

## **Ethridge Abstract**

This paper is part of a larger work I have begun on the rise and fall of the Mississippian world (the world of the pre-contact chiefdoms of the ancient South). The larger work will begin with the rise of Cahokia around 900 CE and end in 1730, after European contact and with the fall of the Natchez, the last remaining Mississippian chiefdom. Because of the great changes that occurred at the meeting of the Mississippian and European worlds, a vital piece of this larger work is to reconstruct the Mississippian world at the time of European contact, in the mid to late sixteenth century. For this reconstruction, I build on the work of Charles Hudson and his colleagues who successfully drew the major contours of this world through their reconstruction of the routes of the early Spanish explorers. I continue this work by fleshing out many of the details, using additional archaeological evidence as well as the earliest colonial documents from first contacts in the South. My goal is to understand the sixteenth-century pre-contact South as a “world” through mapping the multiple interconnections as well as the tensions and rivalries between chiefdoms from Virginia to east Louisiana. However, I also will take this opportunity to look deeply at the earliest contacts (those before 1607) to identify where they occurred, understand any disruptions these may have had to the Mississippian world, and evaluate their extent.