is today central Louisiana, C.C. Robin, a New Orleans trader, encountered a party similar to the Choctaws described by Rousseau. "While we were proceeding at a good pace on the quiet water," he wrote, "two fine pirogues decorated with deer heads sporting long branched antlers suddenly darted out of a nearby bayou. They were manned by Indian families. Women seated nonchalantly near the steersman directed him with comely outstretched bare arms, while the men manned the high oars."[59] Both sexes worked in tandem on this boat. Females directed male rowers with a grace and confidence that could only be gained from a lifetime of experience. Novice travelers, no matter how athletic, struggle with their "sea legs," never mind maintaining the wherewithal to command a pirogue. Robin, like Rousseau, only mentions this sight in passing, suggesting its frequency. Pirogue travel was not a gender specific task, and so reflecting on women's participation did not warrant much consideration.

Like their counterparts throughout the region, Chickasaw women accompanied their menfolk on rivers, even braving the harsh winter conditions of the Mississippi. Rousseau's Choctaw informants had "met a party of fifteen Chickasaws with their women." Then, on February 9th just north of the White River, the *La Fleche* "came alongside eleven pirogues filled with Chickasaw and Arkansas savages." Headed by "a Chickasaw half-breed named Thomas," the Indian convoy paced the warship upstream

[59] Robin, *Voyage to Louisiana*, 128-129. Hunters throughout the Southeast camouflaged themselves using a buckskin with the head preserved to lure deer closer. This type of hunting gear probably accounts for the pirogue's decoration. See Romans, *Concise Natural History*, 66; Bossu, *Travels through that part of North America*, 259-260.

for an hour before Rousseau ordered his charge ashore "to get dinner." Landing with the Spaniards, the "captain of the party" implored Rousseau to look at "all these women and children who are here." Osage warfare drove them from their homes, the headman said, and in order to avoid starvation they had been "forced to hunt deer on the Mississippi." Brutal winter weather recently struck the region, adding to their plight. Over the ten previous days, reports of "wind and the snow," "terrible" conditions, "very cold" temperatures, "rain," and "bad weather" accumulated in Rousseau's logbook, and even on the night of his meeting with the Chickasaws "the weather was disagreeable."[60] Despite the poor conditions, Chickasaw women piloted the Mississippi River alongside their menfolk.

Over exposure must have worried Thomas and the others, but river conditions surely concerned them as well. Frozen precipitation along the UMR usually lowered water levels in the LMR until spring, but Rousseau's records tell a different story for 1793. Throughout late January and early February the Mississippi's depth fluctuated wildly. On February 13th near the St. Francis River, "the [Mississippi] river rose two feet in twenty-four hours." Rousseau dutifully reported, "the current is very strong. The river still carries ice, which make it very cold for us." The following day he complained, "The river is still filled with much ice and driftwood." Two days later "the river rose 4 feet in scarcely 24 hours" and remained "filled with ice."[61] In winter large chunks of ice broke away from the banks and careened downstream when the river rose. As they

[60] Martinez, *Pierre George Rousseau*, 52-57.
[61] Martinez, *Pierre George Rousseau*, 58-59.

pursued the *La Fleche,* Thomas' party, men and women alike, must have monitored the Mississippi for these frozen projectiles to avoid being dumped into the frigid water.

Rising water also swept up logs and tore trees from their banks, adding to the danger. These, too, cluttered the channel, posing a threat for Native and non-native vessels alike. Boatmen reported "wooden islands" of interlocked debris blocking the path or even heading towards them.[62] With forests lining its edges, the Mississippi's immense power undercut banks, uprooting entire trees whenever it flooded. One early nineteenth-century observer noted "planters" fell into the Mississippi with their roots weighted down so they became "fixed and immoveable"—planted—once they settled to the bottom, "generally with the heads of the trees pointing down river." Meanwhile "sawyers" bobbed along "entirely submerged by the pressure of the stream," only to have their momentum cause "huge limbs to be lifted above the surface of the river." According to this traveler, the unpredictability of sawyers made them "more dangerous" than planters. "The steersman this instant sees all the surface of the river smooth and tranquil, and the next he is struck with horror at seeing just before him the *sawyer* raising his terrific arms, and so near that neither strength nor skill can save him from destruction. This is not figurative," he warned, "many boats have been lost in this way, and more particularly those descending."[63] Such obstacles would have caused less damage to solid Indian pirogues than steamboats and bateaus, but they remained a threat to upend canoes and dislodge passengers.

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[62] Charles Sealsfield, *The Americans as They Are: Described in a Tour Through the Valley of the Mississippi,* Vol. 2 (London: Hurst, Chance and Co., 1828), 107-109.
[63] John Bradbury, *The Interior of America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811; Including a Description of Upper Louisiana*…2nd ed. (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819), 202-203.

Should some impediment topple their pirogue, Chickasaws could handle themselves in the water. Bernard Romans claimed they were "all good swimmers, notwithstanding they live[d] so far from waters." Recognizing its utility, Chickasaws taught their youngsters to swim "in clay holes, that are filled in wet seasons by rain."[64] Like canoeing, this was not a skill reserved for warriors. "Both male and female, above the state of infancy, are in the watery element nearly equal to amphibious animals, by practice," Adair asserted. Even if their pirogue upset and Mississippi hazards submerged them, Chickasaws were capable of "swimming under water."[65] This gave them a chance to escape Under World deities intent on holding them below the water's surface. According to one Arkansas hunter, who dove into the Mississippi's hard charging waters, "the Great Spirit had taught him to swim like a fish" so he could not accept a reward for saving a drowning Frenchman. "He could not employ his skill better than to save the life of his fellow-creature," he explained.[66] Whether or not Chickasaws shared these sentiments, the ability to swim aided those who, literally, found themselves in over their heads.[67]

[64] Romans, *Concise Natural History*, 64-65.
[65] Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 404.
[66] Bossu, *Travels through that part of North America*, 172-173. Most Southeastern Indians swam, although Romans and Adair claim the Choctaws could not. See Romans, *Concise Natural History*, 64, 72, 86, 92, 96; Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 404.
[67] At times, pirogues themselves may have been painted as another way to safeguard those aboard. A joint war party of Chickasaw and Abihka warriors rode sixteen pirogues "spotted with red [paint]" across the Mississippi to attack the Arkansas Post in 1749. Chickasaw men painted their faces and bodies for ceremonies or warfare, and pirogues seem to have received the same treatment. Contemporary Chickasaw artist Tom Phillips included serpentine figures on the pirogues he depicted in his painting *Chickasaws Defend Their Homeland, Blocking the Mississippi, 1732-1763*. Serpents adorn the side of three pirogues, in recognition of the unforeseen threats of the Under World, as Chickasaw warriors paddle onto the Mississippi River in the moonlight. See MPA:FD IV, 34; Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 63-70; Green, *Chickasaw Lives* III, 99-104; Jeannie Barbour, Amanda Cobb, and Linda Hogan, *Chickasaw: Unconquered and Unconquerable* (Ada, OK: Chickasaw Press, 2006), 17.

While travelers attempted to stay out of the water, it was important to keep their pirogues in it. For travel, commerce, and warfare, pirogues constituted a valuable resource requiring protection. The time and energy invested by boatmakers during construction meant canoes were not easily replaced. Therefore, travelers sought to safeguard their vessels, particularly when it became necessary to leave them unattended. Forested inlets offered the handiest hiding spots for "parked" pirogues. At other times voyagers deliberately submerged their boats as a defense against the elements and their enemies.[68] If left exposed too long, wind and sunshine dried wooden canoes, causing them to crack. Eventually these fissures jeopardized a craft's integrity, putting both crew and cargo in danger. Immersing pirogues, when not in use, delayed this process and prolonged their service.[69] In addition, the water's surface hid them from preying eyes.

Europeans observed Native customs in these regards and, as with so many other conventions, adopted some themselves. While exploring the mouth of the Mississippi River in 1699, Pierre Le Moyne Sieur d'Iberville witnessed the precautions of one local band around Dauphin Island. Although they had feasted and exchanged goods with the Frenchman, he returned the following day to find "All of their canoes and baggage had been removed, indicating that they distrusted me."[70] Several decades later his countryman, Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz, took similar precautions while exploring along the Mississippi River. Upon arriving at the Chickasaw Bluffs he, "landed, and

[68] Kevin M. Porter, "A Historic Dugout from the Apalachicola River, Florida," *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2009), 54.
[69] Hartmann, "The Development of Watercraft," 46-48.
[70] Carl A. Brasseaux, *A Comparative View of French Louisiana, 1699 and 1762: The Journals of Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean-Jacques-Blaise d'Abbadie* (Lafayette, LA: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1979), 32-33.

concealed, after unlading it, the pettyaugre in the water." Without taking this precaution his beached pirogue would have advertised his entry into Chickasaw Country. Having completed his objective Du Pratz and his Indian escorts returned to Lower Louisiana, at which point "the Indians hid the pettyaugre and went to their village."[71] With transportation limited, pirogues were simply too valuable to be left exposed and unattended.[72]

If one knew where to look, caches of hidden canoes could be found lining the Mississippi River System. A similar system linked the Lower Great Lakes to the Ohio River in the mid-eighteenth century and probably well before that. Bands of Indians passed between Lake Erie and the Ohio's tributaries at short "carrying places" where they could lug their canoes overland. According to Robert Hasenstab, "These sites could be expected to occur at break points in the water transport network, such as at falls along rivers or portages between drainages." Here Native Americans would bury their canoes for the winter, protecting them from the elements, and retrieve them in the spring when needed.[73] A similar arrangement occurred throughout the Southeast as well. Native peoples stored dugout canoes underwater in select spots around lakes and along rivers.[74]

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[71] Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, or the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina* (London: T. Becket & P.A. De Hondt, 1774), 148-149.
[72] While treating with some Chickasaws at the Chickasaw Bluffs in 1795, the Spanish governor of Natchez, Manuel Gayoso, also sunk a rented pirogue for safekeeping. See Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 48 (1976), 136.
[73] Robert J. Hasenstab, "Canoes, Caches and Carrying Places: Territorial Boundaries and Tribalization in Late Woodland Western New York State," *The Bulletin: Journal of the New York State Archaeological Association* vol. 95 (1987), 39-49.
[74] Christopher B. Rodning, "Water Travel and Mississippian Settlement at Bottle Creek" In *Bottle Creek: A Pensacola Culture Site in South Alabama*, ed. Ian W. Brown and Penelope B. Drooker (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 197.

Here too, knowledge of the natural environment facilitated water travel. Navigable backwaters off the Mississippi or its tributaries proved ideal locations for secreting pirogues. The relativity constant water pressure prevented drying and cracking, while a lack of current reduced the risk of canoes being swept downstream. Finding storage spaces, therefore, required scouting accessible places with a certain degree of water depth and stillness. Though canoes could be stashed anyplace conditions allowed, fixed caches were most likely to be found where established overland trails met navigable waterways.

Chickasaws probably frequented three such locations where, evidence suggests, they warehoused pirogues. It is highly likely Chickasaw boatmen stowed canoes on the Tennessee, Wolf, and Yazoo rivers during the eighteenth century.[75] The former, according to Spanish officials, proved "navigable for 200 leagues during high water," although "in low water it [was] impractical because of some 30 miles of shallows called Muscle Shoals."[76] This created natural break points, one of which John Stuart called "the Chickasaw Landing," and seems a logical storage place for canoes given Chickasaws and Cherokees routinely traversed the Tennessee River.[77] The Wolf River, which passed the north end of the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, is another apt candidate as a storage site. Several trails from their villages converged in the area, and Chickasaws

[75] Archeological discoveries have been limited throughout the Southeast since wooden pirogues decay over time. Written documents, on the other hand, only reveal so much, but they consistently report Chickasaw activities in these areas. See Theodore Calvin Peace and Ernestine Jenison, eds., *Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years War, 1747-1755* French Series, vol. III (Springfield, IL: Collections of the Illinois State Historical Society, 1740), 766-767.
[76] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 9 (1937), 140.
[77] C.O. 5, vol. 71, 515; Mary Rush Gwin Waggoner, ed. *Le Plus Païs du Monde: Completing the Picture of Propriety Louisiana, 1699-1722* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2005), 45; William L. McDowell, Jr., *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs*, vols. I-III (1750-1765). Colonial Records of South Carolina, South Carolina Archives Department (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1958), I: 536-537; MPA:FD III, 743-744.

frequented the waterway.[78] They may have cached supplies nearby according to the testimony of two Spanish-aligned hunters who uncovered "a large quantity of powder, ball, merchandise, dried meat, flour, maize, and other provisions and goods." "In the neighborhood" they also found "two pirogues full of bear's fat and tallow."[79] Finally, the Yazoo River offered the most direct access to the Mississippi River, though at times during the eighteenth century this meant passing through enemy territory.[80] Nevertheless, Chickasaw war parties were known to stash pirogues there, and one headman sent messengers to Natchez "by water from the [Walnut] Hills" and he wished they would "return that far the same way."[81]

Wherever Chickasaw canoes ended up, navigating them safely required a keen sense of the river and a pragmatic assessment of one's own skills. "Reading" water levels and current patterns kept travelers safe, while also allowing them to control their pace and direction. Men and women assessed these factors against their own abilities to maneuver about the river. Hard-earned experience and the capacity to swim mitigated their peril to a degree. Caching pirogues upon arrival did the same. Travelers maintained the integrity of their crafts and helped to conceal their own presence. None of this would have been possible without the Chickasaws' familiarity with the

[78] James Adair claimed after Pierre d'Artaguette and his army were routed by the Chickasaws, the survivors returned to their basecamp on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff at "the Chikkasah landing place, N.W. on the Missisippi…where they took boat, and delivered their unexpected message." See Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, 355; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 43-47; Malone, *The Chickasaw Nation*, 149; Stanley Faye, "The Arkansas Post of Louisiana: French Domination," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* vol. 26, no. 3 (July, 1943), 676.
[79] Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," *Annual Report for the American Historical Association for 1945*, vol. III (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 23.
[80] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 211 and John D. Stubbs Jr., "The Chickasaw Contact with the La Salle Expedition in 1682" in *La Salle and His Legacy: Frenchmen and Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, ed. Patricia Galloway (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 46-48.
[81] MPA:FD V, 34; Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 43 (1971), 106.

Mississippi River System. According to *The Complete Canoeist's Guide* this may have been their greatest asset. "Proper advance knowledge of the river to be paddled," it declares, "is the most absolute of all safety rules."[82]

Mapping the River

Accumulated wisdom made it possible for Chickasaws to navigate the Mississippi confident of where they would end up. Collectively they formulated a mental record of its course and extensive tributaries. Maps drawn in 1723 and 1737 underscore their comprehensive knowledge of the river system and the geopolitical landscape around it. If rivers served as North America's first highways, as they are often characterized, Chickasaw Country sat at a major interchange. The importance of waterways is made clear by the fact that rivers—not mountains, lakes, or valleys—constitute the sole topographical feature on both maps. Surrounding the Chickasaw Nation on three sides, the Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee rivers merged on its northern border. By distinguishing between navigable rivers, like these, and non-navigable waterways Chickasaws communicated about river conditions and accessibility. Throughout the colonial period, the Chickasaws' central location and familiarity with the entire river system made them valuable allies and formidable enemies.

[82] Bridge, *The Complete Canoeist's Guide*, 179.

During a meeting in September of 1723, South Carolina Governor Francis Nicholson received a map from a party of Chickasaw diplomats. Hoping to publicize their circumstances, they presented a deerskin diagram consisting of circles and lines for the governor's review. Spheres of various sizes representing Indian nations and European colonies filled the space. Lines connected some of these circles but fell short of others to display the region's alliance network.[83] Because Chickasaw mapmakers intentionally emphasized their connections with South Carolina, overland paths highlight their ties to the east and the Native American allies who helped sustain them. Despite this land-centric focus the mapmakers reveal a great deal about how Chickasaws approached the Mississippi, other rivers in the region, and the land between them and the Chickasaw Nation. Western Muskogean terms and the English rendering "Massasippe" identified twelve distinct waterways, which otherwise are indistinguishable from the land-based paths drawn across the hide.[84] Roughly 13,000 miles of navigable rivers appeared passing every which way through approximately 850,000 miles of mapped territory.[85] These lines were not a traveler's itinerary but the shared socio-geographic knowledge of the Chickasaw Nation.

[83] St. Jean, "Trading Paths," 18-20.
[84] Gregory A. Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," in *Powhatan's Mantle*, 474-478.
[85] https://www.chickasaw.tv/misc/pdfs/cntv_hc_deerskin_map.pdf

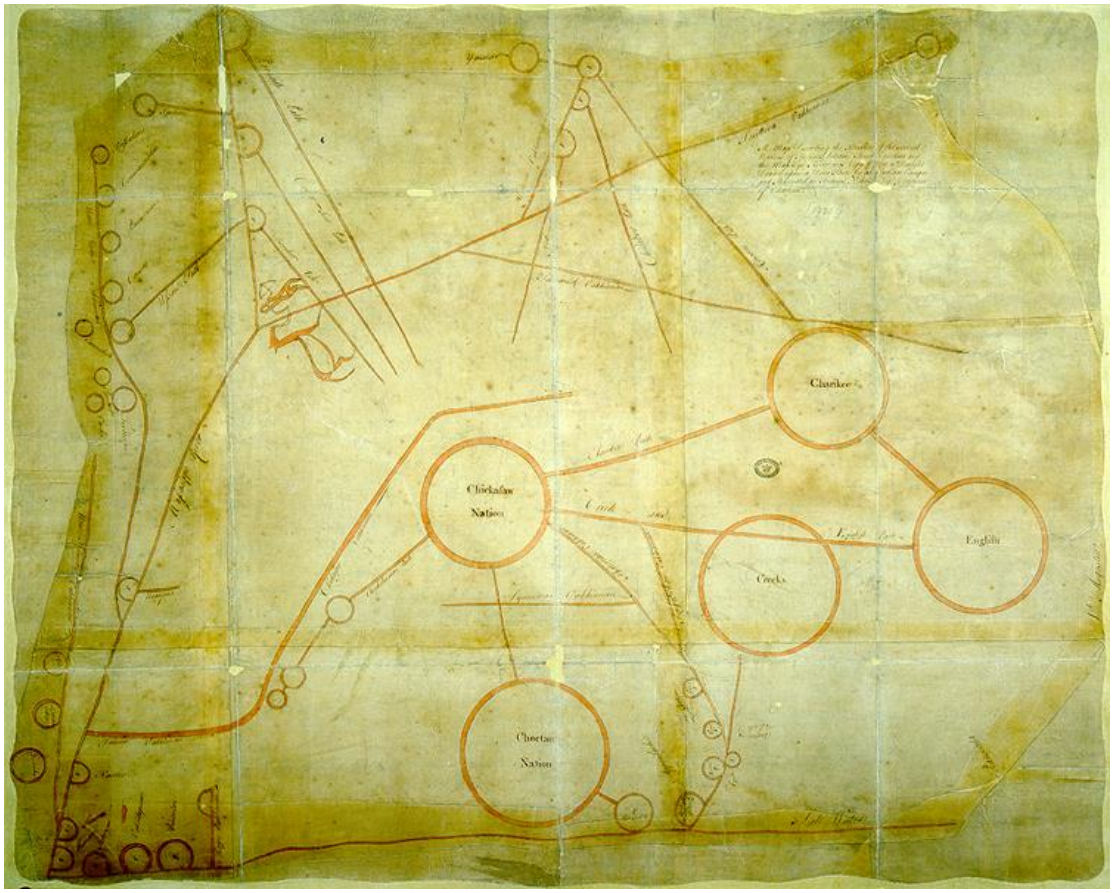

Figure 7: Chickasaw Map, ca. 1723. Anonymous [Chickasaw?] [SEM 192] [ca. 1723:] A Map Describing the Situation of the several Nations of Indians between South Carolina and the Massisipi River; was Copyed from a Draught Drawn & Painted upon a Deer Skin by an Indian Cacique: and Presented to Francis Nicholson Esqr. Governour of Carolina.

The onset of large scale European colonialism had reshaped intra-Indian relationships throughout the Southeast by the early eighteenth century. Competition between France and Britain for land and Indian slaves intensified longstanding Native rivalries and sparked new conflicts. Violence accompanied weaponry and slaves along trade routes, but so too did utilitarian merchandise. Such goods made daily life easier even as it became more dangerous. For their part, France and Britain demanded exclusive trade relationships. Convenience and self-preservation required Native polities to pick a side—or at least appear to. Beginning in the late seventeenth century

Chickasaw headmen used military service, flattery, and even "mapping as diplomatic propaganda" to maintain access to British merchandise.[86]

Every inch of the diagram presented to Governor Nicholson serves this purpose, sketching both the political and physical landscape in order to secure arms and supplies from South Carolina. With that project in mind, the Chickasaw mapmakers emphasized their connections to the British and minimized their contact with the French. In this way, they mapped social and political distance between polities by distorting physical space.[87] Despite the Chickasaws' relatively small population and remoteness from Charles Town, the entire drawing centers on a large circle representing the Chickasaw Nation. The circumference of each polity's circle demonstrates its importance, rather than the polity's actual size. As such the Cherokees, Creeks, and British all appear as large spheres. The Choctaws were the only French affiliated nation to receive a similar treatment, but their ties to the Chickasaws are clearly less significant. Whereas bold double lines unite the Chickasaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and British, only a pencil thin stripe links the Choctaws to the Chickasaw Nation. All of this elevates the importance of the British-backed network dominating the deerskin trade.

Conversely, the entire French alliance system was belittled by the tiny orbs and slim strokes. The Indian nations within this network appear petit, and their European patron is completely absent. As the Chickasaws were well aware, France had settlements in Illinois, Louisiana, and Alabama of which the Chickasaws. These outposts furnished supplies necessary to maintain the expansive coalition along the

[86] St. Jean, "Trade Paths," 765.
[87] Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," 443.

Mississippi River System. If Governor Nicholson recognized the symbolism of this slight, he must have appreciated the gesture. The Tennessee and Mississippi rivers "were the most important arteries of southeastern Indian exchange" yet they appear emaciated compared to paths within the Chickasaws' own network.[88] This topographical distortion obscures the relative ease of water travel compared to energy expended humping overland.[89] In addition, the mileage separating the Mississippi River, the Chickasaw Nation, and the British is devalued. The Chickasaw appear nearly equidistance between the Mississippi and Charles Town, although in reality the waterway is much closer.[90] As drawn, the Chickasaw Nation looks completely excluded from the Mississippi, its tributaries, and the Indian nations residing in those river valleys.

Nevertheless, the Chickasaws retained a wealth of knowledge about these river courses. Down the deerskin's left side the Chickasaw cartographers mapped the Mississippi River from approximately modern-day St. Louis, Missouri, to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Encompassing the whole MMR and most of the LMR, this route extends nearly 1,000 miles. The drawing also incorporates the main components of the entire river system. Although clearly not intended as a navigational chart, the mapmakers precisely located tributaries from east and west. The Chickasaws accurately depicted the Ohio River merging with the Mississippi, followed by the Arkansas, Yazoo, and Red rivers.[91] Like the Mississippi, the Ohio extends across the diagram covering hundreds of

[88] St. Jean, "Trade Paths," 759.
[89] Hartmann, "The Development of Watercraft," 41.
[90] Gibson, *The Chickasaws,* 45-46.
[91] The Arkansas River and Red River share the designation "Ucau Humer Oakhinnau," though they are clearly separate entities on the map.

riverine miles. Along this route, the Tennessee River splits off towards the southeast, while the Wabash River radiates northeastward. Though unlabeled, paths denoting the location of the Peoria, Cahokia, and Kaskaskia suggest the artists included the Illinois River, just north of the Ohio, as an extension of the Mississippi.[92] In this depiction of the MMR and LMR, the Missouri River is the only major tributary left uncharted. Given the Chickasaws' extensive geographic knowledge and their inclusion of the Missouria, this absence is probably an omission rather than a blind spot. Either way, the deerskin drawing is an impressive representation of the mid-continent's waterways.

Nestled beneath the Tallahatchie River, a Yazoo tributary, the Chickasaw Nation is shown near the Mississippi River System but seemingly not a part of it. "Rivers and trails" on Southeastern Indian maps "merge to form communication networks that define the limits of mapped space, which is otherwise unbounded. Rivers arise and flow to their outlets within the confines of the maps, and paths end at the most distant villages or tribal domains. These are self-contained worlds," Gregory Waselkov argues.[93] According to this reasoning, the Chickasaws' world is clearly mapped with an eastward slant. The aptly named Cherokee Path and the Creek and British Paths bind the Chickasaw to the British in Charles Town through their Cherokee and Creek allies respectively. Meanwhile, the Tombigbee and Tuscaloosa rivers connect them to French-allied nations around Mobile. An unnamed path unites the Chickasaws, Choctaws, and more French-allied peoples in that same direction. Not a single path springs north from

[92] Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," 480. If John Robertson is correct that Native Americans (he does not specify who) understood the lower Ohio and lower Mississippi as a single river, then this might explain the absence of the UMR on the map. Refer back to page 7 footnote 9 for more on this.
[93] Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," 444.

the Chickasaw Nation, and only the "Chockchumau Path" proceeds to the west. Mirroring the Tallahatchie River, this trail angles southwest where it ends at a series of three unidentified Indian nations. Here the Chickasaws' communication network stops without intersecting the Yazoo River or the Mississippi River System at large.

Although the rivers depicted on the map appear inaccessible for the Chickasaw people, the names of those same rivers indicate otherwise. In the Chickasaw language, *okhina'* (spelled "oakhinnau" on the map) once denoted a waterway "whose volume and depth were sufficient for travel by dugout canoe."[94] Therefore when they spoke of *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* they evoked a sense of place, at the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, but also commented on its capacity as a water route. An Anglicized version of the Mississippi's Algonquian name appears on the 1723 map, but its tributaries are clearly labeled "oakhinnau," showing that they were fit for travel. These rivers received similarly descriptive or destination-based designations. "Tascanuck Oakhinnau," for example, spoke to the availability of flint on the Tennessee River, as well as to its ability to propel a pirogue. The Ohio River, or "Senottova Oakhinnau," begins in western New York near the Iroquois Confederacy, which earned it the designation "Seneca River."[95] Other identified tributaries include the Wabash, Arkansas, Yazoo, and Red rivers, all of which are regarded as "oakhinnau." The image on the map suggests Chickasaw canoeists could not reach these rivers, but the Chickasaw names for those waterways tell a different story.

[94] In Chickasaw *oka'* is water and *hina'* is road, so these were literally water-roads. See Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 170; Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 532, 492.
[95] Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 179.

Although visible trails do not connect the Chickasaw Nation to the Mississippi River System several warpaths do cross Mississippi tributaries. From the Wabash River, Wea and Kickapoo routes ominously descend over the Ohio from the northeast. To the northwest, three more trails hang like suspended daggers threatening to fall. Originating near the Illinois River, these paths brought French-allied warriors south into Chickasaw Country. Only these warpaths occupy open space between the Ohio River and the Chickasaw homeland. Combined with a lack of warpaths heading in the opposite direction, the Chickasaws appear to be vulnerable and on the defensive. This is a good piece of "propaganda" considering Chickasaw diplomats presented this map to the British in hopes of receiving armaments.

The space north of the Chickasaw Nation on the map, perhaps inadvertently, also reveals more about Chickasaw river usage. The direction of the warpaths clearly paint French-backed nations as the aggressors, but paths were not unidirectional. If their enemies could travel over the Tennessee and Ohio rivers so could Chickasaws. The only human depicted within the diagram is a warrior holding a bow and leading a horse north on the Kaskaskia Path over the Ohio River. The man may symbolize the return of some Kaskaskia warriors following a raid, but why would the Chickasaw artists give the impression they could repel their enemies without British firearms? This figure is more than likely a Chickasaw warrior. Facing north on the warpath he remains on the defensive, yet his bow advertises the Chickasaws' need for guns. However, his presence at the Ohio River means Chickasaws were not isolated from the river system after all. He has already crossed over, yet his horse remains south of the waterway. The man holds its bridle, which spans the Ohio, indicating he is bringing the horse with him.

Therefore, he either cut across a ford or intends to swim his horse to the other side.[96] Either way the image demonstrates Chickasaws crossed the Ohio River with their horses. Warpaths directed at the Chickasaw Nation might just as easily lead them to various locations on the Ohio and Tennessee rivers as well.

Furthermore, the circle signifying the Chickasaw Nation does not replicate the full geographical extent of its territory. A void exists between the Chickasaws and the Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee rivers that actually marked the limits of their domain. A delegation of Chickasaw headman insisted on these exact boundaries when they met President George Washington in 1794. Washington, in response, affirmed their nation's borders on the Ohio, Tennessee, and Tombigbee rivers, before concluding in the west where their boundary ran "up the Missisipi to the mouth of the Ohio."[97] Thus the mental geography of their migration legend matches the description Washington provided. The physical map reproduces these same borders although the artists depict their nation within a much smaller area. There are no paths leading to these rivers, but there is nothing to obstruct Chickasaw access either.

In fact, some Chickasaws had visited the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers just prior to the map's presentation. Two Frenchmen "were taken by surprise in broad midday" along the Mississippi and cut down in "a hail of gunshots which killed them both" in April of 1722.[98] Four others fell victim that October near the Chickasaw Bluffs, where

[96] Swimming horses across waterways was a common practice, although current strength and distance influenced where and when this might be done. See Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 272-273.
[97] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," IV: 326 and Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 164-165. Chief Ugulayacabé similarly claimed an American fort on the Ohio River rested, "on the Very Borders of My land." See Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 41 (1969), 104.
[98] MPA:FD III, 277.

they were captured and carried off. The following year, the crew of two French pirogues encountered still more Chickasaws in that vicinity. Then, just months before Governor Nicholson received his map, a Canadian voyageur reported that a delegation of forty-odd Chickasaws on the Yazoo River attempted to coordinate a peace with France. [99] All of the Chickasaws' routes to and from these rivers, be they warpaths or diplomatic ones, are conspicuously missing from the governor's diagram. The map's lack of paths created the fiction of a political, economic, and physical gap between the Chickasaws and French allies lining the Mississippi and its tributaries. The absence of paths may have been another visual display of Chickasaw fidelity.

The open space wrapping counter-clockwise around the Chickasaw Nation from the northeast also suggested an opportunity. Traveling down the Tennessee and Ohio rivers at the turn of the seventeenth century, British traders reached the Mississippi where they opened relations with the Natchez and other nearby nations. Having lost these ties during the Yamasee War (1715-1717), British agents saw the Chickasaws as their best chance to return to the river.[100] Edmond Atkin, for one, certainly did not miss the significance of their position in the region. In his oft cited mid-century report, he wrote Chickasaw Country "lies in a central place about the middle of the Missisippi, and commands all the water Passages between New Orleans and Canada, and from that River to the backs of our Colonies; And is Supportable or accessible [by water] from most of them."[101] The space on the map divorcing Chickasaws from the Mississippi,

[99] Diron D'Artaguiette, "Journal of Diron D'Artaguiette, 1722-1723." In *Travels in the American Colonies,* ed. Newton D. Mereness (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 31, 33, 62-63, 85.
[100] Crane, "The Tennessee River as the Road to Carolina," 3-18.
[101] Edmond Atkin, *Indians of the Southern Colonial Frontier: The Edmond Atkin Report and Plan of 1755,* ed. Wilbur R. Jacobs (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1954), 67.

Ohio, and Tennessee rivers demonstrates the Chickasaw Nation's detachment from the French. Chickasaw cartographers might have designed the diagram in this way to entice the governor. The gap subtly invited the extension of the British trade network onto the rivers via the Chickasaw Nation. Of course, expansion would require British firearms and other goods the envoys sought.

The 1723 map was designed to minimize French influence and maximize British potential along the Mississippi, but Chickasaw artists altered this scene according to their audience. In July of 1737 the Captain of Pacana, a pro-French Alabama chief, visited the Chickasaw Nation. Knowing he would report his visit to colonial officials in Louisiana, a Chickasaw headman presented the Captain with a map detailing the Chickasaws' sociopolitical relationships.[102] This diagram is quite different from the one received by Governor Nicholson. Geographic depictions of waterways are entirely omitted, though the familiar circles and paths remain. In addition, the French alliance network appears more robust while the British are diminished. Most importantly, paths radiate from the Chickasaw Nation toward French-backed nations throughout the Mississippi River System.

Just a year before the Captain's visit, Chickasaw warriors scored two lopsided victories over the French and some of their Indian allies. Following the Natchez Rebellion (1729), pro-British Chickasaws sheltered Natchez refugees fleeing French reprisals. As a result, Louisiana officials instigated a proxy war against the Chickasaws. French spokesmen induced bands of Iroquois and Hurons, in addition to Wea and

[102] The only surviving copy of this map comes from a reproduction drafted by Alexandre de Batz and shipped to France. See Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," 481-484 and MPA:FD IV, 142.

Miami warriors, to attack them from the north. Meanwhile, parties of Choctaws were encouraged to strike from the south. These assaults climaxed in 1736 as two French-led armies failed spectacularly in their attempts to invade Chickasaw Country.[103] Nonetheless sporadic raids continued, and many Chickasaw headmen looked to the Captain of Pacana for help stemming the bloodshed.[104]

Given the recent state of affairs it is understandable why some details within the 1737 map changed. For starters the Captain need not see regional waterways on the deerskin canvas to know where they were, and Louisiana's bureaucrats had some familiarity with them as well. The artists focused on the Chickasaw alliance network which certainly interested their audience more. Initially this French version appears nothing like its British counterpart, but if rotated to the right 135° their main components are strikingly similar. The Chickasaw Nation sits within a central circle and its trade network extends east from it. Chickasaws are bound to the Cherokees and Creeks by two separate paths and connect to the British through those nations. French-affiliated nations combine to form a backwards "J" partially surrounding the Chickasaws as before. The fundamental structure of the region's alliance network had not changed much since 1723. This is largely where the maps' similarities end.

[103] For more on the French-Chickasaw War of 1736 see Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 36-61; Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 50-53; Patricia Galloway, "Ougoula Tchetoka, Ackia, and Bienville's First Chickasaw War: Whose Strategy and Tactics?" *Journal of Chickasaw History* 2 (1): 3-10; Joseph L. Peyser, "The Chickasaw Wars of 1736 and 1740: French Military Drawings and Plans Document the Struggle for the Lower Mississippi." *Journal of Mississippi History*, 44, No. 1 (1982), 1-25.
[104] The events surrounding his visit will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

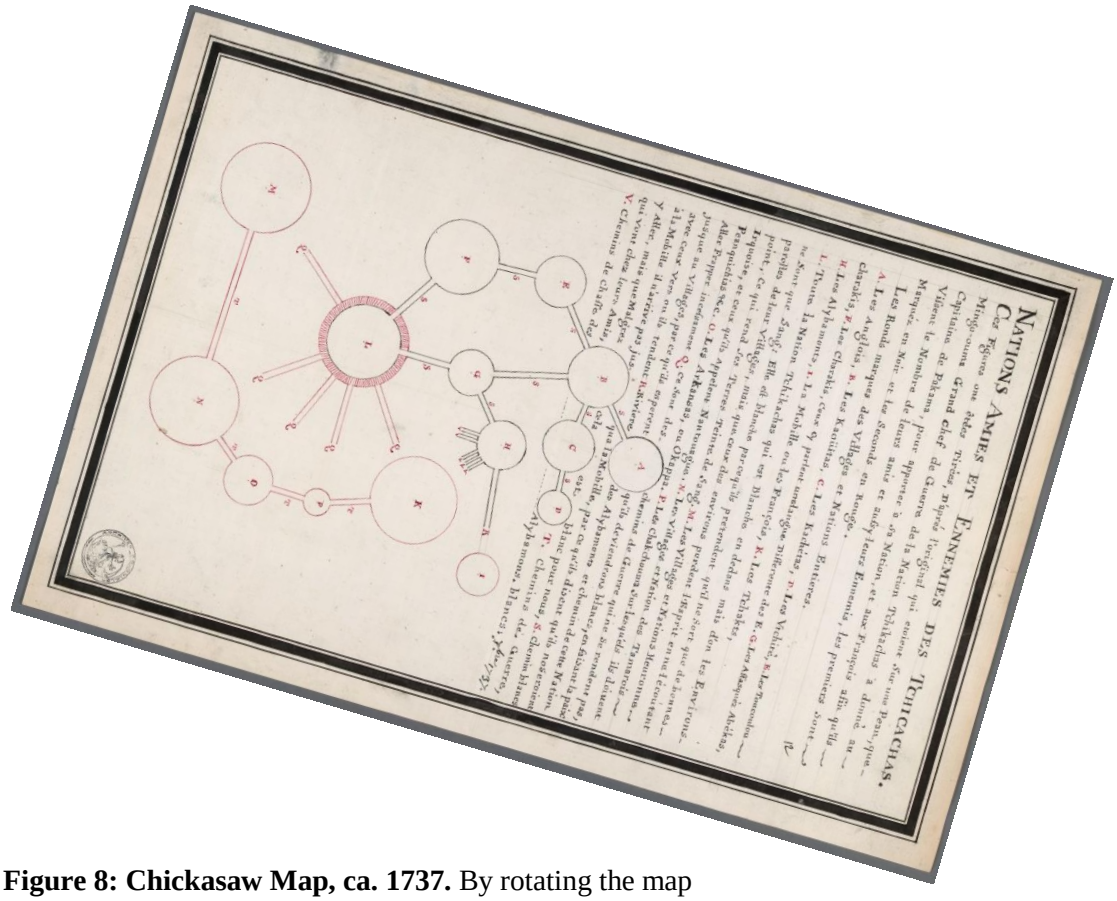

Figure 8: Chickasaw Map, ca. 1737. By rotating the map approximately 135° the geopolitical layout matches the physical landscape. Alexandre de Batz [cf. SEM 236B] 1737d: Nations amies et Ennemies des Tchicachas. Septembre 1737. [Archives nationales d'outre-mer, F3 290 12]

Whereas the Chickasaws' own alliance network commanded the eye in 1723, several Indian nations backing France matched the Chickasaws' significance on the 1737 map. Every polity to the east has been diminished in stature while the Arkansas, Tamarois, and a joint circle representing the Huron and Iroquois have all been greatly expanded.[105] Proportionally the Choctaws continue to equal the Chickasaws, though the

[105] The Creek Nation is subdivided between Coweta, Kasihta, and Okfuskee which partially explains their smaller dimensions. The Tamaroas do not appear on the 1723 map, but the Kaskaskia do and these peoples lived together at the mouth of the Kaskaskia River in Illinois during this time. The Huron and Iroquois received separate treatments in 1723, but their shared circle on the 1737 map is more than twice

Cherokees are the only nation in the other alliance of comparable size. Given the map's viewership and the withering attacks sprung by these peoples, it is little wonder France's allies appear so large. The addition of Mobile marks the first appearance of a French outpost, although others in Louisiana and Illinois are still ignored. Nonetheless, the French alliance network no longer looks scattershot across the page. French-backed nations are neatly bound by paths replicating the Mississippi River System. The Ohio River connects the Huron and Iroquois to the Tamaroi in Illinois, and from there the Mississippi links them to the Arkansas, Chakchiuma, and Choctaw in succession.[106] Without the topographical realism of the 1723 edition, the mapmakers depict this scheme as seamless as the Chickasaws' own pathways to the British.

New trails also fill the void that had existed between the Chickasaws and polities opposite the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. Five paths arise from the Chickasaw Nation extending towards each French ally. Routes to the Choctaws and Chakchiuma exist on the older map, as do warpaths originating from the Huron and Illinois nations. The mapmakers flipped the script in 1737, however, portraying these and another path toward the Arkansas as Chickasaw corridors. Unlike the warpaths (T) and trade paths (S) found elsewhere on this map, they do not connect to their destinations. These passageways (Q) "are warpaths that do not go as far as the villages, because they hope that they will become white when they [the Chickasaws] make peace with those toward whom they lead."[107] France's willingness to negotiate an accord after the Captain of

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the size of these. See Jon D. May, "Tamaroa," Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, www.okhistory.org (accessed August 13, 2015).

[106] The Chakchiuma may have been among the unidentified nations on the "Chockchumau Path" in 1723, but are included within the French alliance in 1737. See Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 173.

[107] Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," 483.

Pacana's visit would ultimately determine the outcome. Peace with the Chickasaws would transform these paths into trade avenues while rejecting their overtures meant war.

Either way, Chickasaws intended to utilize the Mississippi River System. Travelling on four of the five paths towards French-backed nations required traversing a Mississippi tributary or crossing the muddy Mississippi itself. For example, reaching the Iroquois Confederacy meant traveling up the Ohio River which Chickasaws called *Sinitowa' Okhina'*. As noted, this designation stemmed from the Seneca's location and the waterway's suitability for pirogue traffic. Turning off the Ohio to the northeast, Chickasaw canoeists could take *Wiyatino' Okhina'*, or the Wabash River, to the Huron. Accessing the Tamaroi or Kaskaskia by land required passing over the Ohio. Otherwise Chickasaw warriors could paddle up the Mississippi to their villages around the mouth of the Kaskaskia River. To be sure, rowing up these rivers was a daunting chore, but not an impossibility. Being downstream on the Mississippi made the Arkansas far more accessible. Chickasaws might launch their canoes from the north or simply ferry across from the east. Both options meant traversing the mighty river. The Chakchiumas were also reachable by water, although the overland "Chockchumau Path" shown on the 1723 map seems the most likely route. However, the upper reaches of the Yazoo River supported pirogues and could be ridden south. All of these rivers might function as white peace paths or red warpaths.

Both maps demonstrate the Chickasaws' command of the physical and political landscape along the river system. Central waterways, excepting the Missouri River, sprawl across the 1723 rendition representing the Chickasaws' vast geographic

knowledge. In the French copy, topographical realism gives way to sociopolitical considerations, yet the riverine landscape continues to play a large role in the path network. Chickasaws recognized where these rivers led and which friends or enemies they could expect to find along the way. The cartographers sought to define the riverine landscape and in the process made Chickasaw claims about the Mississippi River. In the 1723 version nothing and no one separate the Chickasaws from the mighty Mississippi. Conversely, paths pave the way for them in the French version. Whereas a lack of trails ensured their loyalty and spelled potential for the British, the presence of paths offered an opportunity and warning for the French. When Chickasaws puts their pirogues on rivers they became trade highways, but in times of conflict they ushered in violence instead. These were not idle choices for the Chickasaws nor were they inconsequential for their neighbors and the colonial objectives of France and Britain.

The Chickasaws' station near the middle of their maps put them in a commanding position. Yet Southeastern mapping conventions conditioned Native cartographers to place their people in the center. Chickasaw ability to chart the Mississippi River System, while undeniably impressive, did not make them unique either. Governor James Glen of South Carolina, for instance, marveled over the Cherokees' ability to "trace the Rivers on the Floor with Chalk, and also on Paper."[108] It was not the Chickasaws' spot on the diagram or the rivers across it, but their proximity to these waterways which elevated their standing. Yet, by itself, this meant little. After

[108] DRIA I, 536.

all, it is the interaction between the environment, technology, and people that has shaped history along the Mississippi River for thousands of years.[109]

By observing seasonal patterns, Chickasaws learned to make use of its variable water levels and forecast floods. This maximized the available resources while reducing the risk to human life. Two distinct topographical features, the Chickasaw Bluffs and the Delta, determined the Mississippi's path along Chickasaw Country. The river, in turn, remade these landforms, producing sheer cliffs and an expansive floodplain offering distinct environments. Within these ecological zones, cypress and pine trees grew to massive proportions, providing the raw material necessary for pirogue construction.

Since before Mississippian culture arose, Native Americans had been crafting dugout canoes to pilot the Mississippi. The Chickasaws followed in this tradition, shaping large straight tree trunks with fire before sculpting them with steel tools. Once on the water, men and women worked their paddles to position themselves within the current. River mechanics and machine carried Chickasaws far afield. However, nature also took a toll. If left to dry, pirogues began to crack, but here again the environment offered up an answer. Submersion protected dugout canoes and camouflaged them from one's enemies along the river. Navigating the Mississippi required reading twists and turns, commanding a pirogue, and grasping the nuances of regional politics.

These factors, combined with the Chickasaws' location near the Mississippi, made their maps noteworthy. As a group, Chickasaws had extensive knowledge of the

[109] Pabis, *Daily Life along the Mississippi*, 1-7.

river's channel, its tributaries, and those environments. Furthermore, they understood how to use them in the pursuit of trade and warfare. This forced their neighbors to consider the Chickasaws' geopolitical position. Situated along the Mississippi and its major tributaries, Chickasaws had the capacity to facilitate long-distance commerce. Much to the chagrin of their enemies, they could also curtail river traffic. As evidenced by their maps, the Mississippi River System brought them into contact with a wide variety of people. These peoples, Native and non-Native, had to consider their relationships with the Chickasaws before traversing these rivers. Throughout the eighteenth century, Chickasaw headmen attempted to use this to their advantage, on maps and in practice, to secure their nation's place in the Mississippi Valley.

CHAPTER THREE

"We Shall Paddle our Canoes on the Mississippi"

1735-1745

Since 1699 French officials had recognized the Chickasaws' importance in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The first governor of Louisiana, Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville, immediately began politicking to win them over. Given their British trade ties and continuous slave raids on the French-affiliated Choctaws, allying with them seemed to be a potential economic and logistical boon. Mollifying the Chickasaws might blunt British entry into the region and safeguard the small French populace. D'Iberville and each successive governor, including his brother Jean Baptist le Moyne Bienville, adopted this position to varying degrees. However, an accord proved elusive as time after time regional tensions flared or trade goods failed to materialize.

By the mid-1730s the Chickasaws' relationship with France had sunk to an all-time low after fallout from the Natchez Revolt. On November 28, 1729, Natchez warriors rose up in a surprise attack, devastating French settlers at Fort Rosalie, near present-day Natchez, Mississippi. This event, which Chickasaw tribal historian Richard Green calls a "turning point in Chickasaw history," marked a definitive shift in Chickasaw-Franco relations.[1] The Chickasaw Nation drew the ire of French officials who accused it of planning the attack. Believing they had "led the conspiracy," Louisiana governor Étienne Périer articulated a new policy.[2] Determined to "complete the destruction of the Natchez", Périer proposed the same fate for the Chickasaws

[1] Green, *Chickasaw Lives* III, 239.
[2] MPA:FD IV, 37.

would be "no less necessary at the proper time."[3] At the very "least", he argued, France ought to "drive" the Natchez nation from the region "where it is established too near the [Mississippi] river."[4] For their part, the Chickasaws were "too closely bound to the English" and "situated in the midst" of French allied Indian nations, making it necessary to "destroy them without fail."[5] His assessment is revealing in its vindictiveness and rationale. In the aftermath of the Natchez Revolt, Périer coupled allegations of Chickasaw collusion with geopolitics along the Mississippi River to justify their eradication.

In order to safeguard the Mississippi Valley French officials believed they had to control the river running through it. The Mississippi served as the lifeline between their fledgling settlements in the Illinois country and Lower Louisiana. Known as "Upper Louisiana" after its annexation in 1717, Illinois became the breadbasket for all of French Louisiana. There, settlers grew grains that fed the small urban population and many of the burgeoning plantations downriver. In return, colonial officials and merchants sent manufactured goods and weaponry upstream to resupply the isolated outposts.[6] Should the waterway ever be "cut off," this vital exchange and most communication between Lower and Upper Louisiana would cease.[7] In Périer's estimation the Illinois post proved "most necessary for this colony as much to furnish it

[3] MPA:FD IV, 41.
[4] MPA:FD IV, 37.
[5] MPA:FD IV, 41.
[6] Carl J. Ekberg, "The Flour Trade in French Colonial Louisiana," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Summer, 1996), 261-282; d'Artaguette, "Journal of Diron d'Artaguette," 70-71. For more on agriculture in the region see Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Margaret Kimball Brown, *History as They Lived It: A Social History of Prairie du Rocher, Illinois* (Tucson: The Patrice Press, 2005), 6, 78-87.
[7] MPA:FD I, 120; Jacob Piatt Dunn, "The Mission to the Ouabache," *Indiana Historical Society Publications* vol. 3, no. 4 (1902), 257.

with the things it needs as for the security of the [Mississippi] river, which must be the bulwark of this province."[8] A large portion of the wares annually transported upriver went to France's Indian allies as gifts in order to provide this security. As part and parcel of Indian diplomacy, presents sustained friendly relations, making gifts indispensable. Settlers in Upper and Lower Louisiana came to depend on Mississippi River shipments for their sustenance, commerce, and safety.

The Mississippi was no less important to Chickasaws, and they began making attacks on the French supply line. Chickasaw warriors targeted individual French boats and entire convoys plying the river. Some riverine attacks occurred as outbursts of spontaneous violence, while others served specific geopolitical purposes. Deliberately inhibiting water travel forced French colonists to recognize the Mississippi River as part of Chickasaw Country, even if the imperial project required officially denying it. Furthermore, French travelers captured on the river could be ritually redeemed and employed as mediators conveying Chickasaw intentions. Testimony from these captives taught colonial officials to recognize indigenous geographic boundaries and better understand Native modes of diplomacy.

[8] MPA:FD IV, 36.

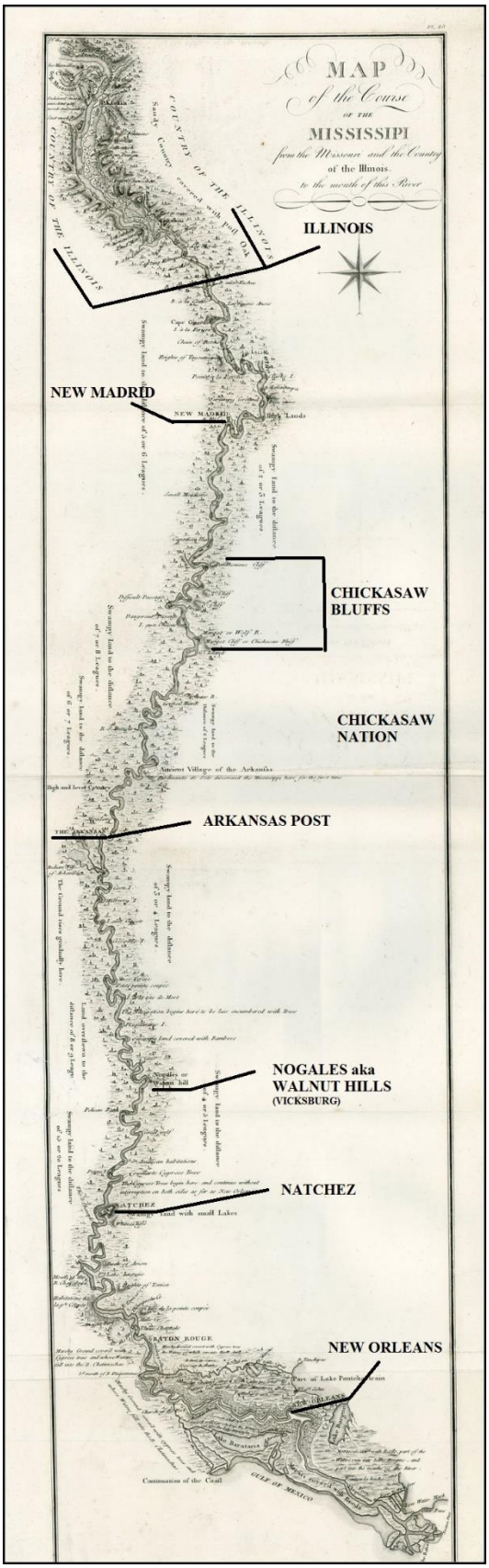

Figure 9: Course of the Mississippi River Map, ca. 1796. Georges-Henri-Victor Collot, Map of the Course of the Mississippi from the Missouri and the Country of the Illinois to the mouth of this River. Paris 1826.

Chickasaws actively sought river hostages in order to transform enemies into allies. The Chickasaw Nation shared its claim to the Mississippi River with foreign nations, but reciprocal relations had to be established. Chickasaws attempted to jumpstart this process with France by detaining Frenchmen along the Mississippi. With captives in hand, Chickasaw diplomats then set about ending hostilities and coordinating trade. Repatriating river captives not only opened lines of communication, it built goodwill and understanding. As Louisiana bureaucrats gradually recognized, peace and mutual exchange with the Chickasaw Nation could safeguard French passage along the Mississippi.

Coordinated river raids and the return of captives also functioned to unite factions within the Chickasaw Nation. Red and white moieties traditionally served complimentary roles in Chickasaw society, as they did for other Southeastern Native American peoples. By the 1730s, this division also shaded internal disagreements over trade relations and foreign policy dividing, tribal leaders and the general population alike. A core group of white moiety chiefs consistently pursued a cooperative agreement with French Louisiana, while their counterparts in the red moiety maintained a close-knit alliance with British Carolina. The white moiety sought to leverage the river and its peoples to reconcile with France. Meanwhile, red chiefs led war parties obstructing travel and taking captives. These actions could be a source of internal animosity but also proved diplomatically useful.

For the Chickasaw Nation colonial competition between France and Britain, the fate of the Natchez refugees, and security along the Mississippi River became interrelated points of contention. Yet, evidence suggests headmen from the red and

white moieties proved willing to collaborate when trying to broker a peaceful, and economically beneficial, relationship with France. Seeking to avoid alienating Louisiana officials outright, members of the red moiety at times cooperated in taking and repatriating French river captives. Members of both moieties joined together to project military and diplomatic power onto the river and claim its waters along Chickasaw Country.

Chickasaw actions on the Mississippi River varied considerably as France attempted to colonize Upper and Lower Louisiana. A paucity of correspondence from commanders based along the waterway at the Illinois and Arkansas posts complicates our understanding of this history. The vast majority of information comes from French governors and other high-ranking officials who wrote reports based on others' accounts or their own limited experiences. More often than not their concerns fixated on diplomatic or military affairs.[10] Therefore, these issues have come to dominate historians' interpretations of the era. It is impossible and ultimately unwise to eschew such topics, but critically evaluating Chickasaw activities on the Mississippi reveals much about their internal politics and how the river affected the Chickasaw Nation's international relations.

Two events, one in 1735 and the other in 1743, warranted the concern of French colonial administrators who unintentionally exposed Chickasaw objectives on the Mississippi River. In the first instance a large band of Chickasaws captured three French soldiers and a pirogue brimming with gunpowder as they ascended the

[10] Patricia Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory: Mining Archives, Hearing Testimony, Constructing Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 33-36.

waterway. Eight years later the Chickasaws apprehended merchant Guillaume [William] Bienvenu's convoy, his wife, and several hired hands on the river. Like driftwood swept up in the current, these events indicate the direction and intensity of Chickasaw activities along the Mississippi. Though these affairs do not fit neatly into a master narrative, it is possible to understand the complexity of Chickasaw actions—the rationale, boundaries, patterns, and sociopolitical implications—by examining these two specific events.

The Mississippi River physically linked French settlements, but in so doing it passed by Chickasaw Country. Using this natural feature to their advantage the Chickasaws used the river as a cultural mediator, imagining a landscape capable of accommodating cohabitation, trade, and French shipping. The Chickasaws were not Anglophiles, nor were they crippled by factionalism. Knowing the Mississippi's significance in the Chickasaws' world helps us see the untapped potential of Chickasaw-Franco relations and the unity the Chickasaw Nation maintained. The French envisioned the Mississippi as a liquid linchpin between Canada and Louisiana in a North American empire, but Chickasaws coped with the far-reaching effects of colonialism by aggressively using the river to enhance their regional significance and instruct the uninitiated in the ways of their Native world.

"Only to Pillage the Munitions," 1735-1737

In April of 1735, French boatmen moved a shipment of merchandise upriver on an important delivery. In preparation for an upcoming campaign against the Chickasaws, Governor Bienville had ordered supplies to be transported north to the Illinois post. Pirogues regularly departed from New Orleans traveling upstream to Illinois most generally arriving in a few months' time.[11] Making its way against spring flood waters, this small "convoy" consisted of four boats carrying "goods for the support of the post."[12] Three of them had been "filled with merchandise," but the other "was filled with powder for the garrison."[13] A portion of the gunpowder had already been earmarked for northerly Indians "in order to carry on the war with the Chickfaws."[14] Sieur de Coulange and La Loere Flaucourt "were together in charge of the supervision of the boats" as they had been appointed by King Louis XIV "to perform the duties of commissary at the Illinois."[15] Despite rumors of a potential Indian attack, the party completed the first leg of their journey, arriving at the Arkansas post, near the mouth of the Arkansas River, without incident. Making it to the fort "without having found so much as a cat to whip along the way (as the saying goes)" no doubt relieved the weary travelers as they found sanctuary away from the Mississippi's open

[11] Norman W. Caldwell, "The Chickasaw Threat to French Control of the Mississippi in the 1740's." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 16, No. 4 (Dec., 1938): 465-466; Brown, *History as They Lived It*, 18.
[12] MPA:FD I, 266.
[13] Dumont, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 254.
[14] Bossu, *Travels through that part of North America*, 286.
[15]Lieutenant Dumont recorded that Sr. de Blanc, a captain, headed the expedition. Bienville's letter to Maurepas about the affair does not list a military rank for Flaucourt, but does identify Coulange as a lieutenant. As a captain Blanc would have outranked Coulange, but given Bienville arranged the convoy it seems safe to accept his version. At the time Dumont lived below New Orleans on a farm with his wife, children, and a couple slaves, so he learned of this convoy secondhand. See MPA:FD I, 266; Carl A. Brasseaux. *France's Forgotten Legion*: A CD-ROM Publication: *Service Records of French Military and Administrative Personnel Stationed in the Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast Region, 1699-1769* (Baton Rouge, 2000); Jean François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747*, trans. Gordon M. Sayre, eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture and University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 254, fn 256.

waters.[16] Upon arriving, Coulange and La Loere Flaucourt made a fateful error. Rather than proceed with their whole cargo they chose to store the powder at the fort and continue without it.

The episode that resulted from this decision illustrates the multifaceted ways the Chickasaws used the Mississippi River to advance their objectives in the continental interior. When a French envoy attempted to retrieve the gunpowder and complete the delivery a large party of predominately Chickasaw warriors denied their passage upriver. In the process the warriors captured several Frenchmen and the entire payload. This action, in addition to other river raids, buttressed Chickasaw authority on regional waterways. Doing so was often a matter of national security and intercepting the explosive cargo reduced the military capacity of their rivals. Meanwhile captured gunpowder augmented Chickasaw stockpiles reserved for self-defense. In addition, the Chickasaw Nation attempted to utilize the river hostages to turn French enemies into allies. Eventually diplomatic negotiations produced a promise of friendship and peace in exchange for the "assured navigation on the [Mississippi] River for the French."[17]

It is unclear why exactly Coulange and La Loere Flaucourt proceeded upriver minus the gunpowder. In his record of the incident, Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, a French soldier and Louisiana farmer, claimed the decision resulted from fears of a possible Indian attack.[18] Given the proclivity of Chickasaw and Natchez warriors along the waterway, many French travelers shared this concern, but Governor Bienville's investigation revealed an ulterior motive. According to his inquiry, the

[16] Dumont, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 254.
[17] MPA:FD IV, 147.
[18] Dumont, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 254.

caravan's leaders entered into a partnership with Sieur de Grandpré, commander of the Arkansas post, forming a "trading company" each with a "one-third interest." As such, the men determined to offload the powder "in order to load with their goods the boat" that hauled the gunpowder.[19] French officials often sought to supplement their meager imperial paychecks, so this explanation is also plausible.[20] Motivated by fear or finances, or perhaps by both, the powder remained at the Arkansas post when the convoy shoved off on the final leg of their journey.

Ascending the river with four boats crammed with merchandise did not attract much attention from the region's Native inhabitants. In fact, the trip ended "without making any encounters or seeing any signs of Indians during the entire three-hundred-league journey."[21] Upon learning of the missing freight, however, Pierre d'Artaguette, the commandant of the outpost, became notably alarmed.[22] Already short on powder, the absence of the anticipated supplies further jeopardized his command. In response, d'Artaguette hastily organized a small contingent to retrieve the volatile cargo. He tabbed Pierre-Laurent Ducoder, an experienced soldier, to lead the critical mission with the sole objective of recovering the gunpowder.[23] Having served in Louisiana since 1729, Ducoder knew the importance of the cargo, particularly since d'Artaguette "sent off the same day a boat to fetch it up."[24] The station sorely "lacked ammunition" and counted on Ducoder and ten other soldiers to execute their vital assignment.[25] Propelled

[19] MPA:FD I, 267.
[20] Pabis, *Daily Life Along the Mississippi*, 52-53; Faye, "The Arkansas Post," 683.
[21] Dumont, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 254.
[22] D'Artaguette can also be spelled d'Artaguiette, but for consistency I will use the former.
[23] Brasseaux, *France's Forgotten Legion*, CD-ROM.
[24] Brasseaux, *France's Forgotten Legion*, CD-ROM; Du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, 97.
[25] MPA:FD I, 266.

by the same currents that had just slowed Coulange and Falucourt, Ducoder and his men descended the Mississippi quickly, loaded the black payload, and prepared for the return trip.

For over a decade, Chickasaw river raids had made travel hazardous for French boatmen. Some Natchez warriors joined with their Chickasaw neighbors following the Natchez Uprising and these aquatic assaults intensified. In April of 1731 several Natchez struck a "convoy of four pirogues" on the Mississippi near "a place called the Arkansas," killing two Frenchmen and wounding two others.[27] Another "convoy that was ascending to the Illinois" suffered an attack "with arrows" from a displaced party of Natchez in 1732. To the north, a party of Chickasaws attacked "six Frenchmen on the Ouabache" in the fall of 1732. Upon returning from a raid on the Illinois that December, some Chickasaws "found a pirogue on the [Wabash] river," killing a few Frenchmen and capturing three others.[28] By the spring of 1733 Jesuit missionaries stationed in Upper Louisiana feared the Chickasaw would make the Mississippi and Ohio rivers impassable. Should "they begin to frequent this region" one warned, "it will be difficult to travel."[29] Another complained that without "a large convoy" to induce the local Kaskaskia population against the Chickasaws "The roads will always be difficult and dangerous."[30] Violent acts intensified French paranoia on the Mississippi since it served as the only "road" connecting the Illinois Country to French strongholds further south.

[27] MPA:FD IV, 76.
[28] MPA:FD IV, 190, 198. The French considered the Ohio River a tributary of the Wabash River. Therefore they understood the "Ouabache" to extend the length of the Wabash into the Ohio River all the way to the Mississippi.
[29] Dunn, *The Mission to the Ouabache*, 306-307.
[30] Peyser, *Letters from New France*, 149.

Conscious of their vulnerability, Ducoder and his crew alertly proceeded back upriver for Fort Charter. Directing his crew upstream Ducoder intentionally "kept to the other side of the river," hugging the west bank as they rowed against the spring flood waters. This had become a common tactic for French boat parties desperately seeking to distance themselves from Chickasaw lands on the opposite shoreline. British trader James Adair reported, "the warlike Chikkasah were so dreadful to the French, that even their fleet of large trading boats avoided the eastern side of the Missisippi [sic], or near this shore under a high point of land, for the space of two hundred leagues."[31] For his part, Ducoder believed that had he "continued to observe this precaution," which he deemed "quite natural," his party might have avoided what came next. At a point "half-way between the Arkansas and the Illinois," Ducoder inexplicably ordered the boat ashore on the east side of the waterway "to rest and refresh his crew" while he scouted to "discover any tracks." Having ventured some distance from the impromptu camp Ducoder heard "more than two hundred gunshots" rip through the air. Fearing the worst, he "ran at once toward his boat" only to discover most of his crew had been killed by a party of two hundred and forty Chickasaw and Natchez men now occupying the site.[32]

Mingo Ouma may have been just as surprised by the turn of events as Ducoder. According to the Chickasaw war chief, he "had no plan to kill anyone" when he led a large contingent of warriors towards the camp.[33] His party had actually been seeking

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[31] The "high point of land" which Adair specified is the Chickasaw Bluffs. See Adair, *Adair's History of the American Indians*, 461.
[32] MPA:FD I, 266. Bossu claimed "a north wind" forced Ducoder ashore "in order to wait for better winds." This seems like a reasonable explanation yet Ducoder's testimony does not reveal as much nor do any other sources. See Bossu, *Travels through that part of North America*, 286-287.
[33] MPA:FD IV, 148.

some Illinois Indians when they came across the Frenchmen. Nevertheless, by the time Ducoder stumbled upon the scene, eight of his party lay dead, a sergeant and another soldier had been imprisoned, and he quickly found himself among them. For the warriors backing Mingo Ouma this must have been a tremendous coup. In one fell swoop, they seized three French captives and nearly a ton of cargo. Taking stock of the situation, Ducoder reported 1,700 pounds of gunpowder, once intended for Chickasaw enemies, became "divided among themselves." The Chickasaws wholly "abandoned" their original mission and marched their captives into the heart of Chickasaw Country.[34]

Despite this skirmish on the riverbank, a faction of Chickasaw headmen had actually been working towards a truce with France. A chief, known to the French as Ymahatabe,[35] travelled to Fort Toulouse in 1733 to make "proposals of peace." With the aid of "one of three voyageurs who were captured…on the Wabash River by a Chickasaw party" the year before, he and two other headmen delivered a letter disclosing their request. Upon reviewing the document Governor Bienville concluded "these three chiefs ardently desire peace" and asked "that we cease having them harassed by the Choctaws and the Weas." In return, the headmen indicated they "would not be opposed" to surrendering the Natchez. Through an emissary Bienville agreed to meet with the headmen, hoping they might send him "the heads of the Natchez" to expedite the peace process. In the meantime, he secretly endeavored to "continue to have [the Chickasaws] harassed more vigorously until they are weakened…or at least obliged to abandon the lands that they are occupying." If the Chickasaws fled east, he

[34] MPA:FD I, 266.
[35] Ymahatabe or Imayatabé was also referred to as Courcerac and Ymahatabe La Borgne meaning the "Blind King" because he was missing one eye.

reasoned, "they would be far enough from the Mississippi and the Wabash for our voyageurs to have nothing more to fear from them."[36]

Although the governor hoped to exile the Chickasaws from regional waterways, Ymahatabe and other peace-seeking headmen employed the rivers to signal their diplomatic intentions. Just the year before a couple of French voyageurs "captured by a party of that nation" had been "ransomed."[37] That summer a "young Canadian" also gained his release "on the river Ouabache."[38] In keeping with Native protocol, these captives received their freedom as a sign of good faith. Native peoples throughout the Mississippi Valley released enemy prisoners when they intended to end reciprocal violence.[39] Headman Ymahatabe and several other chiefs then travelled to visit Bienville in Mobile hoping to reach an accord. "Deputized for this negotiation," Ymahatabe's envoy entered into talks "in good faith", according to Bienville.[40] In all likelihood, Ymahatabe and the others sincerely intended to resolve the ongoing conflict with France. However, one major impasse blocked a reconciliation: the fate of the Natchez.

French officials consistently demanded the Chickasaws forfeit the Natchez in exchange for peace, but this precondition divided the Chickasaw Nation. The refugees had not entered a unified Chickasaw society. Scholars have shown moiety designations split Chickasaw villages geographically as "the Large Prairie towns were war towns, with leadership drawn from the red moiety, and the Small Prairie towns were peace

[36] MPA:FD I, 210-211.
[37] MPA:FD III, 635.
[38] Dunn, *Mission to the Ouabache*, 329.
[39] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 61-63.
[40] MPA:FD I, 275.

towns, with leadership drawn from the white moiety."[41] Hence the Large Prairie villages located north of the Natchez Trace literally and figuratively sat apart from the Small Prairie villages situated south of the thoroughfare. Although these organizational principals dated back to the Mississippian period, the social and political responsibilities of each moiety had changed dramatically by 1735.

The development of a commercialized Indian slave trade had fundamentally altered the relationship between the red and white moieties in Chickasaw society. Historian Robbie Ethridge argues, as an act of war, slave raids elevated the standing of the red moiety in the early eighteenth century. Access to European goods and weaponry hinged on the exchange of Native slaves; therefore as warfare and commerce merged, red towns gained greater commercial influence. This in turn elevated the standing of war chiefs, both internally and externally, as trade literally became a matter of life or death. Conversely, the white moiety leadership lost influence as their major formal bond to foreign polities occurred by way of the *fanimingo*. Through the ritual adoption of foreign men, known as *fanimingos*, peace chiefs forged alliances with outside groups. A *fanimingo* acted as an ambassador between the Chickasaws and his people, but this institution did not generate tangible wealth like commercial slaving or the deerskin trade. As a result, the white moiety sought French commercial opportunities outside of the British trade network dominated by war chiefs.[42]

White Small Prairie towns entertained prospects of closer relations with France, but this necessitated the execution of the Natchez survivors. Since their flight to

[41] Johnson and others, "Measuring Chickasaw Adaptation," 4.
[42] Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 227-230; St. Jean, "Trading Paths," 268-269.

Chickasaw territory, the refugees had lived in a liminal position as guests in a foreign land. Large Prairie towns, generally allied with the British, welcomed and protected the Natchez. The red moiety tried to further expand its influence, challenging the institution of the *fanimingo* by allowing the exiles to settle near their villages over the objections of white moiety leaders.[43] Therefore, by 1735, red/white designations divided the Chickasaw Nation into moieties, shaped Chickasaw opinions about the future of the Natchez, denoted Chickasaw village locations, and approximated Chickasaw associations with European countries.

Within this context, Ymahatabe's meeting with Bienville takes on added significance. Hailing from the town of Ackia, Ymahatabe was the Chickasaws' principal white chief, a position he inherited through his mother's clan. As the highest ranking "great chief," he had a social responsibility to coordinate peace if he could. Lacking the far-reaching trade ties of red chiefs, he must have considered economic factors as well. These issues shaded Ymahatabe's response to Bienville's demands. Bienville continued to insist on the destruction of the Natchez which Ymahatabe remained amenable to. Confident of the Chickasaws' acquiescence, Bienville declared he "had no ground to doubt that to obtain peace they would sacrifice the Natchez as they had promised."[44] For Ymahatabe and his envoy, assuring Bienville of their intentions was one thing, but convincing a majority of the red moiety to consent to this

[43] Johnson and others, "Measuring Chickasaw Adaptation," 7-8.
[44] MPA:FD I, 267.

act was another. However, as they reached home, the dynamics of their objective shifted as word of Mingo Ouma's victory spread throughout Chickasaw Country.[45]

The explosive news must have shocked members of the red and white moieties alike. Mingo Ouma had already achieved a highly respected status due to his previous military exploits. In the process, he earned the title *mingo ouma*, literally meaning "red chief," for his accomplishments and capacity to acquire British weaponry.[46] Mingo Ouma used this standing to help settle Natchez refugees near his village of Ougoula Tchetoka. He also held deep reservations about the French, due in part to his British trade ties.[47] Yet his party did not intend to target Frenchmen when they ventured from their homes. Upon Ducoder's capture the Chickasaws "urged" him to write Bienville "at different places" explaining what transpired. Ducoder reported the Chickasaws went "on the march to go and carry away the women that the Illinois had taken from them a short time before" or at least "get vengeance for this act." Only upon discovering Ducoder's pirogue on the Mississippi did they secretly began "following him for several days to take him by surprise."[48] The Chickasaws may have considered this a judicious military ploy because the French supplied ammunition to their Indian enemies in the Illinois country. Even so, Mingo Ouma explained his party had "no plan to kill anyone, only to pillage the munitions." "We warned the French not to fire," he recounted, "but

[45] John Dyson has recently argued that historians have incorrectly identified Ymahatabe as a peace chief and Mingo Ouma as a war chief. Based on the literal translation of their names and titles he claims their positions were actually reversed. Furthermore he posits too much has been made about white/red symbolism among Southeastern Native Americans. While intriguing and worthy of further investigation, his assessment is currently unconvincing in light of countervailing evidence. See Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 70-79.
[46] St. Jean, "Trading Paths," 55
[47] Galloway, "Ougoula Tchetoka, Ackia, and Bienville's First Chickasaw War," 6.
[48] MPA:FD I, 266.

not wanting to listen to us they fired their volley. It was then that we defended ourselves."[49] In that instant when shots rang out along the river, any plans to peacefully apprehend the detachment vanished and the struggle immediately became one of self-preservation.

Surprisingly, Bienville accepted the Chickasaws' explanation of events. Writing to his superior Jean-Fréderic Phélypeaux, count de Maurepas, Bienville related that "when the boat was at the land the Indians running to it cried to them not to shoot, that they did not wish to hurt them; and in fact they did not fire until after they had sustained the discharge of the French which killed one of them and wounded several."[50] Thus, he placed the impetuous for the riverbank confrontation on the French soldiers. Rather than denounce the Chickasaws, whom he considered "enemies," Bienville defended their actions.[51] He learned of the loss of the gunpowder and the death of the French soldiers from Ducoder, who only heard of the Chickasaws' order not to shoot secondhand.[52] Nonetheless, this account aligns with Mingo Ouma's version of the confrontation. As a student of Indian affairs, Bienville's inclination to accept the Chickasaw description of events provides an additional window onto their mindset. Given the fruitfulness of his earlier meeting with the white Chickasaw chiefs, Bienville understood the "purpose" of the warriors trailing Ducoder's detachment "was not to fire upon it, but to capture it to serve as a hostage."[53] Native Americans traditionally used captives as diplomats to

[49] MPA:FD IV, 148.
[50] MPA:FD I, 267.
[51] MPA:FD I, 269.
[52] Ducoder might have heard the story from the two French survivors, a sergeant and a soldier, who were also being held hostage. However, if the Chickasaws called out the order in their own language, rather than French, the startled Frenchmen may not have understood the directive. It is possible Ducoder learned this command from his Chickasaw captors as they prodded him to write Bienville on their behalf.
[53] MPA:FD I, 267.

usher in more peaceful relations, as the Chickasaws attempted to do in 1733 and 1734.[54] Bienville astutely understood Mingo Ouma and his men wanted to incarcerate the French crew in order to enhance Chickasaw bargaining power and coordinate a peace. Their actions had not been driven solely by antagonism. The discovery of Ducoder's troupe offered an opportunity to force Bienville's hand at the negotiating table.

From this perspective, Mingo Ouma's plan to take the crew hostage and abscond with the gunpowder represents a middle course. Preserving the unity of his war party and nation required appeasing multiple interests. Endeavoring to impede the convoy placated warriors hostile to the French without alienating those more amenable towards them. This scheme also avoided upsetting one European power in favor of the other. International intrigues merged in the Mississippi like the waters from its many tributaries. These crosscutting currents could have divided the Chickasaws, but they did not. The Chickasaw warriors in Mingo Ouma's war party, and their nation as a whole, remained united as they sought to secure the Mississippi River.

Although violence erupted when the soldiers fired a volley, the sheer number of Chickasaw warriors on the scene demonstrates widespread support for Mingo Ouma's strategy. Given Ducoder's estimate that Mingo Ouma's party consisted of 240 Chickasaw and Natchez men, it is likely warriors from the white moiety joined with those from the red moiety to defend the Chickasaw Nation. Although members of the red moiety led in matters of war and those of the white directed peace overtures, men from each moiety participated in both endeavors. A man's social standing directly

[54] Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 111; Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 62.

correlated with his success in warfare and politics.[55] Therefore, men from the white moiety joined military excursions just as those of the red voiced their opinion on political issues. Upon visiting the Chickasaw Nation on a peace mission in July of 1737, the Captain of Pacana, a pro-French Alabama chief, estimated the Chickasaws had "about three hundred men including forty Natchez and ten Coroas."[56] Historian Peter Wood estimates the Chickasaw population to have been about 3,100 in 1730, with 27-35% of the populace being men capable of engaging in warfare. Accordingly, the Chickasaws fielded approximately 835 to 1,085 warriors at that time. Their population declined after 1730, so by the date of Ducoder's capture in 1735 these figures were on the decline. The Natchez living among the Chickasaw consisted of just a "few hundred" which means they might have had 50 to 80 warriors.[57] As a combined force they may have boasted between 885 and 1,165 warriors around 1731.

The number of Chickasaw warriors involved in apprehending Ducoder indicates that men from both the red and the white moieties participated. If Ducoder's assessment is accurate, then according to the figures produced by the Alabama chief 80% of all Chickasaw warriors partook in Mingo Ouma's expedition. By contrast, Wood's population figures suggest roughly 25% of Chickasaw and Natchez warriors assisted in the raid. While this could point toward a single moiety war party, other information indicates the two moieties collaborated in this case. Offensive war parties rarely surpassed fifty men and were usually comprised of warriors from certain clans. Even if

[55] Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 226.
[56] "Coroas" refers to the Koroa Indians, who lived near the Yazoo River. MPA:FD IV, 151.
[57] Wood, *Powhatan's Mantle*, 95 and 105.

Ducoder greatly overestimated the party's size, the contingent still exceeded the norm.[58] Mingo Ouma undoubtedly generated the greatest support from warriors of his own clan and others within the red moiety. Yet it is unlikely only men of red and Natchez villages joined him. With the number of warriors involved, the ceremonies surrounding their preparations could not have been secretive. Ritual fasting and public dances always preceded such forays to mentally and spiritually prepare men for battle. Inhabitants of white towns would have been privy to the goings on in Mingo Ouma's village. Given the high rate of warrior participation, its likely men from white clans joined in.

The timing of Ducoder's capture also suggests Mingo Ouma led a mixed red-white war party. As noted, the Chickasaws had just suffered an attack by a party of Illinois Indians who abducted some of their women, which is why Mingo Ouma mounted a counter assault.[59] War leaders could not force young men to follow them, relying instead on verbal persuasion and social pressure to build support for their cause. Warriors had the liberty to participate in war parties originating in other towns if they chose. Peace chiefs could not compel others to heed their advice either. Ymahatabe's adherents most certainly knew he objected to warring with France and Indian nations from the Illinois country, but he was visiting Bienville in Mobile when the war party originated.[60] With Ymahatabe's absence diminishing his influence, warriors had fewer restraints.

Leading a contingent of warriors from red and white clans might also explain Mingo Ouma's plan to seize Ducoder's detachment. Just as war chiefs could not order

[58] Gibson, "Chickasaw Ethnography," 116; Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country,* 86.
[59] MPA:FD I, 266.
[60] Galloway, "Ougoula Tchetoka, Ackia, and Bienville's First Chickasaw War," 6; MPA:FD I, 267.

warriors to accompany them on the war path, neither could they dictate strategy during a campaign. According to naturalist Bernard Romans, a war leader was "so far from having command that an attempt to do more than proposing whether such or such an undertaking would not be most advisable, or at most persuading them to it, would at least be followed by a total desertion."[61] Therefore, upon discovering Frenchmen rowing a massive cargo of gunpowder up the Mississippi, the war party had a decision to make. Warriors of the red moiety, generally antagonistic towards the French, would have opposed letting them pass, particularly since they hauled ammunition in the direction of the Chickasaws' northern enemies. The Natchez warriors accompanying the Chickasaws probably agreed with this assessment. Men inclined towards Ymahatabe's peace initiative, but seeking revenge on the Illinois, may have balked at the notion of attacking French soldiers. After all, Ymahatabe had been working towards a deal with Bienville for months and hoped his efforts would produce an accord during their conference.

While the white chiefs visited Bienville, Mingo Ouma had no intention of sinking the proposed armistice. He attempted to ensnare the Frenchmen, thus maintaining the applicability of Ymahatabe's diplomacy. Bienville believed that when Mingo Ouma's party "set out there was yet no news in the nation from the chiefs who had come to see me at Mobile." In his understanding, had news regarding the productiveness of their talks reached the Chickasaw homeland in time, the war party would have let Ducoder pass. Upon discovering the French detachment, and with no updates from Mobile, Mingo Ouma's contingent attempted to capture them "to serve as

[61] Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 65.

a hostage."[62] Sparing the lives of Ducoder and his two surviving companions also points to this stratagem.

The three soldiers not only escaped the riverbank alive; they received new life upon reaching the Chickasaw villages. Like other Southeastern Indian nations, the Chickasaws practiced ritual adoption as well as torture. Traditionally prisoners resided under the control of their captor until arriving at their warden's village where women decided the captive's fate.[63] The lives of those imprisoned hinged upon their reception. As matrilineal societies clan affiliation derived from the mother; adoption, like birth, depended on women. Females possessed the power to accept a captive as a means of replacing a deceased relative within their family unit. This also proved an effective means to offset the death toll associated with famine, warfare, or disease. Acceptance symbolically granted the captive new life as a clan member, since to be clan-less was akin to social death.[64] Moreover, adoption literally saved the detainee's life as women tortured less fortunate prisoners to avenge the spirits of lost relatives.[65] Luckily for Ducoder and his companions they avoided the agony of a slow death.

Upon reaching Chickasaw Country, the French hostages experienced a mild fate. One of the soldiers with Ducoder reported the Chickasaws forced them to "pass through all the villages with a white stick in their hands" before being "washed" in order "to signify that they were giving them their lives."[66] White being the color of peace, the

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[62] MPA:FD I, 267.
[63] Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 91-93.
[64]Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 50-51.
[65] Purdue, *Cherokee Women*, 54 and 69.
[66] MPA:FD I, 268. Frenchman Antoine Bonnefoy experienced a similar initiation after a party of Cherokee warriors overcame his convoy on the Ohio River in 1742. See Antoine Bonnefoy, "Journal of

baton served as a symbol of goodwill, while ritual bathing cleansed the men of their past life.[67] The soldier claimed "the Chickasaws did not doubt" the French "would give them peace" in exchange for the "prisoners."[68] This rebirth marked the beginning of a shared future as allies. Their lot differed significantly from what others experienced. Only a year later Pierre d'Artaguette and eighteen Frenchmen would be tortured and burned to death after their failed assault on the Chickasaw village of Ogoula Tchetoka.[69] Even captives tabbed to live usually experienced some form of mild abuse before being received into a clan or enslaved. Ducoder and his men were not meant for torture, however, but rather as pawns in the struggle for spatial and sociopolitical dominance along the Mississippi River. Although their exact status in Chickasaw society remains ambiguous, Ducoder and the two surviving crewmen came to no harm and lived in "complete liberty" among the Indians.[70]

Ransoming Mississippi River captives in exchange for reconciliation did not constitute a new strategy for the Chickasaws. Having already served three terms as governor, Bienville recognized their intentions. According to the journal of Diron d'Artaguette, the Inspector General of Louisiana, a pair of Canadian voyageurs were abducted "on the Mississipy" in 1722 by some Chickasaws who "carried them off to their village." The Langevins, a father and son tandem, along with their two French servants and an Indian slave had been ascending the river to Illinois when they were captured. D'Artaguette noted the French and Illini were currently "at war" with the

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Antoine Bonnefoy, 1741-1742," trans., J. Franklin Jameson, in *Travels in the American Colonies*, ed. Newton D. Mereness (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 246.
[67] Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 103.
[68] MPA:FD I, 268.
[69] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 43-50.
[70] MPA:FD I, 268.

Chickasaws, and yet the captives "had been very well treated by the Indians." One might imagine a darker fate for the river party under such conditions. Yet, upon reaching a Chickasaw village "these Frenchmen had written to M. Bienville that they were being well treated by the Indians, that the latter only asked for peace, and that they had told them that they would not give them up unless peace was made."[71] The Chickasaws seized the Langevins and others in an attempt to buoy Chickasaw-Franco relations and not drown them.

Given this experience Bienville understood the strategy behind captive taking and the diplomacy of repatriation. Thanks to Chickasaw overtures, Bienville came to recognize the motivations for Ducoder's detention. Ymahatabe became "irritated" with Mingo Ouma for committing an "act of hostility" while he sat "in negotiations of peace."[72] He would have much preferred to be more accommodating, and may have been irked with the extensive support Mingo Ouma had received. Rather than accept the accord would come to not, however, the Chickasaws actively tried to use the event to their advantage. "In order to give evidence of the sincerity of their intentions," Ymahatabe and the other pro-French chiefs "saved the lives of [the] three French prisoners," according to Ducoder. Having been ceremoniously granted their lives the Frenchmen became diplomatic agents. Chickasaw headmen quickly told Ducoder to inform Bienville of his internment. Fearing the messages "might not be delivered," they also "sent back the soldier whom they had captured" as an emissary and token of goodwill. Upon learning of the raid from Ducoder's own hand and hearing about their

[71] D'Artaguiette, "Journal of Diron d'Artaguiette," 16, 31, and 33.
[72] MPA:FD I, 288.

treatment from the soldier, Bienville recognized the Chickasaws' amicable intentions. Four months after the raid he concluded, "It seems the measures that the Chickasaws have taken that the advantages that they have obtained over us on this occasion have not made them lose at all the desire to obtain peace."[73]

Despite the changing nature of Chickasaw leadership, headmen of the white moiety still had a traditional responsibility to seek non-violent resolutions. In relations with the French this often required them to act on behalf of river captives. Ducoder credited Ymahatabe with saving their lives, and other peace chiefs acted similarly. In August of 1753, for example, another French victim in a string of Chickasaw raids on the Mississippi River found safety with a headman of the white moiety. A "young girl" about "ten years old" resided in a Chickasaw village "under the protection of the Great Chief," according to Louis Belcourt, Chevalier de Kerlérec. Louisiana's acting governor, Kerlérec reported she lived "with perhaps more decency than would be observed in our nation in a similar case."[74] The great chief and other white headmen had an obligation to safeguard French prisoners, if possible, to encourage improved relations, but they could not act alone.

Lacking the power to command obedience, all chiefs relied on persuasion to generate support for their objectives. If a leader acted contrary to the will of the people he jeopardized his standing and potentially his health. In matters of war and peace a

[73] MPA:FD I, 267-268.
[74] Peace and Jenison, *Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years War*, 823. For more on these raids see MPA:FD V, 131; DRIA I, 39-40, 352, and 384. Kerlérec's assessment in this case is accurate. While Euro-American men routinely used sexual violence during warfare, Native societies observed abstinence during battle and incest taboos prohibited sexual relations between warriors and female captives. See Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 89.

dissenting headmen risked being punished as the enemy if he acted independently.[75] Though Ducoder credited Ymahatabe for their lives, the chief probably did not achieve the feat on his own. Headmen could not act unilaterally, and Chickasaw women customarily determined hostages' destinies. In the case of Pierre d'Artaguette's party, the warriors apparently acted of their own volition, instructing the women to burn the captives.[76] According to Mingo Ouma, the warriors went "berserk and took all authority upon themselves" throwing the Frenchmen into the flames as the chiefs "had not had the authority to save their lives."[77] Unlike d'Artaguette's cohort, Ducoder and company publically paraded through Chickasaw Country before having their lives ceremoniously spared. This almost certainly would not have been possible if Ymahatabe were the only one who desired they survive.

Circumstances suggest the redemption of the river captives also required a collective effort. Matters of national significance necessitated patient deliberation and measured debate in order to reach a group consensus. Among the Southeastern nations, James Adair observed that while meeting in council men generally "reason[ed] in a very orderly manner, with much coolness and good-natured language, though they may differ widely in their opinions." Listeners sat in silence while speakers took turns standing to address the audience "till each of the head men hath given his opinion on the point in debate. Then they sit down together, and determine upon the affair." [78] The fate of captives could have far-reaching political ramifications necessitating this kind of

[75]Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 428.
[76] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 48.
[77] MPA:FD IV, 149.
[78] Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 428.

careful consideration. Executing prisoners might provoke more extensive warfare while returning them signaled a desire for détente. Detainees might also be traded or gifted to an existing ally maintaining that relationship at the expense of the aggrieved party. When an Alabama leader confronted Chickasaw war chief Paya Mattaha about releasing some French captives in 1749, Paya Mattaha explained he lacked the authority to do so. "You have no right to demand of me those ugly French prisoners," Paya Mattaha told him. "We took them in, at the risque of blood: and at home in our national council, we firmly agreed not to part with any of them, in a tame manner, until we got to Charles-town."[79] Paya Mattaha's rebuke invoked a collaborative assessment by an intra-village congress reaffirming their commitment to a British alliance. The fortune of Ducoder and his fellow detainees had ramifications for the entire Chickasaw Nation, so it is likely a similar decision-making process occurred prior to their homecoming.

Governor Bienville welcomed the return of the first soldier but declined to end hostilities as requested. Though Chickasaw diplomacy signaled their desire for peace, Bienville's rebuke arrived as a declaration of war. An Alabama man Bienville tasked with delivering his reply, murdered an unsuspecting Natchez outside a Chickasaw village and fastened the letter to an arrow planted in the victim's stomach.[80] The villagers might not have waited for the note's translation to decipher the meaning. The death of the Natchez graphically demonstrated the cycle of violence would continue to escalate. Bienville informed Ducoder he would not "sacrifice the honor and the

[79] Despite his statement Paya Mattaha eventually released the prisoners to the French garrison at Fort Toulouse in exchange for gifts. This calls into question whether or not he represented tribal interests or he acted on his own. Either way, his explanation seemed plausible enough to satisfy the Alabama chief. Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 335-341.
[80] MPA:FD I, 268, 285-286.

interests of the nation to the safety of two men."[81] Instead, he instructed the remaining Frenchmen to flee for their lives. Although Bienville had not yet committed French colonists to the cause, he determined to spur their Indian allies against the Chickasaws.

With the currents of war swirling, Chickasaw peace chiefs remained committed to an accord. Ymahatabe even "supplied [Ducoder] with provisions and shoes" and arranged for him to be "escorted for one night until he was on the main road to the Choctaws." Bienville later referred to this exodus as an "escape," but Ducoder left much the same way as the soldier-turned peace envoy-had just months before.[82] A Chickasaw delegation accompanied both men within two days march of the Choctaws, directing them on the path toward their destination. Ymahatabe also promised to return the only remaining member of the gunpowder convoy once the sergeant's health permitted. Despite the Chickasaws' devotion to the diplomatic process, prudence limited their concessions.

Chickasaw headmen deemed it wise to return French river captives, but not to dispatch their Mississippi refugees. Upon his return, Ducoder told Bienville the defeat of his boat had "made them lose the hope of obtaining [peace] even though they should kill the Natchez, and this has prevented the execution of this project."[83] However, Ducoder's statement directly contradicts Bienville's assessment shortly after his capture. Based on the Chickasaws' words and actions Bienville concluded, "the advantages that they have obtained over us on this occasion have not made them lose at all the desire to obtain peace." At the time he even held out hope the Chickasaws might

[81] MPA:FD I, 268, 285.
[82] MPA:FD I, 288.
[83] MPA:FD I, 288.

still destroy the Natchez as the white chiefs' intended.[84] The evidence indicates he was correct. With their best prospects for peace dispelled in writing and the ominous signs of war buried in a Natchez's stomach, the Chickasaws needed allies. Any debate over the fate of the Natchez people went unrecorded, yet results speak for themselves. The red moiety did not consent to their annihilation, and nor did the white moiety strike the Natchez on their own. Ducoder gives no indication he knew the extent of Chickasaw discourse on this matter, and his testimony leans heavily on accounts from peace chiefs. Rather than censuring Bienville, they discerningly blamed Mingo Ouma's raid for Chickasaw inaction regarding the Natchez. This retained any slim chance an accord might be reached without acknowledging the utility of Natchez warriors in a war with France.

The Chickasaw moieties not only collaborated on the fate of river peoples, they also used the Mississippi to safeguard the Chickasaw Nation. Treating with the Captain of Pacana, Ymahatabe, other Chickasaw chiefs, and some British traders in 1737, Mingo Ouma rehearsed the events of the gunpowder raid. "It is true that we overcame a pirogue that was going upriver to the Illinois," he began, "but we had no plan to kill anyone, only to pillage the munitions because they were being carried to the men of the north, our enemies." In seizing the black payload he and his men prevented Illinois, Miami, and other enemy warriors from receiving armaments at the Illinois outpost. Without powder for their guns, they would be more apt to remain at home and away from Chickasaw Country. With Chickasaw powder horns full, rather than their foes', the raid on Ducoder's pirogue turned a potential liability into a tribal asset. Mingo

[84] MPA:FD I, 268-269.

Ouma continued, "We warned the French not to fire, but not wanting to listen to us they fired their volley. It was then that we defended ourselves and got the worst of it."[85] Thus, his portrayal of the river raid presents the confrontation strictly as an act of self-defense.[86] In the process Mingo Ouma's men also acquired a tremendous amount of gunpowder which served the interests of the entire Chickasaw Nation.

In his account Mingo Ouma presented a Chickasaw perspective, yet shrewdly shaded events for a French audience. The war chief colored his speech with flattering portals of the Frenchmen while deflecting blame away from his own people. Always casting his actions as unprovocative, Mingo Ouma did his part in attempting to appease absentee French listeners, much to the dismay of the British traders actually hearing his words. Rebukes from these traders became so bitter that Ymahatabe tried to deflect their reproaches with a speech of his own. One hotheaded British observer responded with "a blow of the fist" striking Ymahatabe to force an end to his reprimand. Following this uncivil outburst Ymahatabe, Mingo Ouma, and the Captain of Pacana retired to the red village of Oyoula Tchitoka to confer amongst themselves. Away from the scorn of their British allies, Mingo Ouma told the Captain of Pacana he intended to kill the remaining Natchez "in a little while" and he "hope[d] that the French would become their friends."[87] Encouraged by Mingo Ouma and Ymahatabe's diplomacy, the Captain sanctioned an agreement providing for the protection of French shipping along the Mississippi River.

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[85] MPA:FD IV, 148.
[86] The French invasion of 1736 had been under consideration prior to Mingo Ouma's gunpowder raid, but it took on added significance afterwards as Bienville hoped to destroy the remaining Natchez, punish the Chickasaw, and free the Mississippi from their grasp.
[87] MPA:FD IV, 148-149.

Returning home, the Captain of Pacana triumphantly shared the news with his people and their French allies. As Diron d'Artaguette explained, the Captain of Pacana "entered his village in ceremony holding up a calumet that the Chickasaws had given him on receiving him as a great chief of their nation."[88] Ymahatabe and the white Chickasaw headmen, conceivably, conferred upon the Captain the title of *fanimingo*, making him an ambassador of peace.[89] Just the year before, he ominously threatened the Chickasaws saying, "if they attacked the French along the [Tombigbee] river, he would declare war on them." At that time the Chickasaws assured the Captain of their respect and replied "that they would leave the river free to the French; that it depended only on [the French] to have peace with them."[90] Using access to the region's waterways as leverage for negotiating a truce, the Chickasaws politicized their prowess on the rivers to bolster their international bargaining power. It did not work in 1736, but Mingo Ouma and Ymahatabe must have reiterated the offer the following year. Having conferenced with both men the Captain of Pacana arrived home "delighted." Upon his entrance the Captain proudly reported he had, "assured navigation on the [Mississippi] River for the French, and that no harm would be done to them throughout the country."[91]

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[88] MPA:FD IV, 147.
[89] According to Thomas Nairne the fanimingo had to "keep the pipes of peace by which at first they contracted Friendship, to devert the Warriors from the designe against the people they protect, and Pacifie them by carrying them the Eagle pipe to smoak out of, and if after all, are unable to oppose the stream, are to send the people private intelligence to provide for their own safety." Making the Captain of Pacana a fanimingo would have been a strategic move by the Chickasaw. Creating better relations with the Alabama, a French ally, may have been a means to neutralize them in the ongoing Chickasaw-French conflict and been a step towards reconciliation with the French themselves. See Nairne, *Nairne's Muskhogean Journals*, 40.
[90] MPA:FD I, 340.
[91] MPA:FD IV, 147.

Despite the fanfare, the Captain's announcement did not bring peace to the river. It effectively ended the ordeal of Ducoder and the gunpowder, but failed to produce a general Chickasaw-Franco armistice. This should not, however, diminish the historical significance of the processes that led to Ducoder's capture, his repatriation, and the prospect of reconciliation. Chickasaw engagement with the Mississippi River and its peoples conditioned their internal and external affairs. These relationships, in turn, influenced their riverine activities. Mingo Ouma's band of Chickasaw and Natchez warriors recognized the military necessity of intercepting Ducoder's crew, but made a political calculation in trying to capture them. Meanwhile, Ymahatabe's contingent sought to convince their nation to annihilate the Natchez and returned French river captives when advantageous. Though factionalized, Chickasaw prowess on regional waterways allowed them to employ people and rivers in calculated ways, even using passage along the Mississippi as a bargaining tool. These efforts led to the real possibility of peace with France and French-allied Indians, without altogether alienating their British ally or destroying their nation from within.

"We Shall no Longer Paddle our Canoes on the Mississippi," 1740-1745

France proved unable to defeat the Chickasaws or free the Mississippi from their influence during large military campaigns in both 1736 and 1739. The first expedition had cost well over the colony's annual budget and ended in defeat. Meanwhile the latter stalled before producing a major battle. As the war fizzled, Ymahatabe and headmen

from each Chickasaw village met with Governor Bienville at Fort Assumption, near present-day Memphis, Tennessee, to discuss an armistice. Passage along the Mississippi had been a source of both conflicts and continued to be a point of contention in the latest negotiations. Like many other meetings this one originated from a letter penned by a French captive, taken from the Mississippi, expressing Chickasaw sentiments to Bienville. During the conference the Chickasaws agreed to expel the Natchez and hunt down the rest of those Mississippi refugees. For his part Bienville promised to stop encouraging northern Indian attacks against the Chickasaws. As he explained to his superiors in France, "In order to assure the navigation of the [Mississippi] river we have promised them peace on behalf of the northern nations."[92] Implicit in the agreement, the Chickasaws and French would remain at peace even on the rivers. So when reports flooded in from throughout Louisiana that French convoys on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers had fallen under attack, Bienville's heart surely sank.

Not long after the final remnants of Bienville's army pushed off into the Mississippi heading downstream from Fort Assumption, rumors began circulating the Chickasaws had struck on the water again. Given their recent history, a resurgence of violence on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers must have seemed ominous to French inhabitants. Just months after the 1740 agreement, news of these attacks kept colonists on edge.[93] A pirogue conducted by merchant Louis Turpin came under assault near the mouth of the Ohio River, resulting in the loss of cargo and the capture of at least two party members. "We have heard no talk of anything on the river or elsewhere,"

[92] MPA:FD I, 460.
[93] Caldwell, "Chickasaw Threat to the French Control of the Mississippi in the 1740's," 474.

exclaimed Henri Chevalier de Louboey the royal lieutenant at Mobile, after the defeat.[94] Then in autumn of 1740 the rout of six canoes near the mouth of the Tennessee River rattled French military officers in Upper Louisiana.[95] In June of the following year, a pirogue full of Indians floated down the Mississippi past Pointe Coupée, a French settlement in Lower Louisiana, before absconding with an African woman and a few children.[96] On each occasion early indications suggested Chickasaw involvement. Exasperated, Salmon wrote to Maurepas the Minister of Marine and Colonies definitively declaring, "Nothing more is needed to infer that there has never been any peace made with the Chickasaws."[97]

Governor Bienville meanwhile continued to believe in the peace he had agreed to. Lacking supporters in the imperial court after his less than glorious campaigns, Bienville clung to the delicate accord for political reasons. He needed amity with the Chickasaws to justify the expense to his superiors. "As for the solidity of the peace with the Chickasaws…it would be as good as it could be on the word of Indians," Bienville protested to Maurepas, "but…it was not possible to count on it absolutely."[98] Yet he did not rely on blind faith to absolve the Chickasaws of accusations swirling around Louisiana. His sources indicated some Cherokees claimed responsibility for spoiling Turpin's convoy. He had evidence they committed the other attack on the Ohio as well.

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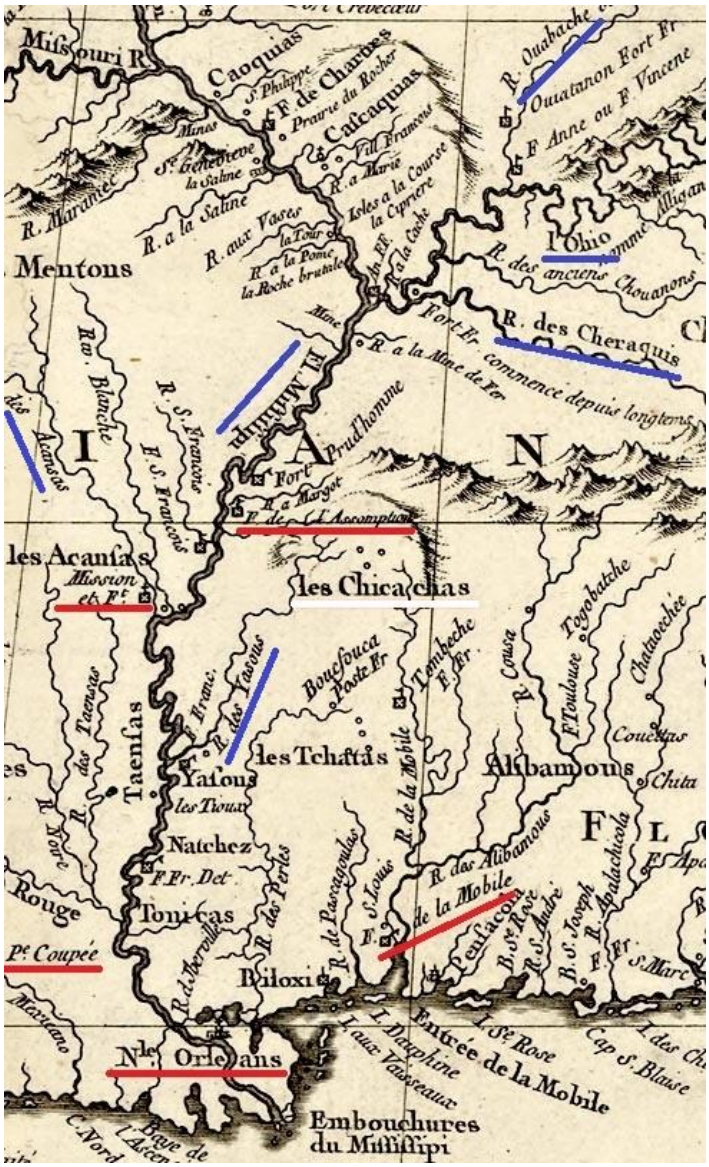
[94] MPA:FD IV, 177, 188, 192 and 194; MPA:FD III, 743-744, 748, 752-4, 772, 775; Bonnefoy, "Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy," 146-147; Brasseaux, *France's Forgotten Legion*, CD-ROM.
[95] The French refereed to the Tennessee River as the Cherokee River due to the nation's prominence on its waters. See Peyser *Letters from New* France, 178-180; Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The French Regime in Wisconsin II, 1727—1748*, vol. 17 of *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* (Madison: Published by the Society, 1906), 336.
[96] MPA:FD III, 755-757; MPA:FD IV, 187-188; 192-193.
[97] MPA:FD IV, 192.
[98] MPA:FD III, 747.

The Natchez, meanwhile, bore responsibility for the intrigues near Point Coupée, according to Bienville. The governor explained, "It was on the knowledge that [he] had of their situation rather than on their word that [he] was counting for the solidity of this peace."[99] While that might be so, Chickasaw actions and contentions reveal their commitment to the armistice and the production of shared space along the Mississippi.



North to south: Wabash River, Ohio River, Tennessee River, Mississippi River, Arkansas River, Fort Assumption, Chickasaw Nation, Arkansas post, Yazoo River, Mobile, Point Coupée, and New Orleans.

Figure 10: The Chickasaws and Louisiana, ca. 1764.
Jacques Nicolas Bellin. La Louisiane et pays voisinsm. Paris, 1764.

[99] MPA:FD III, 750-757, 771-779.

Their dedication to this arrangement became fully evident in 1743 as France failed to meet its obligations in the reconfigured landscape. That year a large party of Chickasaws seized the merchant convoy of Guillaume [William] Bienvenu detaining his wife and a few crew members on the Mississippi. Denying passage and holding the river travelers captive reiterated Chickasaw authority along the water. Least French officials forget, Chickasaw spokesmen used the occasion to remind them of the importance of reciprocal responsibilities. If peace reigned and trade goods were delivered Chickasaw spokesmen assured them, "We shall no longer paddle our canoes on the Mississippi." However, environmental expressions of power and social relationships hinged on proper action. "Otherwise," the authors cautioned, "we shall paddle our canoes on the Mississippi and we shall attack all the French and the red men."[100]

Immediately following the parley with Bienville at Fort Assumption, the Chickasaw Nation took steps to uphold the agreement. Although some officials, and perhaps a majority of French inhabitants, accused them of aquatic wrongdoings the Chickasaws largely avoided making incursions on major waterways. After Illinois Indians spread news of Louis Turpin's defeat, the commandant at the Arkansas post, Tisserand de Monchervaux, investigated the matter. He sent four parties to scour the entire region "as far as above the Prudhomme Bluffs and in the interior" searching for evidence of mischief. As the location of many Chickasaw river raids over the past two decades, the Bluffs seemed an obvious site of exploration.[101] The multiple groups

[100] MPA:FD IV, 212.
[101] The Chickasaw Bluffs surrounded Fort Assumption which the French abandoned in 1740 after their failed campaign against the Chickasaws.

dispatched to the area all returned to assure Monchervaux "they had not found any trace of the Chickasaws." Furthermore their reconnaissance had not uncovered "any indication that they had come on the river for a year."[102] This must have been surprising given the regularity with which Chickasaw war parties previously travelled on the Mississippi in that region. A similar absence also proved noteworthy four years later. Having assumed the governorship in 1743, Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil observed at the end of 1744 that the Chickasaws had "not made any expedition upon the river this year." In his mind this dearth proved "clearly enough the determination of the Chickasaws…to live on good terms with us."[103] Chickasaw war parties intentionally avoided the river, tactfully signaling their dedication to upholding the accord. As partners in peace, the waterway became a shared space allowing for French navigation. This same principle gave the Captain of Pacana confidence to guarantee French safety on the Mississippi back in 1737. In a sincere gesture of reconciliation, Chickasaw warriors deliberately avoided the waterway in 1740, just as they did in 1744, heralding their nation's commitment to the truce.

Eschewing conflict on the Mississippi River served Chickasaw objectives, as did denying themselves the benefits which accompanied forays onto regional waterways. Trade between Native American polities served dual purposes as the literal act--swapping goods, captives, or food--brought physical benefits while also signaling a symbolic connection. Gift-giving served as a means to bolster influence and prestige as well as affirm alliances. By extension, refusal to participate in such initiatives were an

[102] MPA:FD III, 744.
[103] MPA:FD IV, 230.

affront to one's status and could be an expression of hostility.[104] Following Bienville's failed invasion of 1736, the Chickasaws and Overhill Cherokees developed deepening bonds based on such reciprocal exchanges. The flow of British goods along the Upper Trade Path bound the Chickasaws and Cherokees within a shared economic system. Chickasaws joined their Overhill Cherokee allies in swapping goods from plundered French boats and exchanging enemy captives. This cooperation eventually led to increased military cooperation and even the settlement of a joint community on the Lower Ohio River.[105] The alliance also allowed these Cherokees to pass unmolested along the Mississippi River by the Chickasaw Bluffs, as they steered a course back and forth between the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers.[106] Therefore, it would have been surprising if a Chickasaw village declined an invitation to share in the spoils of a Cherokee raid, but according to Bienville's Alabama informants one Chickasaw town did just that.

Having overcome the convoy of French merchant Louis Turpin, a party of Cherokee warriors invited the Chickasaws to share in their success. As they paddled up the Ohio and continued into the Tennessee River, the Cherokees paused on their way home for a potential rendezvous with their Chickasaw allies. For their part, the Alabamas had been "coming from the Chickasaw villages" when the Cherokee arrived. According to the Alabamas, the Tennessee lay "a day and a half" from the Chickasaw village but while passing "going back up their river" the Cherokee landed ashore and "sent to their [Chickasaw] village to invite them to come and drink their share of brandy

[104] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 142-145.
[105] St. Jean, "Trading Paths," 154-157.
[106] Waggoner, *Le Plus Païs du Monde*, 45; DRIA I, 536-537; MPA:FD III, 743-744.

captured in the defeat of these pirogues." Despite the Chickasaws cooperative relationship with the Cherokees, the villagers proved "unwilling" to go "because of the peace" with France.[107]

Declining an invitation for free drinks is not, by itself, indicative of anything beyond what it is. The variables make it difficult to comprehend what actually occurred. Given their participation in the British exchange network, red Chickasaw villages tended to align more closely with the Overhill Cherokees. Perhaps the Cherokee party simply invited a white town as a way to expand their influence and got rejected. It is also possible that a British-aligned town in the Large Prairie declined the invitation since they genuinely intended to maintain the accord, as residents told some Choctaws in September of 1740.[108] Chickasaw villagers might have declined knowing news of the affair would trickle back to French authorities via the Alabamans. Maybe the prospect of a nagging hangover simply felt too real. Without knowing the make-up of the Cherokee faction or which Chickasaw village received the offer, we may never know for certain why Turpin's brandy did not pass the townspeople's lips. However, when this incident is viewed within a larger historical context, it appears as part of a pattern. Through their deeds and declarations, the Chickasaws expressed their commitment to maintaining the settlement with France. In 1740 Chickasaw warriors collectively avoided the Mississippi River, and multiple sources reiterated the Chickasaws' dedication to peaceful relations. In this light, the villagers' refusal to celebrate the

[107] MPA:FD III, 744.
[108] MPA:FD III, 741, 744.

demise of Turpin's fleet is yet another indication of the Chickasaws' efforts to avoid confrontation with the French.

For their part French administrators were not united in their dedication to maintaining the peace. Without pause the governor of Canada, Marquis de Beauharnois, continued to inspire parties of Iroquois to harass the Chickasaws despite Bienville's assurances otherwise.[109] Already divided over the issue, Bienville's failure to restrain his own countrymen further alienated a segment of the Chickasaw population. Natchez refugees fleeing Chickasaw Country in 1741 professed, "the Chickasaws were of different sentiments on the subject of peace which some wished to maintain at no matter what price and which others irritated by the losses that they were incurring every day did not wish to hear mentioned any longer."[110] With the Chickasaw Nation split on the interrelated issues of sheltering the Natchez and peace with France, some individuals lashed out on the region's waterways.

The Chickasaws remained divided on the steep French demands for peace after leaving Fort Assumption, and opposing factions within the Chickasaw Nation could not reach a consensus. Those seeking peace with France would not condone river raids, and those in favor of harboring the Natchez would not consent to their deaths. Nonetheless, the great chief Ymahatabe denied allegations that the entire nation should bear responsibility for the actions of a few. In answering accusations about an attack on the Ohio River in 1740, Ymahatabe admitted that since "the Chickasaws were in alliance with the Cherokees some of them might possibly have been met in the parties that

[109]MPA:FD III, 751-752.
[110] MPA:FD III, 752.

attacked the French," but he asserted, "that attack ought not by any means to be imputed to the body of the nation which did not give its consent to it at all and had no part in it."[111] Holding the entire nation accountable for the independent actions of a few individuals amounted to political fiction in his estimation.

Failure to resolve these complex issues left individuals to act on their own. Ymahatabe stated that although "the nation had not been able to agree to kill the Natchez," they had "treated them so badly that they had obliged them to flee."[112] Operating without the sanction of the nation, those opposed to harboring the Natchez took it upon themselves to compel the refugees to seek shelter elsewhere. A similar scenario played out on the Mississippi River. Although Bienville had exonerated the Chickasaws for abducting an African woman and some children from Pointe Coupee in 1741, they admitted otherwise. Fifteen Chickasaws demanded to know "why the French did not give them peace" when they encountered Frenchmen Antoine Bonnefoy among the Alabamas in 1742. Denying Bonnefoy's accusations they regularly attacked the French, the group "assured" him that "with the exception of a party of young people, which had acted contrary to the consent of the nation, the last year at Point Coupée, they were a people who had struck no blow."[113] Isolated incidents on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers did occur, but nothing of the magnitude of Mingo Ouma's raid on Ducoder's party. Split on the issues--life or death, raid or trade, war or peace--the Chickasaw Nation kept the Natchez and the Mississippi at arm's length in hopes of achieving peace, even as individuals acted of their own volition.

[111] MPA:FD III, 754.
[112] MPA:FD III, 753-754.
[113] Bonnefoy, "Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy," 254.

Unable to neutralize the Chickasaws themselves, Louisiana officials continued using more sinister means. French authorities and traders encouraged their Indian allies against the Chickasaws, jeopardizing the safety of regional waterways. Choctaw and Quapaw forays, sprung from the south, waylaid hunting parties and ravaged fields while Illinois and Iroquois raids from the north continued to terrorize the Chickasaw people.[114] The Choctaws had paid a heavy price when Chickasaw slavers attacked their villages and sold their friends and relatives to British traders. Desperate to stem the flow of captives, they had welcomed a French alliance and the weapons they could provide. French officials facilitated this intra-Indian conflict, paying for Chickasaw scalps as a means to counteract the Chickasaws while reducing the number of warriors the Choctaws could potentially wield against Louisiana. As victims of Chickasaw slave raids themselves, the Quapaw also forged a working relationship with the French predicated on exchange and mutual animosity for their common enemy.[115] A similar scenario played out in the Upper Louisiana as well. Illinois Indians had allied with French traders to gain access to guns which they promptly aimed at the Chickasaws. These Indian adversaries, combined with the Iroquois, threatened the security of Chickasaw Country.

Unsurprisingly, three years of encouraging unrelenting Indian attacks eventually led to the capture of French voyageurs on the Mississippi. On May 7, 1743, about midway between the mouth of the Yazoo and Arkansas rivers, a convoy led by Guillaume Bienvenu capitulated to a joint war party of Chickasaw, Koroa, and Upper

[114] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 74-75; Edward J. Cashin, *Guardians of the Valley: Chickasaws in colonial South Carolina and Georgia* (Columbia: South Carolina Press, 2009), 53.
[115] Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 130-3, 151-2, 180, 203.

Creek warriors after a short scrap.[116] This event happened to coincide with the arrival of Marquis de Vaudreuil to Louisiana. Sent to replace the beleaguered Bienville as governor, Vaudreuil's reputation as a peacemaker preceded him. Vaudreuil's efforts earned him respect among the region's inhabitants, including the Chickasaws, who welcomed his arrival and were optimistic that Vaudreuil might finally deliver on the promise of a ceasefire.[117] With hostages obtained from Bienvenu's failed trip upriver and newborn faith in Louisiana's governor, Chickasaw spokesmen once again turned to the Mississippi River when leveraging an accord with France.

Using their established pattern of river diplomacy the Chickasaws attempted to mitigate any negative fallout from their recent raid. Six headmen immediately sent word to the governor regarding Bienvenu's defeat hoping to clarify their actions.[118] The chiefs informed Vaudreuil they had "learned" how he "kept the peace" among the northern Indians by never "let[ting] them lack coats, blankets, powder and bullets, vermilion, or beads." Their words explicitly linked Vaudreuil's achievements in Canada with matters of peace and trade, an association the governor understood well.[119] This premise established the letter's tone and colored the Chickasaws' vision of a productive relationship. Having asserted Chickasaw expectations, the chiefs addressed what they perceived to be France's foremost concerns. "We do not wish to attack the French any longer. We hold out our hands to them when we find them," proclaimed the headmen.

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[116] MPA:FD IV, 217-218; Vaudreuil to Maurepas, 29 July 1743 (AC, C13A, 28, fols. 73-75).
[117] Bill Barron ed. *The Vaudreuil Papers: A Calendar and Index of the Personal and Private Records of Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Royal Governor of the French Province of Louisiana, 1743-1753* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, Inc., 1975), x and xxi-xxii.
[118] It is likely Chanstabé Mingo, Okapakana Mingo, Pahé Mingo, Sonachabé Mingo, Oulacta Oupayé, and Tachikeianantla Opayé dictated this letter to Vaudreuil. See MPA:FD IV, 258 fn 4.
[119] Barron. *The Vaudreuil Papers*, xxii.

They continued, “There are no longer any Natchez in our villages. The Choctaws are madmen to attack us. We shall no longer paddle our canoes on the Mississippi.”[120]

Chickasaw diplomats offered passage along the Mississippi River in exchange for harmony and commerce. The river’s continued importance as a transportation route made the offer appealing just as it had during negotiations with the Captain of Pacana. The headmen suggested other French stipulations had been met, at least partially, allowing negotiations to proceed. The Natchez had not been executed, but they had fled to the Cherokees. Bienvenu’s convoy had been overcome, but the Chickasaws promised to shun future violence on the Mississippi. They seized Bienvenu’s crew and his wife Marianne, although the headmen maintained they harbored no ill will. Their original goal actually differed markedly from the eventual outcome. “We were not seeking to make attacks upon the French” but rather “we were seeking red men on the Mississippi,” they insisted. The voyageurs would come to no harm since, as the headmen affirmed, “We captured them in order to make you listen to our word.”[121] As with Ducoder’s apprehension, Chickasaw spokesmen denied any wrongdoing and yet defended their objective. Reconciliation required the exchange of captives, justifying the short-term internment of river travelers.

Not only did the chiefs endorse this action, but they also implied that the nation supported their approach as well. The headmen declared, “We love your Frenchmen. We regard them as our brothers. *All* the Chickasaw chiefs ask you for peace.”[122] Back in 1740, Ymahatabe had dismissed Chickasaw involvement in river raids as the work of

[120] MPA:FD IV, 212.
[121] MPA:FD IV, 212.
[122] Emphasis mine. MPA:FD IV, 212.

"some" and not the "nation."[123] At the meeting with Bonnefoy, others downplayed the Point Coupée escapade belittling the mischief of a few "young people."[124] If the raid against Bienvenu occurred without national sanction, or if the Chickasaws remained divided over the issue of peace, the chiefs might have said as much. In this instance, however, the chiefs claimed full responsibility. Abandoning third-person pronouns the chiefs emphasized their unity writing a first-person narrative relying on the plural pronoun "we" to make their case.

The Chickasaws rallied around the respected headman who led the expedition against Bienvenu. The unnamed leader garnered support among his fellow Chickasaws as well as with Koroa and Abeka warriors who accompanied him.[125] Detained as part of her husband's convoy, Marianne claimed "the chief" who captured them ranked "second of his nation" and sought "peace" along with the others.[126] By tradition the leading headman of the red moiety, known by the title *mingo ouma*, ranked behind the principal white mingo in his authority and prestige. Ducoder's captor may have fronted this river foray, as well, but given Marianne's unfamiliarity with Chickasaw sociopolitical hierarchy, it is possible she misinterpreted the title. Perhaps the term "nation" actually referred to his moiety or even clan affiliation; regardless, he was not a disenfranchised individual acting on his own. The "chief" held a respected position

[123] MPA:FD III, 754.
[124] Bonnefoy, "Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy," 254.
[125] Vaudreuil to Maurepas, 29 July 1743 (AC, C13A, 28, fols. 73-75). The Kora were a small nation that lived among the Chickasaws after their ill-fated participation in the Natchez Revolt. As part of the Creek Confederacy, the Abekas were a division of the Upper Creeks. See William C. Sturtevant and Raymond D. Fogelson. *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 14. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 180-181 and 390-391.
[126] MPA:FD IV, 212-213.

within Chickasaw society. Chickasaw warriors and other headmen supported his actions and he inspired warriors of other polities to join the raid.

However, the multitribal outfit formed to seek common Indian and not to advance Chickasaw interests per se. Yet discovering the Bienvenu party on the Mississippi, the Chickasaws sprang into action. The headman and his Chickasaw warriors seized the opportunity to obtain hostages in order to facilitate the peace process with France. Although they acted over the objections of the Abekas among them, the Chickasaws had the endorsement of their own nation.[127] As letters from both the Chickasaws and Marianne claim, the headmen widely accepted accountability for this river raid. While crosscutting factions sharply divided the Chickasaw Nation, this confirmation of unity speaks to its shared objectives along the waterway.

Although they disagreed on critical issues, both red and white chiefs stood united in their desire to end hostilities with France in this instance. Each division had unique though interrelated reasons for doing so. Having been under immense pressure from Indian enemies to the north and south since the 1720s, they needed a reprieve. Reconciliation with France would remove the main impetus for these attacks, a development most Chickasaws assuredly wished for. As the governor well understood, they had grown tired of war and scouted the Mississippi River seizing French travelers as a means to end the conflict.[128] White chiefs had the added motivation of forging a new trade path to help supply their people and elevate their own sociopolitical standing in the process.

[127] Vaudreuil to Maurepas, 29 July 1743 (AC, C13A, 28, fols. 73-75).
[128] Vaudreuil to Maurepas, 29 July 1743 (AC, C13A, 28, fols. 73-75).

Both moieties stood to benefit from reconciliation, as did the colonists of French Louisiana and their Indian allies. Friendly relations had the potential to build socio-economic ties. "Send us powder, bullets, guns, and coats," the chiefs demanded, "and we shall deliver Marianne and the Frenchmen who remain in our villages." Vaudreuil's Canadian peacekeeping efforts had depended on supplying a similar list of goods. In return, the Chickasaws were prepared to return the captives and allow the French to travel the Mississippi River uninhibited. Trade and friendship produced a common landscape, one which could not otherwise exist. Ominously the chiefs warned, "Send us everything that we ask of you and do not refuse us, otherwise we shall paddle our canoes on the Mississippi and we shall attack all the French and the red men."[129]

French voyageurs could expect to share the river, traveling freely, if Vaudreuil befriended the Chickasaws. Social relationships encompassed economic exchange and helped to define territoriality. This is the understanding which allowed the Overhill Cherokees and Chickasaws to navigate the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers in common. Shared usage and right-of-way defined specific landscapes for Southeastern Indian allies, but they did not willingly cede territory to one another.[130] When the Chickasaws offered to "leave the [Tombigbee] river free to the French" in 1736, they made no mention of abandoning the river altogether.[131] The following year, the Captain of Pacana did not claim possession of the Mississippi for France; he only "assured navigation on the [Mississippi] River for the French."[132] In 1740, Chickasaw war parties

[129] MPA:FD IV, 212.
[130] Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 19.
[131] MPA:FD I, 340.
[132] MPA:FD IV, 147.

largely absented themselves from the Mississippi River, but by Chickasaw admission they did not forsake its use. Therefore, Chickasaw headmen spoke figuratively in 1743 when they wrote Vaudreuil saying, "We shall no longer paddle our canoes on the Mississippi."[133] This did not entail self-eviction, territorial transfer, or recognition of French claims upon the water. France would simply gain right-of-way on the Mississippi River after Marianne returned with the other captives and trade relations commenced. Having created a shared environment, predicated on exchange and friendship, French people and goods could pass freely along the border of Chickasaw Country. However, if an agreement could not be reached, the French could not expect to traverse the Mississippi unimpeded.

Before proverbially rocking the boat, however, the Chickasaws continued to pursue a more amicable alternative. In addition to their letters, they sent "a Frenchman named Carignan," captured from Bienvenu's convoy, to visit Vaudreuil in New Orleans. As an emissary, Carignan bore "witness" to the "sincerity" of the headmen, testifying that they proposed peace in exchange for "the assistance in munitions and merchandise that is necessary for them." [134] Though it went unrecorded, Carignan undoubtedly reiterated Marianne's sentiments about the Chickasaws' hospitality. As with other French river captives, the party had avoided the rigors of torture. Impressed by "the most touching manner" in which the letters had been written and Carignan's authentication, Vaudreuil proposed collaborating with the Choctaws on a negotiated

[133] MPA:FD IV, 212.
[134] MPA:FD IV, 213.

resolution. Unlike Bienville, he did not require Natchez blood but insisted the Chickasaws expel the British and receive only French traders.[135]

Over the course of the following two years, discussions for a permanent settlement dragged on. Throughout this time, the Chickasaws strategically used their river captives and the Mississippi to advance the peace process. In February of 1744, Vaudreuil proudly wrote to Maurepas, "The Chickasaws have sent back to me at different times three Frenchmen, a Frenchwoman, and an Indian ally of ours whom they had captured on the seventh of last May on the bank of the Mississippi."[136] Sending Carignan to New Orleans had demonstrated the Chickasaw's initial commitment, and the return of Marianne at a meeting with Vaudreuil in 1744 reiterated that pledge.[137] Chickasaw negotiators stayed open to sharing the waters of the Mississippi with France, but the governor remained adamantly opposed to splitting the Chickasaw trade with Britain. Nevertheless the accumulation of Chickasaw river diplomacy seemed to have a positive effect. At the end of 1744, Vaudreuil wrote, "The fact that they have not made any expedition upon the river this year proves clearly enough the determination of the Chickasaws to give up the commerce with the English and the desire that they had to live on good terms with us."[138] The concerted effort to halt river incursions proved they sincerely desired reconciliation. Chickasaw headmen gradually cultivated trust by releasing captives, allowing passage on the Mississippi River, and entertaining Vaudreuil's demand for an exclusive trade.

[135] MPA:FD IV, 218.
[136] MPA:FD IV, 217.
[137] Louboey to Maurepas, 6 February 1744, AC C13A, 28, fol. 325v.
[138] MPA:FD IV, 230.

Regrettably, Vaudreuil knew France could not supply the Chickasaws' material demands and yet insisted on the expulsion of British traders as a precondition anyway. Discerning his mandate was impractical, he resigned himself to gaining possession of the Mississippi by force. Like Bienville before him, Vaudreuil determined that "destroying" the Chickasaws had to be done to free the river and limit British influence throughout the region. He feared that, even if the Chickasaws were forced east to the Cherokees or into Carolina, the distance would not safeguard the French "against the raids that they still might make on the Mississippi."[139] France could neither provide the goods necessary to cement a lasting peace nor force the Chickasaws to capitulate.

A faction of Chickasaws remained committed to obtaining some resolution, nonetheless. In the spring of 1745, they once again sent an envoy bearing a message of reconciliation. The sole messenger, a French go-between named Languedocq, had been a part of the Bienvenu party and chosen to remain with the Chickasaw Nation ever since.[140] Among his supplies, Languedocq carried "a flag, a calumet, and a white fan," all symbolizing the Chickasaws' peaceful intentions. Having built Languedocq a "bark canoe," they set him on a course down the Tombigbee River for Fort Toulouse. Like the tokens he carried and the captives before him, Languedocq himself served as an emblem of benevolence. Taken from the muddy waters and accepted by the Chickasaws, he bridged political boundaries. As the Mississippi did, Languedocq

[139] MPA:FD IV, 244.

[140] Vaudreuil wrote to Maurepas May 10, 1744 stating that Languedocq had chosen to remain with the Chickasaw. However, Louboey claimed Languedocq had been "made a slave with Bienvenu" in a letter to Maurepas of November 6, 1745. Louboey's mention of Bienvenu, who later escaped from the Chickasaw, implies the enslavement occurred initially. Marianne's statement that the Chickasaw had treated them well and the reception of other French river captives, like Ducoder and company, supports the notion of Languedocq remaining with the Chickasaw of his own volition. See Baron, *The Vaudreuil Papers*, p. 184; MPA:FD IV, 213, 253.

connected Chickasaw Country to French Louisiana. Unfortunately the hazards of river travel proved too much and he capsized, arriving downstream near the fort clinging to a tree. Still, he managed to he convey the "latest word" from the Chickasaws to Commandant Louboey.[141]

And yet, as often happened, local expectations drowned in the undercurrent of imperial ambition. Vaudreuil remained insistent the British exit Chickasaw Country before peace could commence. Despite the pleas of some headmen, the Chickasaw Nation could not take the radical step to end the Chickasaw-Anglo alliance. Without a general consensus, they could not appease the French. Momentum for an armistice slowed as France continued encouraging its Indian allies against the Chickasaws. From 1745 through the Seven Years' War, Chickasaw warriors took to the rivers in recourse, wreaking havoc on French travelers plying the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash River. Although the Chickasaws continued to take captives, most were simply held for ransom and the prospect for a treaty sunk.

Expressions of power played out along the waterfront as the Chickasaws asserted preeminence over the river as it passed their country. As such, the Mississippi became a meeting place where violent confrontation ensued and foreign diplomacy began. This approach often united the Chickasaw Nation, as opposing factions joined together in pursuit of shared objectives. Despite favoring rival European powers, the red and white moieties collaborated on the capture and repatriation of French river captives. Widespread communal participation continued when French hostages marched into

[141] MPA:FD IV, 253.

Chickasaw villages. Tradition stipulated the white moiety direct subsequent peace proposals, but this required consent from red chiefs. Headmen cooperated in sending go-betweens to French officials with carefully crafted messages. Without the ability to compel obedience chiefs relied on public support to maintain friendly relations, collectively curbing river raids and foregoing their benefits. In times of danger, however, red and white villages shared supplies captured from the Mississippi. Internal sociopolitical bonds underpinned Chickasaw actions as they sought to shape external affairs. In so doing the Mississippi River became a tool for instructing the French on social, political, and economic corollaries of cohabitation.

Over time, colonial officials grasped Chickasaw motivations along the river. Both Bienville and Vaudreuil understood, at least partially, the logic behind capturing boatmen and the pattern of diplomacy that followed. Although each bemoaned the carnage done to river traffic, they came to appreciate what motivated the attacks. Letters and personal testimonials buttressed Chickasaw messages concerning the exercise of Native space. Colonial officials came to realize that unabated access to the river required peace and trade or the complete obliteration of the Chickasaws.

Assaults on French boats and negotiations for safe passage proved the river remained a Native waterway. Chickasaw expeditions conveyed their territorial sovereignty and resolution to maintain their geopolitical position. France made verbal claims to the Mississippi Valley and the river itself, but these words rang hollow. Chickasaw actions reinforced their rights along the waterway. Their repeated offers to allow passage on the Mississippi also demonstrates this reality. Although they were undeniably split over critical issues during this time, the Chickasaws worked together to

establish recognizable signs of self-possession across the riverine landscape. From their perspective, the river constituted part of their homeland that could be shared by allies and closed to enemies. This spatial configuration compelled the region's newest inhabitants to avoid the east bank of the Mississippi as they attempted to shuttle across its waters. Instructing the French on the obligations of allies did not prove easy, nor did it produce a permanent accord.

The ordeal of Ducoder, Bienvenu, and their compatriots expose broad dynamics playing out on the Mississippi. Hoping to stem years of incessant warfare, the Chickasaw people united to force a reprieve. The veil of history unfortunately masks the full extent of Chickasaw cooperation, but it is evident in their military campaigns, pronouncements, public ceremonies, and council meetings. While the river did not belong them, it certainly fell within their spatial and cultural purview. Through the duality of violence and diplomacy they communicated their territorial claims, political designs, and socio-economic desires. These messages were not lost on French colonists or distant Louisiana governors, who recognized Chickasaw dominance on the Mississippi between the Arkansas and Ohio rivers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sakti Lhafa'

1745-1795

In his correspondence with the Governor of the District of Natchez, Ugulayacabé did not shy away from the importance of *Sakti Lhafa'*. It was, the Chickasaw headman told Manuel Gayoso, a "pretty convenient place the Bluffs."[1] After all the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, or Ecores á Margot to the Spaniard, sat on the bank of the Mississippi River just a few days journey from most of the Chickasaw villages. They could easily make the trek to meet Spanish ships sent to deliver their annual presents. Much to the governor's consternation, the bluff proved equally accessible for American vessels transporting gifts of their own. Yet the Chickasaws had other reasons to "love that place," and so the governor could "depend on us not parting with it to any people," Ugulayacabé informed him.[2]

Part of the bluff's appeal certainly rested on the physical landscape, the namesake of S*akti Lhafa' Okhina',* which enhanced Chickasaw authority on that river. Together the Chickasaw Bluffs and Mississippi River conspired against boat traffic. Islands littered the channel as it wove through the heights. As a result, shifting currents obliged pilots to steer their vessels from one side to another. The banks offered a degree of safety, but also exposed craft and crew to whoever happened to be in the hills above. This was particularly true at the foot of the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, where whirling waters forced boats to the eastern shoreline. Here unwelcome travelers, particularly

[1] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 40 (1968), 110.
[2] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 41 (1969), 104.

those rowing upstream, were particularly vulnerable. This is where Chickasaw warriors often sought to curtail the movements of their enemies. Commanding the high ground gave them a distinct military advantage, while riverine topography created natural "checkpoints." They need not patrol the Mississippi's length nor span its width. By controlling the bluffs and the narrow river passes through them, the Chickasaw Nation gained outsized influence over the Mississippi. They knew this, and gradually the French, British, Spanish, and finally Americans came to realize it too.

After failing to make peace in the 1740s, Chickasaw warriors struck at French river travelers. These renewed assaults often occurred amid the bluffs in the 1750s and carried on throughout the Seven Years' War. British agents spurred Chickasaw parties to this business, much to the chagrin of French administrators and Canadian voyageurs. To these European foes, it seemed the Chickasaws carried out the bidding of their imperial masters. But as historians have repeatedly shown, Native Americans collaborated with European interests so long as they deemed best.[3] During this time Chickasaw aims dovetailed with British objectives in the Mississippi Valley. Both sought to limit French influence by impeding river traffic. Chickasaw success in doing so facilitated British claims to the Mississippi at the end of the war. Their "self-subjection" gave Britain dominion over Chickasaw territory, at least according to European standards.[4]

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 brought an official end to the Seven Years' War. Having ceased hostilities, Great Britain, France, and Spain resolved many of their

[3] James H. Merrell's book on Catawba history, *The Indians' New World*, is an excellent example.
[4] Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 105-127.

longstanding territorial disputes swapping claims to "countries, lands, islands, places, coasts, and their inhabitants."[5] Without consulting their Native American allies or considering the land claims and usage rights of Native peoples, vast regions "legally" transferred from one European country to another. "In order to reestablish peace on solid and durable foundations" the treaty also sought to define geographic spaces by establishing internationally recognizable borders. As such, Great Britain and France agreed "the confines between the dominions" would be "fixed irrevocably by a line drawn along the middle of the River Mississippi, from its source…to the sea."[6] So, with the stroke of a pen the river became a geographic landmark splitting the interior claims of competing imperial powers. Unbeknownst to Britain, France had transferred its title to Spain in the Treaty of Fontainebleau the year before, but nonetheless the river remained the borderline cordoning British claims from those of Spain.[7]

Chickasaw warriors were not eager to enforce Britain's "new" border. When the American Revolution commenced, Indian Superintendent John Stuart called upon them to patrol the Mississippi.[8] After all, experience had proven their effectiveness in doing so. With the Crown's soldiers concentrated in the east, Chickasaw warriors were essential for controlling the waterway and defending against an American invasion. If the Chickasaws cut off the river, Stuart hoped, loyalists in Natchez and West Florida would be spared the effects of war. Yet, few Chickasaws volunteered for the mission. Topography and experience gave them the capacity to impede river traffic, but they had

[5] Treaty of Paris 1763, article IV, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/paris763.asp, accessed 10/9/2014.
[6] Treaty of Paris 1763, article VII.
[7] Aron, *American Confluence*, 51.
[8] Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 222.

little to gain by doing so. Even when encouraged by gifts, Chickasaw attentiveness proved fleeting. British war aims simply did not match their nation's objectives during the conflict.

American actions eventually prompted the Chickasaw Nation to join the fight. Belligerent overtures and the construction of Fort Jefferson in 1780 provoked a response. Built on the east bank below the mouth of the Ohio River, the American outpost infringed on Chickasaw hunting grounds and threatened the Mississippi River. In rejoinder, warriors laid siege to the fort and took the waterway by storm. Though not on especially cordial terms with American rebels before this, most Chickasaws had skirted involvement in the civil war. However, realpolitik considerations dictated Chickasaw activities throughout the American Revolution, and the bluffs' topography amplified their decisions.

Chickasaw assaults on the Mississippi ceased before the war's end, but James Colbert carried on the fight. Although a Scottish migrant, Colbert had lived with the Chickasaws for decades. He rallied Loyalist support along the river and coordinated surprise attacks on Spanish ships passing the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff. Though Chickasaw warriors did not join in these endeavors, the Chickasaw Nation did not entirely disallow them either. Several hundred villagers joined Colbert's band of British Loyalists to share in their largesse. Even those outspokenly opposed to Colbert's actions took the opportunity to build off his success. As Chickasaw diplomats had with the French, those seeking an alliance with Spain returned river captives to begin negotiations. In exchange for free passage along the Mississippi they requested peace

and commerce. Having been on the receiving end of Chickasaw raids and experienced Colbert's effectiveness, Spanish administrators knew the value of this offer.

After the American Revolution, the Chickasaws once again found themselves between non-native nations competing for land and influence. Both Spain and the United States courted their allegiance with hopes of acquiring *Sakti Lhafa'* in the process. Spanish authorities, in particular, wanted to build a fort on the bluff and thereby command the Mississippi River. Chickasaw factions headed by Ugulayacabé and Piomingo, respectively, exploited this rivalry to receive annual presents and maintain trade relations with both powers. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff no longer functioned as a military checkpoint but as a negotiating chip in foreign affairs. For a time, its topographical advantages and geographic importance continued to work to the benefit of the entire nation.

However, by 1795 the Chickasaws found themselves in a difficult position. Piomingo's relationship with the United States threatened to engulf them in war with the numerically superior Creeks. Furthermore, American advances had begun to close in on Chickasaw Country. The U.S. Army occupied Fort Massac, an old French outpost on the Ohio River, which sat ominously on their northern border. Pressure from Cherokee and American diplomats also forced the Chickasaws to cede land on the Tennessee River. Easy access to the Mississippi from these locations breathed new life into longstanding rumors of a pending American invasion and occupation of *Sakti Lhafa'*. Sensing the Chickasaws' growing uneasiness, Spanish authorities once again requested permission to build a fort on the bluff. In return, they offered to assuage the Chickasaws growing conflict with the Creeks, safeguard the Chickasaw Nation from an

American land grab, and establish a trade post, in addition to providing immediate "gifts." The short and, seemingly, long-term benefits overcame Ugulayacabé and the other chiefs' reluctance to part with such a critical portion of their territory.

Throughout the eighteenth century, *Sakti Lhafa'* magnified Chickasaw influence along the Mississippi River. At the Fourth Bluff, the channel narrowed and waters churned hindering boat traffic. The heights extending skyward further advantaged warriors, scouts, and eventually forts seeking to block the way. Similar features throughout the entire string of Chickasaw Bluffs made travel through the region difficult and therefore more easily disrupted. Chickasaws took advantage of this setting in their military and diplomatic endeavors as the balance of power shifted. *Sakti Lhafa'* transformed from a checkpoint, into a bargaining chip, and then a land cession during their struggle to resist the ravages of colonialism. Chickasaw "love [of] that place," as Ugulayacabé said, did not change, but the ways they utilized *Sakti Lhafa'* did.[9]

Checkpoint

The Chickasaw Bluffs, and the fourth bluff in particular, offered several distinct benefits. These unique landforms rose above the Mississippi, essentially dividing the great river in two. Boat traffic moving between the LMR and the MMR could not avoid traveling through them. Yet doing so required navigating harrowing passes where islands littered the channel and collected a menacing assortment of planters and

[9] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 41 (1969), 104.

sawyers. Fueled by the Ohio and hemmed by the Bluffs, the Mississippi's waters sped around such obstructions making it difficult for boatmen to steer their crafts. The river naturally funneled traffic into particular routes, occasionally forcing boats near the eastern shoreline. This was the case at the foot of *Sakti Lhafa'*.

Though Chickasaws certainly understood the bluffs differently than European travelers, their eyes fell upon the same sights. Cultural perspectives aside, one's view of the bluffs and the Mississippi hinged on several considerations. For instance, the picture presented from the water differed markedly from the spectacle at the top. Likewise, appearances transformed when proceeding upstream rather than down. Furthermore, impediments to river travel turned to assets when attempting to block traffic. Ugulayacabé's European contemporaries marveled at such imposing challenges and the stunning scenery.

Adventurer Thomas Ashe described his trip downriver through this section in 1806. "The Chickasaw Bluffs are one hundred and fifty-one miles from the mouth of the Ohio," he explained. "I should have found it a very lonesome stretch, had I not been incessantly employed in preserving the boat from danger; from rocks, sawyers, and snags; and from eddies, gulphs, bayaus, points, and bends in the river." These obstacles proved only half the battle in his estimation. "The attention is also kept awake by the necessity of looking out for islands, in order to choose the proper channel, and to pull

for it in time, or before the boat falls into the race of a wrong one."[10] Failing to avoid any one of these obstacles could prove disastrous.

Figure 11: Chickasaw Bluffs Map, ca. 1765.
Lieut. Ross and Robert Sayer, Course of the river Mississippi from the Balise to Fort Chartres; taken on an expedition to the Illinois, in the latter end of the year 1765 (London: Printed for Robt. Sayer, 1775).

Native Americans struggled with similar challenges and dealt with them accordingly. At a place north of the Ohio, a massive rock climbed from the Mississippi

[10] Thomas Ashe, *Travels in America performed in 1806, for the purpose of exploring the rivers Alleghany, Monongahela, Ohio, and Mississippi, and ascertaining the produce and condition of their banks and vicinity* (London: R. Phillips, 1808), III: 139.

River to form an elevated island unto itself. According to a French missionary the stone outcropping "makes the river turn very short and narrows the channel, causing a whirlpool in which it is said canoes are lost during the high waters. On one occasion fourteen Miamis perished there. This has caused the spot to be dreaded by the savages, who are in the habit of offering sacrifices to that rock when they pass there."[11] When steering around of these places could not be avoided, appeals to spiritual forces and taboos were used to offset the risk. Potentially perilous areas of a river, known in Chickasaw as *okishtahollo'*, necessitated silent observation. Otherwise, this "witch water" would "bubble and rise toward" the person who "makes a noise."[12] Even with experience and proper precautions, river travel remained dangerous. In February 1753, a party of Cherokees arrived in the Chickasaw Nation "naked" after "the Falls or Breakers, [combined with] the Rapit running of the Water overset four of their Canoes." In the aftermath "they lost all their Guns, Blankets, and Boots, and had two Men drownded."[13] Such hazards were particularly acute throughout the Chickasaw Bluffs.

The Mississippi adjusted its course for these heights, creating and destroying obstacles as it went. These impediments made the river difficult to navigate according to Christian Schultz. "The Upper Chickasaw Bluffs," he wrote, border the sky for "about one mile along the river" and sat "eleven miles" apart from the second set, "which are of the same extent as the former." From these, the river turned ragged and

[11] This rock became known as Cap St. Cosme. See Louise Phelps Kellogg, ed., *Early Narratives of the Northwest, 1634-1699* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 356-357; Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 58-59.
[12] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 274.
[13] John Buckles did not make clear which river the Cherokees were traversing when this occurred. See DRIA I, 384.

far more threatening. “Sixteen miles below,” the water rumbled “very difficult and dangerous” as it tumbled through “the Devil’s Race Ground.” Here “the rapidity of the current, together with the obstruction of planters and sawyers,” earned the passage its nickname. Surviving that obstacle and moving “ten miles” further the third set of bluffs cast their shadow “nearly a mile along the river,” with “high” and “narrow commanding ridges.” A sharp left hook quickly followed, kinking the river in “one of the greatest bends” on the LMR. “Twenty-six miles below” the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff began to elevate above the water near a “small stream” known as Wolf River. From his vantage, these heights seemed to “tower sixty feet above the greatest rise of the river” and did so for “about ten miles on the river.” Given the bluff’s massive scale Schultz felt confident there was “no danger of its being washed away like the other parts of the bank.”[14]

The Navigator, published a little over a decade after Schultz’s voyage, proves how much the river could change in time. Neither the channel nor the “Upper Chickasaw Bluff” warranted much concern, although the Mississippi reportedly met the Second Bluff abruptly. “The river bearing hard against the bluff,” the author explained, “subjects it to an almost constant caving down, hence the face of the bluff is kept fresh in its appearance.” Having passed a “very narrow” right turn and an eddy “close to the bluff,” the channel again widened to ease travel. In fact, the power of the New Madrid earthquakes in 1811-1812 realigned the river and redeemed the devil in the process. “The right channel is now the best and in fact the main one,” *The Navigator* reported, “though so bad a few years ago as to get the name of the Devil’s Race Ground.” Drastic

[14] Christian Schultz, *Travels on an inland voyage through the states of New-York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee: and through the territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New-Orleans; performed in the years 1807 and 1808; including a tour of nearly six thousand miles* (New York: Printed by Isaac Riley, 1810), 109-111.

shifts like this did not occur often, but changes in navigational routes transpired regularly due to flooding. Without guidebooks like this one, Chickasaws relied on one another to stay abreast of such alterations. Knowing which *ittifilammi*, or branch, to take and which to avoid kept them safe on the water and helped them obstruct others.[15]

Though most Chickasaw raids concluded before the publication of *The Navigator*, it describes the types of environmental features that made their success along the Mississippi possible. An oblong peninsula between the third and fourth bluff serves as an illustration for how this worked. Apparently the New Madrid earthquakes did not offer salvation for the entire river because boats still encountered the "Devil's Elbow." This landmass dominated the river jutting out and filling the channel with debris. As a remedy the guide advised:

> In approaching this chute, you must hug close round the left hand point until you come in sight of the sand bar, whose head has the appearance of an old field of trees; then pull over for the island to keep clear of the snags on your left, while you leave those along the head of the island on your right, taking care not to approach these last too near, for the current is so rapid, that the striking one might so shock the boat as to endanger the cargo. The channel to the right of No. 38 is now too dangerous to be run, it being chocked, and filled with snags and sawyers.[16]

With limited options, boats *had* to veer near the east bank to avoid wrecking. Yet doing so brought them within range of musket fire or arrows loosed from the shore. With their hand upon their oars, boatmen could do little to defend themselves.

[15] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 197.
[16] Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator Containing Directions for Navigating the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers* (Pittsburgh: Cramer & Spear, 1824), 145-147.

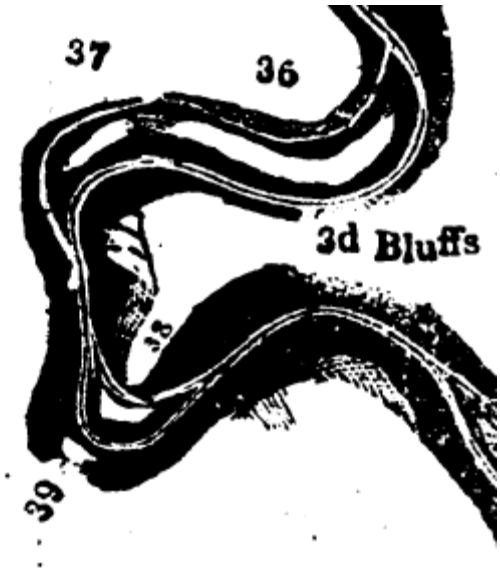

Figure 12: Mississippi River at Third Chickasaw Bluff Map, ca. 1811. Cramer, *The Navigator,* 155. Land formations like "Devil's Elbow" (no. 38) created obstructions within the Mississippi's channel that worked to funnel boat traffic near the eastern shore. Chickasaw warriors took advantage of places like this to limit the movement of their enemies.

Those going upriver became particularly vulnerable when forced near the shoreline. Since the current generally moved fastest in the middle of the river, rowing upstream was easiest at the channel's edges. French convoys, like Ducoder's, tried to parallel the west bank, taking advantage of these slower waters while avoiding potential Chickasaw attacks. Voyageurs where "most at risk when they have to paddle up the river, since when holding their oars, they cannot defend themselves from a surprise attack, which is the strategy most favored and most often employed by the barbarous Indian nations," Lieutenant Dumont explained.[17] Sticking to the western portion of the river mitigated this risk until islands, planters and sawyers, river bends, swift currents, or even weather obliged them to switch sides.

Yet nature was no partisan and did not pick sides in the struggles over its rivers. As John Stuart made clear to Lord George Germain in the midst of the American Revolution, Chickasaw patrols on the Ohio and Mississippi did not constitute

[17] Dumont, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont,* 291.

blockades. “As from the width and rapidity of their streams, more especially at the parts where these Indians must of course be stationed,” Stuart explained, “it may not be always in their power to succeed in intercepting such rebel expeditions.”[18] Without large navies or long-range canons, Native nations could not establish foolproof cordons. Even where the river normally narrowed, floods might quickly advantage paddlers. With the banks inundated, warriors on land had to retreat while boatmen gained more surface area to maneuver. Accelerated currents also sped those heading downstream past anyone wishing them ill. Thus, impeding river traffic required assessing water levels, river patterns, and landforms.

Where the environment allowed, Chickasaws struck. In one instance a young warrior “concealed himself under cover of a fallen pine tree, in view of the ford” opposite a Creek village on the Coosa River. “The enemy now and then passed the river in their light poplar canoes” so, according to James Adair, “he waited, with watchfulness and patience almost three days” before killing three passersby. The riverine landscape again proved advantageous in 1736. After blunting d’Artaguette’s invasion, Chickasaw war parties headed to the Chickasaw Bluffs intent on punishing the French. “Some went to the Missisippi, made a fleet of cypress-bark canoes, watched their trading boats, and cut off many of them without saving any of the people,” Adair reported.[19]

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[18] K.G. Davies, ed., Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783. Vol. XVII, Transcripts, 1779 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1977), 29.
[19] Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 395-396, 355; Samuel Cole Williams, *Beginnings of West Tennessee, In the Land of the Chickasaws, 1541-1841* (Johnson City, TN.: The Watauga Press, 1930), 20-26.

From atop these heights, Chickasaw scouts could spy (*hapompoyo'*) watercraft passing in either direction. The Chickasaw Bluffs became a *nannaa-apiisachi'*, a lookout place or watchtower of sorts.[20] Naturally lookouts intensified during times of conflict and perhaps in the summer when river levels dropped and travel increased. British trader John Buckles made frequent mention of such watch parties throughout much of 1752. "Thirty Chickersaws left this Nation with a Desgin to look for French Boats," his journal entry from August 13th notes. These men returned from "out on the River Missisippia" in October "without doing any Mischief." In fact, he told Governor James Glen of South Carolina, "several Parties of Chickasaws" had gone "to War against the French in order to meet with their Boats on Missisipia River." More Chickasaws headed to the river that fall "to watch the Motions of the French to see if they can make any Discovery." Come January, a party arrived back having been "out a scouting" when they captured "five French Men Prisoners" from "the other Side of the Missisipia River."[21] Buckles did not pinpoint the Chickasaw Bluffs as the locus for such watchfulness, but French reports do.[22]

From the vantage of the fourth bluff, lookouts gained an especially impressive view. One early nineteenth century observer recorded, "The Chickasaw Bluff is a very high red bank on the eastern side of the river." Near its summit, the Mississippi's voluminous curves sprawled out before him. "Over the Louisiana shore the sight has no limit, but rushes unrestrained over an immense expanse of forest." He continued gushing, "To the right it is arrested by a fantastic bend of the river…to the left it strays

[20] Munro and Willmond, *Chickasaw*, 97, 251.
[21] DRIA I, 364-366 &382-384.
[22] Bossu, *Travels through that part of North America*, 309-310; MPA:FD V, 131.

amidst a cluster of islands, through the channel of which the water meanders."[23] The nuances within the river certainly varied over time, but the general overview would have remained much the same throughout the eighteenth century. Boat traffic in either direction could be spied and tracked from high above the water. A station on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff proved "commanding from its elevated situation," according to another travel report.[24] None of this was lost on the Chickasaws themselves. "Our forts," Ugulayacabé explained, "[were] the woods" about those heights.

The river also presented its own unique challenges as it passed this rocky outcropping. "The Mississippi frequently rises to a height of forty feet," Christian Schultz noted, "and there the banks are of any extraordinary elevation, the difficulty of ascending their slippery sides, particularly when the water is low, is proportionably great; and this is the case with all the bluffs, or head lands."[25] Topography limited the number of landing spots available on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, as it did throughout the string of heights. Fewer places to beach also meant less waterfront for scouts to observe. Not only that, but the river's movements directed boat traffic towards the fourth bluff. One Spanish official warned, "There is a whirlpool which forces boats to pass within pistol shot of the hill which dominates the river."[26] Forced near the shore, yet unable to land, boat travelers became vulnerable at the base of the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff.

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[23] Ashe, *Travels in America*, III: 141-142.
[24] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), IV: 295.
[25] Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage*, 111.
[26] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 32 (1960), 88.

Topography and geography gave Chickasaws enormous sway over much of the LMR. From the Fourth Bluff, a nation could influence the waterway upstream and down. Warriors from other nations utilized advantageous river sites to obstruct their enemies, but these did not match the Chickasaw Bluffs in importance.[27] British diplomat Edmond Atkin recognized as much in his plan for gaining control of the colonial southeast. Three points within Chickasaw Country could derail the "free Navigation of the Missisippi, and Communication between New Orleans and Montreal, or the Illinois," he asserted. The mouth of the Wolf River on the north end of the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff held great importance, as did the mouths of the Tennessee and Ohio rivers. From the Chickasaw Bluff, Atkin claimed, "The passage of the Missisippi may be commanded."[28] A generation later, the Spanish governor of Louisiana, Baron de Carondelet, wholeheartedly agreed. Whoever possessed this spot, he explained, were in effect "masters of the navigation of the Mississippi through the advantages of being in a situation above Walnut Hills, Natchez, and New Orleans, to which by means of the rapid current they could arrive in a few days, while going up to the Bluffs would require months." [29]

In times of conflict Chickasaws exploited this naturally occurring checkpoint to their advantage. Following the failed accord in 1745, warriors made good on their headmen's promise to "attack all the French and the red men" on the Mississippi.[30]

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[27] By way of comparison, a Creek and Cherokee war party took advantage of a narrow passage on the Wabash River to waylay an American envoy in 1790. Though successful in blocking the Americans' advance, the location of this particular bottleneck held less strategic importance in terms of travel throughout the Mississippi Valley. See Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 24 (1952), 109.
[28] Atkin, *Indians of the Southern Colonial Frontier*, 67-69.
[29] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 32 (1960), 88.
[30] MPA:FD IV, 212.

From then on colonial administrators could not count on convoys or voyageurs passing the bluffs unmolested. "At the Prudhomme Bluffs on the [Mississippi] river" in the summer of 1751, Chickasaws "defeated the pirogue" of six hunters.[31] Then in 1752 and 1753 convoys descending from Illinois to New Orleans also came under fire. Of these attacks Jean-Bernard Bossu, a Captain in the French Marine, reported the Chickasaws "always choose some advantageous situation, to make an attack in, their most common post is at the rocks of the Prudhomme." After all, nature granted both scouts and warriors the upper hand in those parts. "The river being narrow there, they can annoy the boats," Bossu grumbled. When two officers failed to take proper precautions on account of "not knowing the topography of the country" they paid with their lives.[32] The parties Buckles witnessed going to the river undoubtedly played a role in their demise.

Inexperienced Frenchmen may not have known the lay of the land, but Chickasaw spies and warriors did, and they used it to their advantage. John Pettycrew informed Governor Glen of these developments while trading amongst the Chickasaws in 1752. "The Chickesaws had cut off several Boats in the Missippi this Summer and

[31] MPA:FD V, 108-109.

[32] The location of Prudhomme Bluff has been the subject of some historical debate. A hunter named Prudhomme got lost on one of the four Chickasaw Bluffs during La Salle's expedition down the Mississippi in 1682. The party built makeshift defenses, Fort Prudhomme, while they searched for him and the name stuck. Historians disagree over whether this took place on the First Chickasaw Bluff, near modern-day Fulton, TN, or at the Fourth Bluff where Memphis now stands. However, most French primary sources refer to the fourth bluff as Ecores a Prudhomme and that is the case with Bossu, although it was also known as the Ecores á Margot at times. While discussing a convoy heading downstream Bossu wrote, "after passing the rocks at Prudhomme, there are no other in the Missisippi." Given the Chickasaw Bluffs are the major rock formations along the LMR, this had to be the fourth bluff or else he would have passed the others in his descent. See Bossu, *Travels through that part of North America*, 204-205 & 309-310. For more on the location of the Prudhomme Bluff see J.P. Young, "Fort Prudhomme: Was it the First Settlement in Tennessee?" *Tennessee Historical Magazine* II, no. 4 (Dec., 1916), 235-244 and Stubbs, "The Chickasaw Contact with the La Salle Expedition in 1682," 41-48.

killed twenty French Men," he reported, before noting, "It's probable that there may be some French Prisoners taken by the Chickesaws."[33] By late summer of 1753, passing along the river had become nearly impossible. Chevalier de Kerlérec, then governor of Louisiana, warned the commanding officer at the Arkansas post to remain vigilant. He ordered Sieur de La Houssaye to monitor "the space of forty leagues above and below on both banks of the [Mississippi] river against the raids and attacks that some bands of Chickasaws, Cherokees, and Shawnees make from time to time on our boats."[34] Had Houssaye scouted this distance upriver, he would have found himself at the foot of the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, but apparently not even avoiding the eastern shoreline would have assured his safety during such a mission.

Potential warpaths drawn across the Chickasaw map in 1737 had come to fruition by the 1750s. With their offer of peace rebuffed, the Chickasaws put the riverine landscape and bluff's topography to work. At points where the Mississippi narrowed and streamflow hindered enemy boatmen, warriors struck. From the vantage point atop the Chickasaw Bluffs, scouts could assess river conditions and anticipate the movements of traffic below. These advantages combined in spectacular fashion at *Sakti Lhafa'*. The tapered channel and swirling currents forced watercraft to its base. From the bird's eye view above, Chickasaw warriors could spy unsuspecting boaters below. Then using the current to their advantage, these warriors disrupted French convoys which threatened the security of the Chickasaw Nation.

[33] DRIA I, 352.
[34] MPA:FD V, 131.

Bargaining Chip

Sakti Lhafa' had long defined the Mississippi River, which delineated the western reaches of the Chickasaw homeland. After the Treaty of Paris officially ended the Seven Years, War in 1763, the river also came to demarcate the extent of British and Spanish land claims in North America. Down the rivers' twists, turns, and bends the treaty prescribed "a line drawn along the middle" in order that territories on either side might be "fixed irrevocably."[35] Native Americans, of course, recognized that certain rivers distinguished boundaries so this concept was not entirely foreign. After all, Chickasaws already used the river to divide time and space. However, their designations centered on socio-religious beliefs and Native political history, not European law or theories.[36] Furthermore, currents and landforms, seasonality and flooding, trade and alliances, could not be ignored.

During the American Revolution, British and Spanish authorities came to realize their line meant little when compared to these principles. Up until that time, Britain generally benefited from the enormous influence the Chickasaws accrued at *Sakti Lhafa'*. The Chickasaws' well-earned reputation as fierce warriors and the physical geography both worked in their favor. British officials anticipated Chickasaw support would buttress their interests against the rebellious colonists, too. However, the Chickasaws were neither gatekeepers nor mercenaries. For their part, Spanish officials came to appreciate *Sakti Lhafa's* importance on the Mississippi and the value of a

[35] Treaty of Paris 1763, article VII.
[36] Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 19.

Chickasaw alliance. After suffering several river raids by Loyalist holdouts orchestrated by James Colbert, the governor of St. Louis sought Chickasaw assistance. Once again Chickasaw diplomats skillfully deployed captives and claims to the Mississippi when negotiating an accord. In each case the river enhanced the Chickasaws' captivity to serve their own interests while appeasing their European partners.

Immediately following the Seven Years' War, the Chickasaws began facilitating, rather than hindering, river travel. In the summer of 1765, a party of 125 Chickasaws, led by principal war chief Paya Mataha, met a British regiment led by Major Robert Farmar at the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff. To that point, navigation of the Mississippi had proven to be "extremely difficult and intricate" for his men who were unaccustomed to the waterway. Ordered upriver to seize former French posts in Illinois, Farmar found himself "but Five Days bad Provisions left" when the Chickasaws arrived. Besides being a critical stronghold, *Sakti Lhafa'* was a favored Chickasaw hunting ground, and the party quickly "supplied" the regiment "plentifully with Buffalloe Bear and Venison." A number of them then escorted the regiment to Fort de Chartres, sending out "Flanking parties to attend the 34th Regiment in its passage up the Mississippi." Impressed with their service, Farmar concluded, "That Nation can be very Usefull in case of Disturbances amongst the Northern Indians, as would not only cut of[f] all Supplies, but would also Strike upon them with as many Men as we would Choose."[37] In his trip, Farmar discovered the simple lesson France had long since known: allies shared river-paths, while enemies did not. Native nations along the

[37] Clarence W. Alvrod and Clarence E. Carter, eds., *The New Régime, 1765-1767* Collections of the Illinois Historical Society, vol. 11 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1916), 127-131.

Mississippi widely followed this principle, which is why Farmar required Chickasaw protection.

Ten years later, during the American Revolution, the distinctions between enemies and allies frustrated British officials' calls to suspend traffic on the Mississippi River. The Chickasaws had repeatedly served the Crown's interests, and many bureaucrats assumed they would again. From West Florida, Governor Peter Chester assured his superiors that the Chickasaws "have always been very good friends of the English," and he was confident "they will join us."[38] This time, Spanish ships engaging in clandestine trade with the Americans were to be targeted. Monitoring this activity reduced the chances that supplies might slip upstream from New Orleans to the American rebels above the Ohio River.[39] Loyalist strongholds at Natchez and in West Florida would also be secured from American attacks generated upriver. John Stuart, the British Indian Superintendent, asked for Choctaw and Chickasaw "assistance" in this endeavor, which he considered "absolutely necessary for the effect."[40]

Whereas Chickasaw and British interests so often aligned against the French, a majority of Chickasaws did not see these new objectives adding to their own security. French outposts along the Mississippi had directly threatened their welfare. The upstart rebels had no such holdings, and they resided to the east. With its powerbase in New Orleans, France always had to contend with the Mississippi's currents that worked to the Chickasaws' advantage. The Ohio and Tennessee rivers, on the other hand, flowed

[38] Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 71.
[39] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 101 & Kathryn T. Abbey, "Peter Chester's Defense of the Mississippi After the Willing Raid," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 22 no. 1 (June, 1935), 18-19.
[40] CO 5, vol. 79, 788.

east to west, favoring the Americans. As evidenced in the Chickasaws' map from 1723, they knew these rivers extended into the colonies and could support watercraft. An American army might well be propelled downstream into Chickasaw territory. In fact, such concerns severely limited Chickasaw participation at the Mobile conference hosted by John Stuart in 1777. The delegates who did attend explained that most of their people stayed behind believing it "prudent to remain at home to defend their country, which they were determined to do to the last extremity."[41] Despite this defensive measure, the Chickasaws were not at odds with the Americans as they had been with the French.

Chickasaws had the ability to curtail river traffic; they simply did not deem it necessary for their security. France had secretly transferred Louisiana to Spain, at the Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762, to help pay its war debt. Even with the defeat of their chief European rival, the political divisions within the Chickasaw Nation remained. Afterwards Ymahatabe's old faction looked to Spain as a possible trade partner and potential military counterweight. They had little interest in detaining Spanish vessels. Meanwhile pro-British headmen had begun competing with one another for manufactured goods and political influence.[42] At the Mobile conference, Stuart attempted to leverage Great Britain's trade advantage into more direct action. James Colbert, a staunch loyalist living amongst the Chickasaws, did manage to raise a few parties to patrol the Mississippi in the latter half of 1777. Occasionally Spanish boats encountered light Chickasaw firepower at the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, warranting

[41] DAR 14, 79-82.
[42] Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 220-222.

protest from Governor Bernardo de Galvez at New Orleans, but the Chickasaws' efforts were not sustained. In fact, James Willing led a small group of Patriots down the Mississippi in an armed vessel that winter. They encountered only "slight" resistance at the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff before continuing to Walnut Hills and Natchez.[43] Chickasaw history and the environmental advantages to be had at *Sakti Lhafa'* demonstrate a concerted effort by some Chickasaws might have stopped Willing, but other priorities consumed their attention.[44]

According to Stuart, the Chickasaws' overall reluctance to engage stemmed from a lack of hostility. The head war chief Paya Mataha explained as much during a meeting at Pensacola in 1778. "I found that it was with the utmost difficulty he could place in the light of enemies those men whom from his earliest infancy he had been taught to consider as his dearest friends, whom he had assisted and defended upon many occasions at risk of his life," Stuart wrote. "He could not bring himself to imbrue his hands in the blood of white people without the greatest reluctance," fearing the repercussions "of committing some fatal blunder by killing the King's friends instead of

[43] Abbey, "Chester's Defense of the Mississippi," 21. For more on the Willing Raid see Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 103; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 223; John Caughey, "Willing's Expedition Down the Mississippi, 1778," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Jan., 1932), 5-36 and Robert V. Haynes, "James Willing and the Planters of Natchez: The American Revolution Comes to the Southwest," *Journal of Mississippi History*, vol. 37 (1975), 1-40.
[44] Ethan A. Schmidt, *Native Americans in the American Revolution: How the War Divided, Devastated, and Transformed the Early American Indian World* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, an Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), 105-106. In light of his recent tragic passing, I have been reflecting on the Ethnohistory Conference in 2013 when I met Dr. Schmidt. He chaired a panel featuring many distinguished academics and I found myself, the lone graduate student, among them. As the youngest and least accomplished he might have afforded me less time and respect than my fellow panelists, but he did not. It seems an odd thing to place in a footnote, but historians live and breathe footnotes, and so his act of kindness (in addition to his work) will be remembered here. Thank you Dr. Schmidt.

his enemies."[45] Adversaries suffered the consequences of traversing the Mississippi, not allies, and Chickasaws had no interest in confusing the two.

Only after American and Spanish agents threatened the security of the Chickasaw Nation in 1779 did they truly respond in force. Furious over Virginia's ultimatum for war or peace, the principal red chiefs and all the warriors informed the Virginians "We desire no other friendship of you but only desire you will inform us when you are Coming and we will save you the trouble of Coming quite here for we will meet you half Way."[46] In New Orleans, the Spaniards received a similar message after news that they had encouraged Choctaw hostilities against the Chickasaws circulated about the region.[47] Then in 1780, Thomas Jefferson, governor of Virginia, ordered George Rodgers Clark to erect a fort on the Mississippi's east bank near the mouth of the Ohio. Like so many before him, Jefferson recognized the strategic value of the Ohio-Mississippi intersection, but ran afoul of the Chickasaws trying to control it.

Chickasaw war parties immediately sprang into action, placing the river and the fort under siege. American and Spanish boats encountered resistance on the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers. By the fall of 178,0 John Stuart's replacement, Alexander Cameron, could report, "The Chickasaws are constantly hunting the Mississippi and Cherokee [Tennessee] Rivers for Virginians, French and Spaniards and every now and then some of each are knocked in the Head."[48] More fortunate travelers were plucked from the water and sold for ransom.[49] Residents of the newly established Fort Jefferson

[45] DAR 15, 183-184.
[46] Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 226.
[47] CO 5, vol. 80, 243-245.
[48] CO 5, vol. 82, 640.
[49] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 107.

faired much worse. Repeated attacks against crops, cattle, and settlers forced the fort's abandonment in June 1781, just a year after its completion.[50]

Spain had joined the American war effort two years earlier and quickly claimed West Florida in the process. Loyalists from Natchez fled north after a failed rebellion and sought shelter from James Colbert in the Chickasaw Nation. This native Scotsman had lived amongst the nation since his youth and established kinship ties through his three wives and eight children.[51] He used this influence to harbor nearly three hundred British refugees near the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff for much of 1782. Refusing to accept Spanish victories along the Mississippi, Colbert employed the advantages of *Sakti Lhafa'* as his adopted nation had so often done. From a basecamp on the Wolf River, his Loyalist holdouts launched assaults on Spanish ships near the bluffs. However, this put a growing number of Chickasaws in an awkward position. British supply lines had lagged and Britain's defeat seemed imminent. Many Chickasaws actually began to favor an alliance with Spain. Never ones to miss an opportunity on the river, some individuals welcomed the booty Colbert snagged while Chickasaw diplomats bargained with Spanish officials.

On April 2, 1782 Colbert and his raiders captured a keel-boat out of New Orleans bound for the Spanish garrison at St. Louis. The boat, owned and operated by Silvestre l'Abadie, had been hugging the Mississippi's west bank opposite the Fourth

[50] Robertson, "Fort Jefferson," 127-138; Kathryn M. Fraser, "Fort Jefferson: George Rogers Clark's Fort at the Mouth of the Ohio River, 1780-1781," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 81, no. 1 (Winter, 1983), 1-24; Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 72-73; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 227; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 108.
[51] Guy B. Braden, "The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* vol. 17 (Sept., 1958), 223.

Chickasaw Bluff when a voice rang out from the shore requesting an audience. Once l'Abadie landed to inquire about the matter, a party of Loyalists rushed from the woods, weapons drawn, and seized the vessel. Merchandise earmarked for Spain's Indian allies and 4,900 pesos fell to the Loyalist holdouts. In addition, the young wife and four children of Lieutenant-Colonel Francisco Cruzat, governor of St. Louis, came under Colbert's authority. Having assured Madam Cruzat of their safety, Colbert and crew rowed the keel-boat, prisoners and all, back to their camp.[52]

Two of Colbert's sons might well have been the only Chickasaws involved in the ploy, but that did not stop others from benefiting.[53] According to Madam Cruzat's testimony, the party moved further up the Wolf River the following day, though "the rapidity of the current" due to "the narrowness and slope of the river" made it slow going, as did "the trees that were in that river." Nevertheless, they made close to four leagues and "commenced to unload the boat." Over four days, the loot slowly accumulated on the ground: "tableware of silver" in one pile, "clothes" in another, "guns" here, and "other merchandise" there. While these items were collected in the open, Colbert's Loyalists carefully covered the powder "with oilcloths or oilskins" for safekeeping. Having finished their task and divided "about six thousand pesos" amongst themselves, they put some slaves and the silver up for auction. All the other goods "were evenly distributed," except the "powder, bullets, and brandy" which remained in

[52] D.C. Corbitt, "James Colbert and the Spanish Claims to the East Bank of the Mississippi," *The Mississippi Historical Review*, vol. 24, no. 4 (March, 1938), 457-472; James E. Roper, "The Revolutionary War on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff," *The West Tennessee Historical Society* vol. 29 (Oct., 1975), 12-15.

[53] A Spanish report named Robert Thomas "half-breed Indian of the Chickasaw nation" as possibly being "in league" with Colbert at the time of Madam Cruzat's capture. See Kinnaird, *"*Spain in the Mississippi Valley*,"* III: 158-159.

reserve. Then, a few days later, "two hundred Chicachas more or less" joined the British party at which time the brandy and powder were "divided among all, including the Indians."[54]

Madam Cruzat's statement is telling in a number of ways. First, almost no Chickasaws joined Colbert's efforts to disrupt Spanish boats. Second, Colbert piloted the Wolf River despite all of its challenges. The river cut across the north end of *Sakti Lhafa,'* and Colbert knew its capacities after living nearly forty years with the Chickasaws. Finally, the fact that the Loyalists did not divvy up the powder and brandy, like the other goods, indicates they planned to rendezvous with the Chickasaws. These British holdouts continued to pursue the war effort and most "were continually drunk," so both the powder and the brandy would have been highly prized.[55]

The Loyalists' restraint indicates that a scheme to split these two valued goods was prearranged. Colbert may have wanted to gift the munitions to his Chickasaw relatives in order to curry favor, but Colbert only had nominal influence over the British holdouts he led. A Choctaw chief even claimed the outfit had "no ball nor cloth" and "did not wish to sell goods to the Chickasaws because they were keeping them for their own urgent requirements."[56] Nonetheless, Madam Cruzat saw them set aside "powder" and "bullets" which they divvyed up among their Chickasaw guests. Colbert's Chickasaw kin may have granted his Loyalists temporary access to the Fourth

[54] Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, I: 226-228. Silvestre l'Abadie estimated the number of Chickasaws to be "about two hundred and fifty." See Kinnaird, *"*Spain in the Mississippi Valley,*"* III: 15.
[55] Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, I: 227-228; Roper, "The Revolutionary War on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff," 15-18; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 112-113; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 229-230.
[56] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 57-58.

Chickasaw Bluff in return for these supplies. After all, sharing space on the Mississippi necessitated personal relationships and mutual exchange. Colbert had the obligatory familial ties, and the munitions helped procured safe haven.

The speed at which a large group of Chickasaws met Colbert also gives the impression their meeting was prearranged. It took between two and eight days to reach Chickasaw villages from the Loyalist enclave. And yet, according to Madam Cruzat, "eight or nine days after the capture of the boat," the Chickasaws arrived.[57] To keep with this timeline they must have left their homes shortly after word of Colbert's success reached them. Group decisions were communal, and often deliberative affairs, so consensus was either reached quickly or determined in advance. A couple hundred people made the trek to meet the British party, which indicates this was not an impromptu affair.[58] Most Chickasaws in attendance probably favored Britain and were willing to profit from Spain's misfortune. Although these Chickasaws would not join in Colbert's river raids, they would grant his refugees asylum. With gunpowder and lead running low in Chickasaw Country, the good plundered by Colbert must have been worth the trip.

What is less clear is the degree to which the Chickasaw Nation as a whole endorsed these actions. Some villages had received British refugees, although competing interests divided the Chickasaw people. Much like Mingo Ouma's raid back

[57] Madam Cruzat pegged the journey at eight days, though another captive thought two or three days sufficient. See Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri* I, 226, 228, & 231.
[58] Peter Wood estimated the Chickasaw population to be 2,300 in 1775 and 3,100 in 1790. If the population grew at a constant rate during that time they would have reached 2,700 by 1782. Therefore the party of 200-250 represented 7-9% of the entire Chickasaw population, far exceeding the members of Colbert's kinship network. See Wood, "Changing Population of the Colonial South," 95.

in 1735, Colbert's attack occurred in the midst of efforts to coordinate peace. Delegates had visited St. Louis just the month before requesting an accord with Spain, and Colbert repeatedly made clear to Spanish authorities that he did not fight on the Chickasaws' behalf.[59] In fact, a Spanish officer sent to investigate Madam Cruzat's capture determined, "the Chickasaw nation had had absolutely nothing to do with the affair and found itself undecided and not knowing what course to take."[60] Despite competing interests within the Chickasaw Nation, the long-term risk of alienating a European trade partner simply outweighed the short-term benefits. Though not overtly hostile to Spain, those "friends of the English" did accept the largess and even returned to their nation in custody of some thirty-odd prisoners.[61] Still, these actions did not entirely undermine those seeking peace. In early June, a messenger assured Paya Mataha that Miró was "convinced" the Chickasaws had "played no part in the attack lately perpetrated on the Mississippi River."[62] Building towards a partnership with Spain, Paya Mataha and other chiefs then used some of Colbert's captives to initiate a round of river diplomacy. Like their ancestors a generation earlier, they pursued a new partnership using the Mississippi and *Sakti Lhafa'* as leverage.

From his headquarters in St. Louis, Governor Cruzat grasped the role of the Mississippi River in Native American relations. Alliances begat transportation and trade, and so the interruption of either could be construed as an act of war. The governor

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[59] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 110-111; Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 60; Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, I: 221.
[60] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 50.
[61] Dozens of prisoners were sent with the Chickasaws, but Colbert released Madam Cruzat, l'Abadie and a man named Fropé with the assurance he would receive a ransom once they reached New Orleans. No word is given as to Cruzat's children, but it is likely they accompanied her. Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, I: 228-229.
[62] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 20.

operated according to these principals upon learning the fate of his family. “I adopted the most efficacious means…in order to have the Chickasaw nation on my side,” he wrote Miró that August. Knowing they had “carried on war” with nations “who live on the Mississippi River, and on the bank of Illinois,” he sought to rekindle the animosity. Though he held Colbert responsible, Cruzat informed the Kickapoos and Mascoutens that the Chickasaw Nation “had captured the boat” with their presents “and that it was necessary that they avenge a theft which was against themselves.” This party may not have cared about Cruzat’s family, but tampering with Spanish supply lines could not be tolerated. “Without the slightest delay they set out to attack the Chickasaws and the rebels,” Cruzat informed Miró.[63]

Even before the war party returned, Cruzat reveled in his apparent success. Some Chickasaws repatriated six of Colbert’s captives and presented themselves at St. Louis “to reiterate their desire for peace.” He reasoned they had been “filled with fear” once they discovered the northern Indians in their homeland and came to him to “put an end to a war which seemed directed anew.”[64] Besides overstating his own influence, patterns in Chickasaw history and the timing of these actions run counter to his assessment. Chickasaws did not scare easily nor depend on foreign officials to resolve their conflicts. They did, however, layer social geography upon *Sakti Lhafa’* and its river, which could divide as well as unite disparate peoples. Although Cruzat understood the Mississippi’s economic importance, his “success” stemmed, in part, from the triumph of these relationships.

[63] Kinnaird, “Spain in the Mississippi Valley,” III: 52-53.
[64] Kinnaird, “Spain in the Mississippi Valley,” III: 52-53.

Personal affiliations and the river's connections led to the captives' return and helped restore peace. James Colbert did not operate free of restraint within the Chickasaw Nation. Despite familial connections, the Loyalists' sanctuary at the Chickasaw Bluff was dependent on the goodwill of others. Because a growing majority of Chickasaws favored opening trade with Spain, Colbert found himself in a precarious position. Particulars remain murky but the sources suggest Colbert gifted six of his prisoners to chiefs in favor of a Spanish alliance to atone for his actions. Although captured and subsequently held by Colbert, several Spanish soldiers and a corporal were repatriated by pro-Spanish headmen. Cruzat explained these six "were the only ones in their power, for all others were held by the rebels."[65] Colbert retained control over the remaining captives, which implies he had consented to returning those six. Agreeing to part with a half dozen captives reaffirmed his bonds with opposing Chickasaw factions and allowed them to pursue their own objectives relative to Spain. Divisions within the Chickasaw Nation had not precluded internal cooperation in foreign relations with France, and this pattern continued with the Spanish.

Furthermore, these men returned via Indian emissaries. The chiefs delivered them up to a group of Loups, Peorias, and Kaskaskias, who ultimately brought them to Cruzat. Like the Kickapoos and Mascoutens they were among the many nations on the Mississippi that had a tumultuous history with the Chickasaws. These peoples were also allied to and traded with Spain, meaning their gifts had been stolen by Colbert. Yet, Cruzat does not seem to have "fired their spirits" in quite the same way. Instead, they returned the captives and assured the governor of Paya Mataha's commitment to protect

[65] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 53.

and forward others who might "escape" Colbert or his rebels. As go-betweens, and not combatants, the Loups, Peorias, Kaskaskias, and Chickasaws built sociopolitical bonds pursuant to their own objectives. This established mode of Native American politics set the stage for the commencement of trade and peace along the Mississippi River.

Afterwards Paya Mataha and ten other Chickasaw delegates travelled to meet Cruzat in St. Louis and "reiterate their desire for peace." They "begged me publicly," Cruzat crowed, to "pacify the nations of the Mississippi and the banks of the Illinois."[66] Yet this was certainly not the sole motivating factor for their visit. According to a Choctaw chief, the Chickasaws were "poor" and "no other white people except the Spaniards" could "supply their necessities."[67] Wanting peace but needing trade goods, Paya Mataha leveraged Colbert's raids to his advantage. Spanish ships had to make the difficult pass at *Saki Lhafa'* where Colbert lurked, so Paya Mataha used this as his primary bargaining chip. The Chickasaw delegation "assured" the governor "they would render no aid whatever to the rebels and pirates." In addition, "they would do everything within their power to expel the bandits from their nation and…make efforts to clear the banks of this [Mississippi] river of all the evil doers who infest it." Citing such "great evidence of sincerity," Cruzat claimed victory in his "objective" to "intimidate the Chickasaws" and promised to appease the Kickapoo and Macouten nations.[68]

While the governor marveled at his accomplishment, Paya Mataha and the other Chickasaw left St. Louis as the true winners. They needed to ally with Spain to avoid a

[66] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 53.
[67] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 57.
[68] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 52-54.

conflict, offset American influence, and gain steady access to the trade goods being shipped up and down the Mississippi River. Yet, the envoys gave up almost nothing, and were assured that Spain's "friendship would be reciprocal and generous." For returning the six prisoners, who they had not captured, the Chickasaw delegation received "a gift suitable to what the present circumstances called for" as did the Loup, Peoria, and Kaskaskia Indians. Meanwhile the Chickasaws' other promises bound them to do little more. Few, if any, Chickasaws outwardly aided Colbert, so this "concession" amounted to naught. Expelling the Loyalists and clearing the Mississippi around *Sakti Lhafa'* would take some doing, but how this might be accomplished or a timetable for such activities went unmentioned.[69] These nonbinding agreements actually served to enhance Chickasaw authority. By claiming the power to accomplish these tasks, Paya Mataha and his envoys bolstered Chickasaw command over the river. Cruzat's reliance on them, conversely, acknowledged Spain's vulnerability. In Cruzat's mind, these factors made their "good will" an "indispensable necessity" worthy of "presents" so as to win their allegiance "by all means possible."[70]

Whether Paya Mataha and the others acted in concert with Colbert or not, their combined efforts underscored the value of the Chickasaw Bluffs and their cooperation. Colbert proved to colonial officials the vulnerability of Spanish supply lines at the bluffs. Fears of "outrages" or of the Chickasaws "preventing of navigation on the Mississippi" continued to shape Cruzat's thinking and Spanish policy for years to

[69] Daniel Flaherty, "'People to Our Selves': Chickasaw Diplomacy and Political Development in the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2012.
[70] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 52.

come.[71] In the meantime hundreds of Chickasaws shared the bounty of his success.[72] Even those who publically condemned his actions profited from them. The transfer of Colbert's captives to pro-Spanish Chickasaws, then to the delegation of Illinois Indians, and finally to Cruzat in St. Louis facilitated Chickasaw, intertribal, and international reconciliation. In accordance with established Native American protocols the return of prisoners initiated the peace process via which travel and trade on the Mississippi might commence.[73]

Paya Mataha built on these factors in pursuit of commerce with Spain. Few Chickasaw warriors ever joined Colbert, but he could not, or would not, put an end to his raids. Only when word of the war's conclusion reached Colbert in the summer of 1783 did he completely suspend hostilities.[74] Meanwhile, after the Chickasaws' visit to St. Louis, Paya Mataha did not wait on Cruzat to orchestrate a peace. He hosted "seven different nations" including the Kaskaskia and Kickapoo that September. They too needed Chickasaw cooperation at the bluffs to facilitate Spanish commerce and urged a resolution.[75] Paya Mataha remained open to this idea and continued to send emissaries to meet with Spanish officials throughout the rest of 1782 and 1783. However, he only

[71] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 134-135.
[72] Colbert split the brandy and powder with his Chickasaw visitors but apparently refused to sell them any cloth or shot, preferring to hold them in reserve. See Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 57-58.
[73] The Quapaws also played a role in mediating Spanish and Chickasaw interests during this entire affair. See DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 153-158.
[74] Even after the disbandment of Colbert's followers some remained on the Mississippi. In November 1783 Paya Mataha reiterated his promise to "get rid of the remainder." See Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 90-91.
[75] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," III: 57-58.

committed to an official Spanish alliance in 1784 once it became clear the United States could not supply Chickasaw needs.[76]

As their British alliance had been, this was a match made of necessity. For Spanish authorities, the appeal of Chickasaw cooperation rested on their capacity to block American advances towards the Mississippi and control river traffic. With Chickasaw support Spain could supply St. Louis and their Indian allies while preventing American incursions downriver. From Paya Mataha's perspective and that of a majority of Chickasaws, Spain proved the best alternative to replace British commerce after the war.[77] They needed manufactured goods, plus a relationship with Spain might blunt American expansionism.[78] Much of this hinged on Chickasaw control of *Sakti Lhafa'* and the availability of Spanish merchandise. In recognition of this fact Paya Mataha travelled to the bluff and welcomed their traders in the spring of 1784. Unfortunately, the elderly headman fell ill while he was there. From his deathbed Paya Mataha recounted the past and laid out his vision for the future:

> Since the time when I gave my word to make peace with the Spaniards I have not broken it. I have directed all my labors toward counselling my young men to keep on good terms with that nation. I have convinced them that they could hope to get from no other nation the goods that they need. Already I have had the satisfaction of seeing subside little by little the enmity that my people used to hold toward the French and the Spaniards. I myself wish to die a Spaniard. I have ordered that when I am dead my

[76] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 120-124.
[77] White and red moiety designations seem to have played a lesser role in Chickasaw politics at this time. Although an accomplished war chief, Paya Mataha headed the pro-Spanish faction which originated from members of the white moiety who had generally favored the French. At that time they had been the minority, but after the American Revolution the pro-Spanish party became the majority. Conversely the new minority party, or pro-American faction, sprung from the pro-British party. Since the number of backers for each side switched, these designations cannot be entirely based on moiety affiliation. See Flaherty, "People to Our Selves," 41-49, 118-121; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 228, 234-237; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 107, 110-111, 137-138.
[78] Calloway, *The American Revolution in Chickasaw Country*, 233-235; Schmidt, *Native Americans in the American Revolution*, 161-163.

people shall set my body upon the bank of the Mississippi with my Spanish flag, and with my body it shall be burned.[79]

In accordance with his final wish, Paya Mataha's body was placed on the bank of the Mississippi, draped with a Spanish flag, and reportedly set alight.[80] This dramatic ceremony at *Sakti Lhafa'* was meant to bond Chickasaws and Spaniards in space. The physical geography remained unchanged, but Paya Mataha attempted to alter how people perceived that environment. The bluff and its river had always been essential to Chickasaw identity and independence. They split west from east and divided ancient history from the modern era, and now Paya Mataha intended to add another layer of meaning. He foresaw his people and the Spaniards as codependent along the Mississippi River. Expressed ceremonially at his death, each party merged with the other at *Sakti Lhafa'*. Based on the necessity of peace and trade, Paya Mataha adopted the Spanish into the region's sociopolitical geography. In doing so they joined the Chickasaws' past, present, and future. Thereafter *Sakti Lhafa'* would endure as a testament to their relationship, or so he hoped.[81]

British and Spanish expectations of the Chickasaws did not match their own outlook on these relationships. Colonial officials issued orders and demanded

[79] Stanley Faye, "The Arkansas Post of Louisiana: Spanish Domination." *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* vol. 27 (1944), 680.
[80] Chickasaws did not practice cremation so the final component of his request may be an embellishment by a Euro-American. Swanton, *Chickasaw Society and Religion*, 57-63; Gibson, "Chickasaw Ethnography," 104; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 124.
[81] This was not the first time Paya Mataha used symbolism to express himself and communicate about the Chickasaws' reliance on manufactured goods. At the 1771-1772 Mobile congress, he presented Charles Stuart with a bow and quiver of arrows. He did this in recognition of their ancestors' lives prior to receiving British guns and cloth with a request that the benefits continue. See Eron O. Rowland, "Peter Chester, Third Governor of the Province of British West Florida under British Dominion, 1770-1781," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, Centenary Series vol. 5 (1925), 108-160.

obedience. Chickasaws sought to maintain reciprocal bonds beneficial to all parties. When called to act upon the Mississippi they did so if it fit with their objectives. In return, Chickasaws expected to be provided with manufactured goods. Having demonstrated their capacity to curtail river traffic, Chickasaws could demand, and their allies paid, greater gifts. The unique combination of river and earth at *Sakti Lhafa'* allowed them to manipulate Britain's imperial ambitions and Spain's dependence on the Mississippi River. Paya Mataha wanted material support from his Spanish allies and was willing to integrate them into the Chickasaw's place-world to secure it. But, his final act took place where Spain had proven vulnerable and Chickasaw power was unquestioned.

Land Cession

Just two months after Paya Mataha's passing, representatives from every Chickasaw village travelled to Mobile where they signed a treaty with Spain. All parties pledged their allegiance and forged an exclusive trade agreement. Despite this show of unity and Paya Mataha's sentiments, American overtures for a similar arrangement persisted, as did Chickasaw factions. In January 1786, famed war leader Piomingo headed a much smaller delegation which signed the Treaty of Hopewell, on comparable terms, with the United States. The Chickasaws' geopolitical position once again put them at the center of the contest for the Lower Mississippi Valley. By signing competing commitments, the Chickasaw Nation ensured Spain and the United States

would continue to vie for its allegiance. Agents from both nations delivered annual gifts and lavished special attention on Chickasaw headmen. Chickasaws weighed the benefits of these alliances against the prospect of maintaining their place along the Mississippi River.[82]

Although relatively unknown to Spanish officials at the time, one of the cosigners at Mobile, a young man named Ugulayacabé, would eventually sway his people in their favor.[83] Unlike Piomingo, Ugulayacabé descended from the white moiety.[84] As a civil leader he came to front the pro-Spanish faction and often played the role of peacemaker. In so doing, he and Piomingo became rivals, but their contest always remained political. Much like Ymahatabe and Mingo Ouma before them, both men pursued their people's wellbeing, and at times personal interests, while avoiding civil violence. Along with the Chickasaw "King," Taski Etoka, they often met with Spanish or American delegates collectively. They knew and understood the position of the other, as well as those of their non-Native suitors. Therefore, national politics shaped international affairs, and international rivalries bleed into domestic matters. In this context, the Fourth Bluff played the role of bargaining chip, until sharing the river eventually required conceding a portion of *Sakti Lhafa'*.

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[82] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 124-133; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 234-237; Schmidt, *Native Americans in the American Revolution*, 162-163; Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 76-81; Richard Green, "Hearts and Minds of the Chickasaws in the 1780s," The Chickasaw Nation, https://www.chickasaw.net/Our-Nation/History/Historical-Articles/History/Homelands/Hearts-and-Minds-of-the-Chickasaws-in-the-1780s.aspx (accessed Sept., 25, 2015).
[83] Ugulayacabé was known to the Americans as Wolf's Friend and many historians refer to him as such.
[84] Atkinson found "no evidence" that Ugulayacabé "ever directly participated in war activities, which indicates that he had always been a peace chief." Conversely, Dyson deems him "a peace chief with an earned war title" because Ugulayacabé translates as "Waster of Each Nation." Whether or not he participated in warfare, it is clear he descended from the white moiety. See Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 127-128 and Dyson, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland*, 72 & 85-87.

Spaniards and Americans familiar with the region understood the strategic value of the Chickasaw Bluffs. Chickasaw success against French convoys and James Colbert's efforts at the end of the American Revolution dramatically emphasized the importance of *Sakti Lhafa* along the Mississippi. Having replaced Miró as governor of Louisiana at the end of 1791, Baron de Carondelet made the bluffs the centerpiece of his strategy to secure the colony. He believed that a fort on the Fourth Bluff could command the entire Mississippi River. When combined with a fleet of war vessels and a buffer of Indian allies, he was confident the east bank would "remain" Spanish territory. While Carondelet set his plan in motion, American agents continued to court the Chickasaws. Hostilities with some Creeks, stemming from Piomingo's relationship with the United States, threatened to engulf the Chickasaws in war during the spring of 1793. In response, the U.S. War Department shipped munitions and other supplies down the Mississippi to Piomingo, who gladly received them at the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff. Some Americans hoped, and Carondelet feared, a Creek-Chickasaw war would serve as a pretext for the United States to destroy the Creeks and establish a military installation on the bluff. In recognition of this, Carondelet redoubled his efforts to gain the bluffs for Spain.[85]

Despite immense pressures Ugulayacabé, Piomingo, and other Chickasaw leaders refused to allow a foreign presence on the Mississippi's namesake. Carondelet, however, hoped the enticement of a trade post might sway them and provide an excuse

[85] Jack D.L. Holmes, "Spanish-American Rivalry over the Chickasaw Bluffs, 1780-1795." *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 34 (1962), 37-42; Jane M. Berry, "The Indian Policy of Spain in the Southwest 1783-1795," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 3, no.4 (March, 1917), 470-477; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 155-158, 162-163, 170-177; Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives" 33 (1961), 62.

to build a fort as well.[86] Juan Villebeuvre, the Spanish agent to the Choctaws, informed Carondelet otherwise. The Chickasaws "consented" to a trade post, but "not exactly on Chickasaw Bluffs." Instead, they proposed "the flat ground" on the Yazoo River thirty leagues to the south. "Our horses are all dead" they lamely explained, so the bluffs "dont Suit us."[87] This might have been a plausible excuse except, a few months later, in the fall of 1793, they signed the Treaty of Nogales in which they requested "the bank of the Mississippi River" at *Sakti Lhafa'* serve as the delivery site for their annual presents.[88]

Although Ugulayacabé and Piomingo pursued different alliances, both opposed land cessions and shared the objective of Chickasaw independence. When rumors circulated Piomingo had consented to an American settlement on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, Governor Gayoso put Carondelet's nerves at ease. [89] "Many Chickasaws" had "assured" him that "while they are given support they will not permit the Americans there." In fact, none other than the Chickasaw King and "his three principal warriors" had boasted "they would either die or drive the Americans from Chickasaw Bluffs" if necessary.[90] These sentiments made it pointless for Spain to insist on acquiring land for a fort while treating at Nogales that October. "Under no circumstance will the

[86] Charles A. Weeks, *Paths to a Middle Ground: The Diplomacy of Natchez, Boukfouka, Nogales, and San Fernando de las Barrancas, 1791-1795* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 126-134.
[87] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives" 30 (1958), 97.
[88] Kinnaird, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley," IV: 225.
[89] As part of the Treaty of Hopewell, Piomingo did consent to a small concession at Ocochappo Creek, near Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River. Reports that he also agreed to an American trade post and fort at the Chickasaw Bluff surfaced in 1789 appear unfounded. See Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 154 &128-129; Charles A. Weeks, "Of Rattlesnakes, Wolves, and Tigers: A Harangue at the Chickasaw Bluffs, 1796." *The William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 67, no. 3 (July 2010), 496-497; John Walton Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 238-240; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 236.
[90] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives" 34 (1962), 96-97.

Chickasaws permit a white settlement at Chickasaw Bluffs: which, since it excludes the Americans, makes it unnecessary for us to insist upon it at least for now," Gayoso theorized.[91] Yet Carondelet persisted. "The Chicachá tribe, more jealous than any other in the possession of the lands, know the importance of the Ecores á Margot," he concluded, but "a good present, made with finesse and in time might surprise their consent."[92]

The advantages of *Sakti Lhafa* only served Chickasaw interests so long as they retained possession. As Ugulayacabé said, it was a "pretty convenient place the Bluffs."[93] Its environmental features and geographic location made it one of a kind. Beyond that, it defined the Mississippi River and the river, in turn, demarcated Chickasaw territory, defined their history, and was an intimate part of who they were. "As for the Bluffs," Ugulayacabé told Gayoso, "it is not a loan my talk to love that place…so you May depend on us not parting with it to any people."[94]

Supplies could be dropped off there, but neither Spaniards nor Americans could stay. In 1782 Piomingo and several other headman declared "the Road and water courses [to] be open" between themselves and the Americans. [95] In their minds, this declaration included the Mississippi River, although Spain officially denied the United States navigation rights. Piomingo recognized their ability and willingness to ship goods down the Mississippi. The Americans delivered supplies to him at the Fourth

[91] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives" 36 (1964), 71.
[92] Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri,* II: 16-17.
[93] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 40 (1968), 110.
[94] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 41 (1969), 104.
[95] Colin G. Calloway, ed., *Revolution and Confederation,* Vol. 18 in Alden T. Vaughan, gen. ed., *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1994), 277.

Chickasaw Bluff several times after that. Just as Ugulayacabé requested Spain deliver annual presents at *Sakti Lhafa'*, Piomingo directed the U.S. to "send a boat with provisions to the Bluffs" in 1795. "The provisions can be packed in from the Bluffs" to Chickasaw villages he explained.[96] He too recognized the strategic value of *Sakti Lhafa'* and understood the significance of their homelands to his people. The year before Piomingo scolded Benjamin Fooy, a Spanish agent living with the nation, for meddling in their lands. He asserted, "The white people is yet at some Distance from us facing of Each other therefore I am Resolved as we are yet people to our Selves."[97]

Ugulayacabé personally preferred Spanish naval power on the Mississippi over a land cession for a fort next to it. As part of his plan to defend Louisiana, Carondelet had created a squadron of war ships which began cruising the river in January 1792. If Spain feared an American takeover of the Fourth Bluff, as they often said, Ugulayacabé recommended he "Send about ten of them Boats" so that they would "have the pleasure of Seeing them Come."[98] Consisting of five light galleys, two galliots, and one smaller gunboat, Spain's navy had quickly become the dominant force on the water. Navigational challenges had forced France's largest gunboats to remain south of New Orleans, but Carondelet exercised his lighter war galleys throughout the LMR and beyond to St. Louis. Though petite by European standards, they dwarfed the pirogues and flatboats commonly used by the French and Americans. Spain's long slender

[96] Piomingo to James Robertson, 29 Sept. 1795, in Henley Papers, folder 11, document tl023, Tennessee State Library Archives, Nashville, TN.
[97] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives" 38 (1966), 81.
[98] The United States government had not secured navigation rights to the Mississippi and disgruntled settlers in the backcountry, inspired by the French Revolution, threatened to claim the river themselves. Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives" 41 (1969), 104-105 and Weeks, *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 128-131.

warships must have been some spectacle for anyone unaccustomed to oceangoing vessels. The mobile battleships were each equipped with oars, a mast and sails, up to eight swivel guns, and the galleys even had cannons. The squadron's unique stature certainly impressed Ugulayacabé.

As 1795 dawned, the naval strength of his Spanish ally gave Ugulayacabé some comfort in an otherwise dire situation. The Americans had occupied and rebuilt Fort Massac, on the Ohio River, that summer. This stronghold deeply concerned Ugulayacabé, and most Chickasaws, since it sat "on the Very Borders" of their land and gave newfound credence to rumors of a pending American occupation of *Sakti Lhafa'*.[99] "In spite of all my endeavours to preserve my land from the white people," he reported, the Cherokees and Americans had also coerced the Chickasaws' into allowing a fort on the Tennessee River near Muscle Shoals.[100] Taski Etoka, the king of the Chickasaws, died that fall as well, prompting a change in leadership.[101] Furthermore, the Creeks had killed his nephew the year before, and now hostilities threatened to consume the Chickasaw Nation again.[102] The pressure to concede land had made Ugulayacabé "crazy like the rest," and unless Spain sent munitions to fight the Creeks he spoke as a man "going to die." In February 1795, Ugulayacabé had to admit, "My land is at present full of trouble."[103]

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[99] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 41 (1969), 104 & 110.
[100] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 43 (1971), 105 & 107.
[101] Taski Etoka was succeeded by his brother Chinubbee who generally favored the Spanish over the Americans. See Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 167.
[102] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 32 (1960), 75; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 158.
[103] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 43 (1971), 105-106.

Facing American calls for land and war with the Creeks, Ugulayacabé and his fellow Chickasaws began to consider allowing a Spanish fort on *Sakti Lhafa'*.[104] Ugulayacabé had foreseen the end of the play-off system and knew a time would come for Native Americans to pick one side over the other. To continue defending Chickasaw space on the Mississippi, Ugulayacabé believed his nation had to cede a portion of *Sakti Lhafa'* to their Spanish ally. As national and international affairs changed, so did Chickasaw expectations of their allies.[105] This shift was the opening Carondelet had been waiting for. Captain Pedro Rousseau, squadron commander of the Mississippi galleys, set sail for the bluffs in the spring of 1795, bearing presents and orders to defend the heights against an American invasion. The threat never materialized, but several parties of Chickasaws, including Ugulayacabé and twenty-five warriors, joined him there shortly after his arrival. While awaiting Gayoso, so they might "come to an agreement," Ugulayacabé probed Rousseau about the fleet's capabilities. "The people of his Nation would be happy to see the squadron under full sail" Ugulayacabé told him, and asked "several times" if the Spanish could hold the bluffs against the Americans. Hearing that Spain would defend *Sakti Lhafa'*, Ugulayacabé seemed pleased and "said that he had told all his Nation that the Spaniards had many men and cannon as well as money."[106]

Two days later, on April 25, 1795, Ugulayacabé and the assembled Chickasaws witnessed Spain's fleet in action. Having distributed the presents and with a "steady wind" blowing, Rousseau "signaled the squadron to prepare to put on all sails." He

[104] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 43 (1971), 106-107; 44 (1972), 109.
[105] Flaherty, "People to Our Selves," 100-115.
[106] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 46 (1974), 113.

informed the Chickasaws camping on the Bluffs of the spectacle about to begin, and invited Ugulayacabé to join him aboard his flagship, *la Venganza*. This galley was an imposing specimen bobbing on the river with its sails puffed up and guns gleaming in the sunlight.[107] With everyone in place the squadron set sail promptly at 2:45, forming "a line of battle" directly "in front of the Bluffs" at which point the cannons fired in succession. "When the squadron had finished the Indians on the Bluffs replied with rapid volleys, which," Rousseau admitted, "had a charming effect." He thanked them with one final blast from the cannons before anchoring the fleet. Ugulayacabé "saw all of this with great satisfaction" and the Chickasaws celebrated this show of force well into the night. Convinced that Spanish firepower would safeguard the Chickasaw Nation along the Mississippi, Ugulayacabé returned to his village "to get its consent" for a trade post and fort.[108]

By the time Gayoso finally arrived at the Bluffs near the end of May, Ugulayacabé had returned and negotiations began. The Creeks were at fault in the current conflict, Ugulayacabé claimed, and he wanted Spanish aid to end it. In private he also spoke in favor of a fort although he maintained that he alone could not authorize it. Furthermore, "recompense" would be necessary to "satisfy his people" if "their land was cut up." Since the Spanish envoy had remained across the Mississippi, on the west bank,

[107] Coughlin, "Spanish Galleys on the Mississippi," 64-70.
[108] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 46 (1974), 114-115. Ugulayacabé began receiving an annual pension for his service to the Spanish during this time. While this cannot be overlooked there is no evidence that it influenced his thinking. See Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 173.

Gayoso understood these issues would need to be discussed in Ugulayacabé's "own country" with other "chiefs and headmen" of the Chickasaw Nation.[109]

Gayoso and his officers made their way across the Mississippi and met the assembled Chickasaws. Taking the floor, Gayoso assured those gathered that Spain would promote peace with the Creeks as they desired. In addition, he argued that a fort was necessary to defend Chickasaw lands and commerce from the Americans. Despite generally backing these proposals, Ugulayacabé and the others still wavered "in view of the fact that it was necessary to consult with the other [pro-American] chiefs of the nation" before ceding land. To this Gayoso consented, promising "the greater part" of Spain's gifts for those in attendance, but assured them "means were not lacking" for Piomingo and his faction too.[110] Pleased with what Gayoso said, Ugulayacabé and the others allowed land to be cleared for a fort. Having gone home and gained the support they needed, two Chickasaw chiefs, William Glover and Payehuma, returned a month later to sign a formal treaty relinquishing a portion of *Sakti Lhafa'*.[111]

This decision had not come easy, nor was it unanimous. Piomingo balked at this concession. He claimed to speak for the entire Chickasaw Nation when he demanded Gayoso "leave the Chickasaw Bluffs as you found it, and return home to your own land immediately."[112] When the Chickasaw King and his envoy visited Gayoso at San

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[109] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 48 (1976), 134-137.
[110] Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 47 (1975), 148-149; 48 (1976), 134-137. For a slightly different translation of Gayoso's May 23rd letter to Carondelet see Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, II: 114-115.
[111] These men carried messages from King Chinubbee and Ugulayacabé, who supported their actions, but did not attend. Both headmen and some of their followers visited the new fort soon afterwards, however. See "Diary of Gayoso de Lemos' Expedition on La Vigilante" in Nasatir, *Spanish War Vessels on the Mississippi*, 263, 266, 272, & 275-276.
[112] Weeks, *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 139; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 173.

Fernando de las Barrancas, the new Spanish fort, they made clear the causes of their hesitation. The King's spokesman explained, "it had never been believed that any white man would dare to settle" in that place given "their ancestors had always been opposed to it with all their power." However, now seeing "the face of the earth so altered," they believed "the determined will of the Great Spirit" made it possible, and "they would not dare oppose." The Chickasaw people had defended *Sakti Lhafa'* ever since it had been given to them during their epic migration. The cleared woodlands indicated the Bluff was now meant for the Spaniards. "The Great Spirit was doing what he had wanted," the spokesman announced. Even so, he repeatedly emphasized that Gayoso must restrain his soldiers and any Choctaws from hunting in the area. A warrior "of much boldness and verbosity" made it known that this "was their favorite hunting land" which they had "sustained even at the cost of blood" since ancient times. He and the other warriors were not happy about ceding any part of *Sakti Lhafa'*. They would not, however, oppose the decision of their chiefs, although "the loss of the *most precious* part of their lands cost them great pain." Even if a fort stood on site, he declared, the Chickasaws "were the true owners of this place."[113]

Given *Sakti Lhafa'*s cultural and geopolitical significance, only dire circumstances could have brought this cession about. The Chickasaws agreed to forego "any future claim" to a portion of the Bluff because Ugulayacabé and his fellow headmen prioritized Chickasaw independence over Chickasaw land.[114] In return Gayoso agreed to work towards a diplomatic resolution of the Creek conflict, which even

[113] Weeks, *Paths to a Middle Ground,* 236-242.
[114] For the terms of the agreement see "Cession of the Barrancas de Margó or Chickasaw Bluffs to the Spanish Nation, June 20, 1795" in Weeks, *Paths to a Middle Ground,* 233-235.

Piomingo appreciated.[115] Should these efforts fail, however, "gifts" for relinquishing their land equaled supplies necessary to withstand a war. No less pressing, a Spanish fort on *Sakti Lhafa'* countered U.S. garrisons springing up on the Ohio and Tennessee rivers. The Americans, Ugulayacabé knew, wore "hard shoes" and would tread on Chickasaw soil.[116] By utilizing Spain's powerful navy and the topographical advantages of the Bluffs, the threat of an invasion down the Mississippi would be eliminated. Furthermore, the establishment of a Spanish trade post would assure an outlet for Chickasaw hunters who sought to trade furs for manufactured goods. Freed from all these interrelated concerns, the Chickasaw Nation would be less susceptible to American pressure for land cessions going forward. In parting with a piece of their history, Ugulayacabé and the others hoped to secure their short and long-term future.

As they had so many times before, the Chickasaws turned to the Mississippi to help define their place along it. Surrendering a portion of the Fourth Bluff represented a new iteration in this established pattern. Allies entered into reciprocal relationships in which they shared the river, and often the land around it, for their mutual benefit. Adversaries did not have this luxury, and their entry into these spaces was contested. Gayoso had come to understand this and framed his message accordingly. For his part, Ugulayacabé recognized Europeans and Americans dealt in land. Gayoso insured that *Sakti Lhafa'* would continue to be a checkpoint and bargaining chip in Chickasaw-U.S. relations, but Ugulayacabé knew that these benefits required ceding part of the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff to Spain. Together Ugulayacabé and Gayoso forged an agreement

[115] Weeks, "Of Rattlesnakes, Wolves, and Tigers," 499.
[116] *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*. Vol. I (Washington, 1832), 284-287.

within the "cultural premises" of the other.[117] Chickasaws yielded a small well-defined portion of the heights, but retained the majority of *Sakti Lhafa'* for themselves.[118] In consenting to this treaty, the Chickasaws took a calculated risk. They bet they could solidify their Spanish alliance and stave off greater threats to their security.

Regrettably, Spain abandoned Fort San Fernando and the entire region shortly afterwards. Concerns in Europe prompted Spanish officials to accept American assertions that the thirty-first parallel should constitute the border between land claims made by Spain and the United States in West Florida. The Treaty of San Lorenzo, signed October 27, 1795, resolved what had been a tense territorial dispute between the two countries and also opened the Mississippi River to American shipping. According to the treaty's terms, Fort San Fernando was to be abandoned and the Chickasaws' beloved Bluffs transferred to the United States. Rather than a bulwark against American advances, Spain facilitated them. Then, in 1800, the Spanish Crown secretly ceded Louisiana back to France; Napoleon Bonaparte sold it to the United States when his short-lived dream of an American empire crashed three years later. With few other options Ugulayacabé, and a majority of Chickasaws, gambled on their Spanish alliance and lost.

When word of the Treaty of San Lorenzo reached the Chickasaws in springtime 1796 they were furious. That December, Ugulayacabé led a delegation to meet with Spanish officials at Fort San Fernando, and he expressed the Chickasaws' displeasure.

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[117] This is not to say the Spanish and Chickasaws created a "middle ground" like the French and Algonquians. White, *The Middle Ground*, 52-53.

[118] Georges-Henri-Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America, Containing a Survey of the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri and Other Affluing Rivers*, Vol. II (Paris: Printed for Arthus Bertrand, 1826), 21-24.

They had placed great confidence in the Spaniards over the "seduction" of the Americans. As proof, Ugulayacabé exclaimed, "we gave you land that we had promised to preserve in the same state as it had been given to us by the great master so that you could establish a fort there." The Chickasaws had entrusted Spain with an important piece of the Chickasaw Nation. *Sakti Lhafa'* was the Mississippi's namesake, and according to legend marked the start of Chickasaw history, the place where they became Chickasaws. The Bluff's topographical features and geographic location made it unique to the Mississippi River as well. The whirlpool in the narrow channel and the rocky cliffs overlooking it had given them military power over the river. Now, Ugulayacabé explained "the land we gave and that you have now abandoned cannot be defended by us. Our forts [were] the woods that you converted into meadows." The place that had always helped to define them, could no longer secure their place along the Mississippi. In this state, Ugulayacabé asserted, they were "like small animals to the claws of tigers and the jaws of wolves."[119]

[119] Weeks, "Of Rattlesnakes, Wolves, and Tigers," 511-513. For a different translation of Ugulayacabé's harangue see "The Talk of the Chickasaw Chiefs, At the Bluffs, represented by Ugalayacabe," *MASSACHUSETTS SPY,* or *WORCESTER GAZETTE*, 1 November 1797, 2-3.

CONCLUSION

In late 1837, John E. Parsons told about another river crossing. He wrote to his mother, "I shall never forget the singular picture the whole party presented when all were got across the Miss--& in one dense mass covered the whole open ground on the bank. It was a scene to paint, not described with words--civilized society is so uniform & tame in the dress & manner & equipage that a crowd has no life in it." In the midst of the removal policies of President Andrew Jackson and the United States government, Parsons bore witness to the tragic Chickasaw exodus. Yet, he could only lament his inability to sketch the scene "as they stood each above the other from the water's edge to the top of the ascending ground. They seemed grouped there, to present one grand display of barbaric pomp."[1] Many Euro-Americans would have agreed with Parsons and believed Native Americans were unfit for "civilized society" which, conveniently, necessitated their removal so Euro-American settlers could possess their lands.

The beginnings of Chickasaw removal actually dated back to January 1803, just before the Louisiana Purchase. The territory "between the Ohio and Yazoo [rivers]," President Thomas Jefferson wrote, "all belongs to the Chickasaws, the most friendly tribe within our limits, but the most decided against the alienation of lands." However, this could not be allowed to slow the movement of yeoman farmers westward or the expansion of the agrarian empire he envisioned. "The portion of their country most important for us is exactly that which they do not inhabit," Jefferson informed

[1] John E. Parsons, "Letters on Chickasaw Removal 1837," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* vol. 37, no. 3 (1953), 281-282.

Congress. “They have lately shown a desire to become agricultural; and this leads to the desire of buying implements and comforts. In the strengthening and gratifying of these wants, I see the only prospect of planting on the Mississippi itself, the means of its own safety.”[2] Over Ugulayacabé’s strenuous objections, Piomingo and James Colbert’s son, William, had backed the construction of an American fort on *Sakti Lhafa’* to replace the abandoned Spanish outpost.[3] But that was not enough. Jefferson encouraged Chickasaws to amass personal debts with the hope of forcing the Chickasaw Nation to sign away more land in repayment.[4]

Despite this scheme, the majority of Chickasaws strenuously opposed ceding their homeland and moving west of the Mississippi River. After the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, however, the new president’s backing intensified efforts to have them exiled. Jackson argued the Chickasaws would be better off in the West as squatters invaded their lands, the states of Mississippi and Alabama legislated against their existence, and federal officials coerced their “cooperation.” Chickasaw representatives eventually relented to these pressures and signed the Treaty of Pontotoc Creek on October 20, 1832, ceding all their land east of the Mississippi. Even then, most continued to linger in their homelands until 1837, after the Treaty of Doaksville, when the Choctaw Nation sold the Chickasaws part of its landholdings in Indian Territory.[5]

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[2] President Thomas Jefferson's confidential message to Congress concerning relations with the Indians, January, 18, 1803; Record Group 233, Records of the United States House of Representatives, HR 7A-D1; National Archives.
[3] Weeks, “Of Rattlesnakes, Wolves, and Tigers,” 506-510; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 178-179; Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 90-97.
[4] Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 242; Gibson, The Chickasaws, 103-105; Atkinson, Splendid Land, Splendid People, 193-196, 199.
[5] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 214-235; Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 158-178; Braden, “The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation,” II: 320-330;

That summer, as Parsons looked on, they began the painful migration to present-day Oklahoma. Crossing the Mississippi River once again marked a critical moment in Chickasaw history.

Since becoming a people the Chickasaws had laid claim to the Mississippi. They did this conventionally: traveling the waterway by pirogue, utilizing its resources, and denying passage to their enemies. Yet the stories they told, their names for the river, and its otherworldly characteristics were no less important. These created shared perceptions that worked simultaneously to create and define Chickasaw sovereignty and to demarcate the western limits of their dominion. Environmental factors also determined when, where, and how Chickasaws interacted with the Mississippi River. Seasonal variation and weather conditions affected water levels, which in turn altered resource availability and travel patterns. More generally, waterways constituted a central place in the worldviews of Southeastern Native Americans. Their perception of rivers influenced how they related to the landscape and other peoples.

As imperial designs reshaped Native worlds Chickasaws demonstrated their independence along the Mississippi River, and displayed a willingness to utilize it to advance their alliances with Europeans and Euro-Americans. Organized river raids, like those against the French, challenged royal dreams and paper claims. Other countries, too, discovered the influence Chickasaws could have on the Mississippi River. Nevertheless, Chickasaw diplomats proved willing to negotiate passage and share the riverine landscape. At times Britain, Spain, the United States, and even France gained easy passage along the banks of Chickasaw Country. Personal relationships and mutually beneficial exchanges were all that was required.

The “great river” proved critical in defining Chickasaw history and the course of colonialism. No other overland or waterway path was as geographically imposing or as central to the meetings of peoples and empires in North America. Though their villages were more than one hundred miles from the Mississippi River, individual Chickasaws were never far from the water. The river lived in their minds, supported their lifeways, and influenced the political course they charted. Only a holistic view of the Mississippi’s status in the Chickasaw place-world can begin to explain these interrelationships.

Each telling of their migration legend underscored the importance of the Mississippi River. Recounting this journey created a shared sense of place and time relative to the river. As the narrative unfolded, an unnamed people moved laterally, west to east, through a nondescript land. The indefinite nature of the story added a sense of homelessness and uncertainty. However, in most cases their arrival at the Mississippi River provided the sole physical landmark that defined West and East as locations. The sacred long pole continued to direct them towards the rising sun, but now sunrise and sunset occurred on either side of the waterway. Remembering when they first crossed the Mississippi also produced a sense of chronology. This act manifest itself as a transformative moment in time, separating what came before from that which occurred afterwards. According to their migration legends, at the Mississippi River, Chickasaw ancestors passed into a modern era.

The collective memory of this event perpetuated ideas about Chickasaw sovereignty and identity. These, in turn, reinforced social and political bonds within the nation. When the sacred pole stood straight they found their homeland, and thereafter

the muddy Mississippi delimited its western bounds. Only then were the migrants identified as Chickasaws. In recognition of this occasion, clan and house groups adopted new names. The river's stature as a boundary may have even denoted one such association and influenced the structure of Chickasaw society. In due course, the Mississippi also received labels. Where it passed their lands Chickasaws knew the river as *Sakti Lhafa Okhina'*, but when it wound south into foreign territory it became *Balbásha'*. These social constructs further embedded the Mississippi within Chickasaw history, cultural, and geography.

The river most certainly took on supernatural dimensions as well. Waterways were important components of the Under World for Southeastern Native Americans. As the descendants of Mississippian peoples, they inherited beliefs about the cosmos and the interworking of the Under World, This World, and the Upper World. Taboos related to river travel were meant to neutralize the "Great Serpent" who ruled the lower realm. This horned serpent could produce strong currents or drowned naysayers, and so proper ritual precautions had to be observed. The white dog of Chickasaw legend may have represented the first Chickasaw sacrifice on the Mississippi River. Meanwhile, in the Upper World, the Great Serpent took shape in the stars as a constellation. There, too, the white dog may have been waiting to guide the deceased into the afterlife. Even far removed from the Mississippi's channel, Chickasaws were reminded of the river and its influence.

Seasonal variations dictated the Great Serpent's position in the night sky and altered water levels in the Mississippi. With the rise and fall of the river, physical landscapes transformed, as did the ecosystems they supported. Experience and careful

observation enabled Chickasaws to navigate these changes. In doing so, the Mississippi became part of their lived environment. Chickasaw craftsmen made hunting and gathering foodstuffs on the Mississippi River easier. Pirogue construction expanded the Chickasaws' resource base, trade ties, and alliance networks.

Intimate knowledge of the Mississippi's undulations kept Chickasaw canoeists safe as they pursued these ends. Men and women harnessed the water's power to propel themselves downstream and exploited its weak spots when paddling upriver. The LMR's meandering nature required that they constantly reposition their pirogues. Strong central currents rushed through straightaways only to collide with the interior banks of the Mississippi's many curves. Chickasaws "read" the waterway and adjusted their boats accordingly. In addition, those aboard remained vigilant for planters, sawyers, or any other obstructions. When disaster did strike and the Under World threatened to pull them below the water, Chickasaws were trained to swim for their lives. River travel, and even river crossings, entailed risks. To help offset some of these, Native Americans kept their pirogues in good condition by storing them underwater. "Navigating" the Mississippi successfully required Chickasaws to be familiar with the river's natural features and the peoples surrounding it.

Chickasaw cartographers mapped the geopolitical landscape in 1723 and 1737. Both maps demonstrate the Chickasaw Nation understood its place within the British trade network and the course of regional waterways. Like the Chickasaw migration legend, these documents point to the importance of the Mississippi River for the Chickasaw people. In addition to Chickasaw pronouncements, blank space between the Chickasaw Nation and the Mississippi, on the map in 1723, demonstrate the river

served as the western limit of Chickasaw Country. Paths drawn from the Chickasaw Nation toward the Mississippi act similarly on the 1737 version. Furthermore, thousands of river miles take shape in the older diagram. The names of a dozen rivers express the characteristics Chickasaws associated with them, as well as the navigability of each. In both maps, rivers are the only natural features present on otherwise political documents. By the mid-eighteenth century Chickasaws inherited, interpreted, and manipulated space along the Mississippi River to create cultural and political geography. Like the Mississippi's channel, there was an unseen depth to Chickasaw actions. Their maps give a sense of these dimensions and how they influenced the Chickasaw Nation's relationships with other polities.

The dynamics of the relationship Chickasaws maintained with the Mississippi become more evident when reevaluating Chickasaw interactions with Europeans on the river. Colonialism brought Chickasaw conceptions of the Mississippi landscape to the fore. They claimed use rights and cultural authority on the river, but only where it passed their lands. Even so, others were not barred. Native Americans did not conceive of land or rivers as exclusive spaces. Passage through these places, and use of resources within them, might be negotiated or shared depending on kinship ties and formal alliances. People outside of such categories did not belong to the Mississippi landscape as Chickasaws envisioned it. However, peoples once thought to be foreign could become relatives, friends, or allies. Through ceremony and ritual exchange, Chickasaws transformed the river from a boundary into a path. The Chickasaw Nation's influence on the Mississippi River shaped the colonial process in North American throughout the

eighteenth century, even as the balance of power shifted and Chickasaws adjusted their expectations of non-Native allies.

The capture of Pierre-Laurent Ducoder, with his men and gunpowder, illustrates how the Mississippi united Chickasaws and held the potential to create new relations. Both red and white moieties shared common beliefs about the river. Under Mingo Ouma's leadership warriors from both divisions joined together to protect their people and uphold those values. Discovering Ducoder became a way to safeguard the Chickasaw Nation and instruct French officials about how France might gain access to the Mississippi River along Chickasaw Country. Warriors seized the gunpowder Ducoder and his men transported in order to prevent Chickasaw enemies from using it. In addition, three French soldiers were captured and escorted to Chickasaw villages. Chickasaws witnessed these men's ritual redemption, and headmen from both moieties collaborated to have them repatriated. Despite political divisions within the Chickasaw Nation, the Chickasaw people well-understood the value of both actions. Taking goods and captives from the Mississippi enforced their boundaries. Returning the detainees initiated a process by which peace and trade with France could be established. Only then would Chickasaws assure French navigation of the Mississippi River.

By 1735, when Ducoder fell into Chickasaw hands, French officials had come to recognize the vulnerability of their river traffic and the methods of Native diplomacy. As a precaution, they instructed convoys and independent voyagers to avoid the Mississippi's east bank near Chickasaw territory. Furthermore, French authorities understood the return of captives was meant to initiate reconciliation. Even the Chickasaws' fractious relationship with France was not beyond repair, and many

Chickasaws remained open to the possibility of sharing the Mississippi. To this end, Chickasaw war parties largely avoided the river in 1740 and a Chickasaw village rejected a Cherokee offer to share spoils from defeated French pirogues. When these efforts failed to produce the desired results, a body of Chickasaws captured Guillaume Bienvenu's convoy, and the peace process began anew.

Sharing physical space on the Mississippi required Europeans to respect the social, economic, and political relationships Chickasaws built upon the river. French diplomats understood these concepts but could not come to terms with the Chickasaw Nation. Failure to do so might not have mattered had it not been for *Sakti Lhafa'*. The Fourth Chickasaw Bluff was an intricate component of the Chickasaw's connection to the Mississippi and those who plied it. *Sakti Lhafa'* personified *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'*. Evoking one was to speak of the other, and traveling between the LMR and the MMR required managing the twisted course they set. Europeans struggled to navigate their boats in this section of the river, and the task became even more harrowing when Chickasaw warriors obstructed the way. Chickasaw braves could hide in the woods and shoot down upon their enemies or sit in wait at one of the few landing spots. Traveling the Mississippi between Louisiana and Illinois meant neither *Sakti Lhafa'* nor the Chickasaws could be avoided.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Chickasaw Nation exercised its power at the Chickasaw Bluffs to maximize its influence on the Mississippi River. When efforts to reconcile with France failed and the Seven Years' War swamped the region, Chickasaw warriors made them a military checkpoint. Consequently, Frenchmen struggled to maneuver their boats past the Bluffs unmolested. The

Chickasaws' British allies cheered this development, but could not inspire Chickasaws to impede Spanish and American traffic on the Mississippi during the American Revolution. British officials paid a small fortune to retain the Chickasaw Nation's allegiance, yet Spanish and American vessels generally went unhindered, that is until they became a direct threat. Inspired by his adopted nation's successes at *Sakti Lhafa'*, James Colbert orchestrated his resistance movement from its safety. Few Chickasaws actually joined him, but many reaped the rewards.

After the American Revolution, with Chickasaw strength at the Bluffs unquestioned, Chickasaw diplomats set about affirming relations with Spain and the United States. Both countries recognized *Sakti Lhafa's* geopolitical importance, although neither perceived its cultural significance to the Chickasaw people. Competing factions within the Chickasaw Nation entertained the prospect of an American or Spanish fort on site, but neither Chickasaw bloc would consent. As part of the "confluence region," people and trade goods had come together there for thousands of years, and Chickasaw headmen ensured this would continue. While pursing alliances with Spain and the United States, Chickasaw diplomats requested that both nations utilize the Mississippi River and deliver manufactured wares to the Chickasaw people at the Fourth Bluff. Chickasaws had a long history with *Saki Lhafa',* so it remained in the Chickasaws' possession, a tantalizing bargaining chip.

Not until 1795, when events threatened to drown the entire Chickasaw Nation, was a part of *Sakti Lhafa'* dealt away. Chickasaws had faced dire prospects before, but this time was different. Forecasts of a Creek war had intensified, trade opportunities stagnated, and American pioneers seemed poised to flood the land. Ugulayacabé and

many other Chickasaws looked to the high grounds of *Sakti Lhafa'* for safety. Ugulayacabé had built a personal relationship with Manuel Gayoso, the governor of Louisiana, and believed Spain would help defend the Chickasaw Nation while supplying its need for trade goods. However, in order to seal this alliance Chickasaws had to cede a portion of the Fourth Bluff to Spain as Gayoso requested. On the Mississippi River history, topography, hydrology, and geopolitics merged at *Sakti Lhafa'*. Though the manner in which Chickasaws navigated this space changed throughout the eighteenth century, the bluff and its river remained important to the Chickasaw Nation. The bonds that drew Chickasaws to the Mississippi also influenced the course of colonialism in the Mississippi Valley.

Without a counterweight to offset American expansionism in the nineteenth century, the Chickasaws were forced west. Nevertheless, they did not forget their history on the other side of the Mississippi River. On March 4, 1856 the Chickasaw people adopted their constitution and the Great Seal of the Chickasaw Nation. When you view the Seal today, you will see "a likeness of Chief Tishomingo holding a shield and bow, with four (4) swan feathers in his headband and swan mantle across his chest and a quiver of arrows at this side, standing in front of the Mississippi River."[6] The Seal is a permanent reminder of the Mississippi's importance to the people and their homeland. More recently, the Chickasaw Nation has begun to celebrate its heritage on the water too. In 2011 the Chickasaw RIVERSPORT Canoe/Kayak program began to teach Chickasaw youth "the art of kayaking and canoeing," and a yearlong exhibit

[6] Chickasaw Nation Code. Section 1-401.2 B.

showcasing dugout canoes just concluded at the Chickasaw Cultural Center.[7] On my trip down I-35 to visit this display, billboards featuring the white dog guided the way. If you should also make the journey to Ada, OK, you'll find "The Arrival Sculpture" near the Exhibit Center commemorating the people's first Mississippi River crossing. *Sakti Lhafa' Okhina'* is part of the Chickasaws' past, present, and future.

[7] Gene Lehmann, "Wintersmith Lake hosts Chickasaw boaters Special gala marks first time in 20 years watercraft allowed on park lake," The Chickasaw Nation, https://www.chickasaw.net/news/press-releases/2013-press-releases/wintersmith-lake-hosts-chickasaw-boaters-special-g.aspx (accessed 10/22/2015); "Dugout Canoe Exhibit," The Chickasaw Nation, http://chickasawculturalcenter.com/special-events/view/dugout-canoe-exhibit (accessed 10/22/2015).

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