

The Cahokia Site and Its People

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INTRODUCTION

When Hernando de Soto's band of adventurers crossed the southeastern United States in 1539–43, they witnessed the living, vibrant cultures of moundbuilding American Indians (see fig. 5 in the essay by Garrick Bailey). Unlike settlers in the nineteenth century, these Spaniards had no need to invent a mythical race of moundbuilders to account for the earthen monuments they beheld, because the leaders of the Natchez Indians they met in Mississippi lived in mound-top lodges and honored their ancestors in mound-top temples and did so well into the 1700s. One such temple belonging to the Natchez was visited by a Dutch-born planter, Le Page du Pratz, who portrayed its appearance and described its contents in 1758.¹ This active mound culture was one of the last recorded in the U.S.

If a traveler of Du Pratz's day had ventured farther north up the Mississippi River and into the Illinois country, he would have soon found himself in the colonial settlement of Cahokia, a French village named for the Cahokias, a branch of the Illiniwek or Illinois Indian nation. Beyond French Cahokia, he would have encountered Cahokia Creek where it enters the Mississippi River, and following the creek eastward toward the bluffs, this traveler would before long have come to a towering, man-made mountain of earth with a commanding view of the Mississippi bottomland—a massive construction that could have been visible an hour before actually arriving at its foot. This earthen monument

Fig. 1 View looking southwest over Monks Mound and the grand ceremonial plaza of Cahokia in St. Clair County, Illinois.

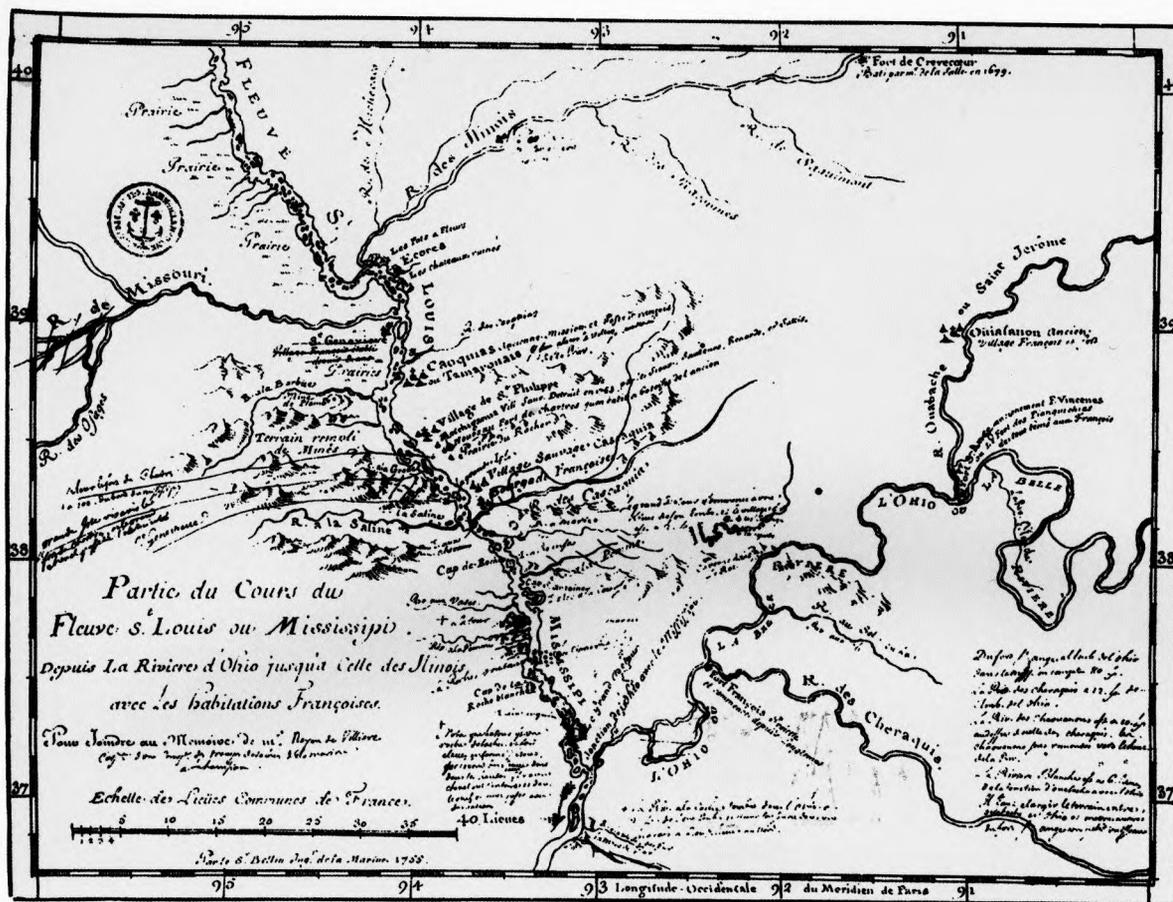


Fig. 2 French map of Illinois region, produced by Jacques Nicolas Bellin in 1755 (with later manuscript corrections) to accompany a memoir by the French captain Pierre Joseph de Neyon de Villiers. This map charts the Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois rivers, as well as settlements of the Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Tamaroa Indians.

would become known generations later as Monks Mound (fig. 1). From its summit, close to a thousand years ago, a native-born lord could survey the inner precincts of a domain that extended beyond the power of human sight to see. There was no greater prehistoric temple platform in the Americas north of Mexico than Monks Mound. Borrowing a name with local roots, archaeologists have called the Monks Mound location Cahokia.

THE AMERICAN BOTTOM

France ceded control of the Cahokia area to Great Britain in 1763. When, twenty years later, Britain herself lost control of the Cahokia area to the United States,

former colonists began to settle the extensive flood plain east of the Mississippi and opposite St. Louis. The American Bottom—as this region has long been called—was a wide and well-defined natural area of easily cultivated soils and marshy lakes, begotten when the Mississippi River changed its course from century to century and left relics of itself along its former course.² During the French regime, a mission station had been built on Monks Mound itself, ministering to the Cahokia-Illinois Indians from 1735 to 1752 (fig. 2).³

The name Monks Mound comes not from this French mission, which included a chapel on a terrace of Monks Mound, but from a later establishment of Trappist monks who lived at the foot of Monks Mound

Fig. 3 Karl Bodmer (Swiss; 1809–1893), *Prehistoric Indian Mounds Opposite St. Louis*, n.d.; ink over pencil on paper, 27.3 × 41.3 cm; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska. Bodmer accompanied Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied on an expedition across North America and made these sketches of Monks Mound at Cahokia in the early 1830s.

Fig. 4 Karl Bodmer, *Trappists Hill Opposite St. Louis*, n.d.; pencil and ink on paper, 25.4 × 31.8 cm; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska.



from 1809 to 1813 (figs. 3-4). This settlement existed well after American control of the area was established. In recent decades, excavations by archaeologists from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee have uncovered not only the foundations of the 1735 mission chapel but also an adjacent cemetery for native converts, all on a single lower terrace of Monks Mound.⁴ It is all the more surprising then that despite more than a century of European and American occupation of the American Bottom, it was not until 1808 that anyone interpreted the particular environs of the Cahokia site as a scene of ancient human activity (fig. 5).

While running a government survey line across a portion of the Cahokia location in 1808, a land surveyor named John Messinger jotted in his field notes, "Twenty four or more of those mounds in Sight at one View . . . All covered with Simtoms of ancient Ruins."⁵ Messinger correctly estimated the height of Monks Mound to be 100 feet (30.5 meters) from top to bottom, but he greatly underestimated its footprint. Covering an area equal to a dozen football fields, Monks Mound was constructed of earth raised basketful by basketful over the level of the flood plain to the height of a ten-story office building. Early in the twentieth century, efforts to preserve the Cahokia mounds were hampered by the reluctance of geologists advising the state government to recognize that the mounds were anything more than just natural features of the Mississippi flood plain—that they were in fact products of Indian construction. Instead, geologists considered them to be erosional remnants of a river terrace of some bygone era.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was no professional archaeology program in Illinois, but nonetheless the mounds of the Mississippi valley were the subject of increasing interest to professional

archaeologists elsewhere and to many with serious antiquarian interests locally. Less than a century after John Messinger's brief observations, it was already clear that the Cahokia site was not only one of a number of mound centers in the American Bottom and adjacent areas but also grander in scale than any site of similar character anywhere in North America. Numerous mound centers were identified: the Lunsford-Pulcher site located south of Cahokia near Dupou, Illinois; an East St. Louis mound center on the banks of the Mississippi west of Cahokia; the mound center on the opposite shore that gave St. Louis its early nickname of Mound City; the Mitchell Mounds north of Cahokia; and the Emerald Mound group, located southeast of Cahokia near Lebanon, Illinois. More than two hundred mounds have survived in the greater St. Louis area, serving as material reminders of the local achievements of a stage of cultural development that archaeologists have called Mississippian.⁶

THE MISSISSIPPIAN PERIOD

The Mississippian or Temple Mound period in the eastern United States was characterized by the emergence of sedentary societies based on maize agriculture with a ranked or layered social order that was governed by a leadership believed to have been perceived as semi-divine. Their ideologies were artfully expressed in the symbols incorporated in their engraved shell ornaments and other manufactures, and in settlements formally organized around plazas flanked by one or more earthen platform mounds surmounted by temples, council houses, or chiefly residences. Mississippian towns were often protected by palisaded perimeters. This specific pattern of traits was typical of hundreds of bottomland communities up and down the Mississippi River and

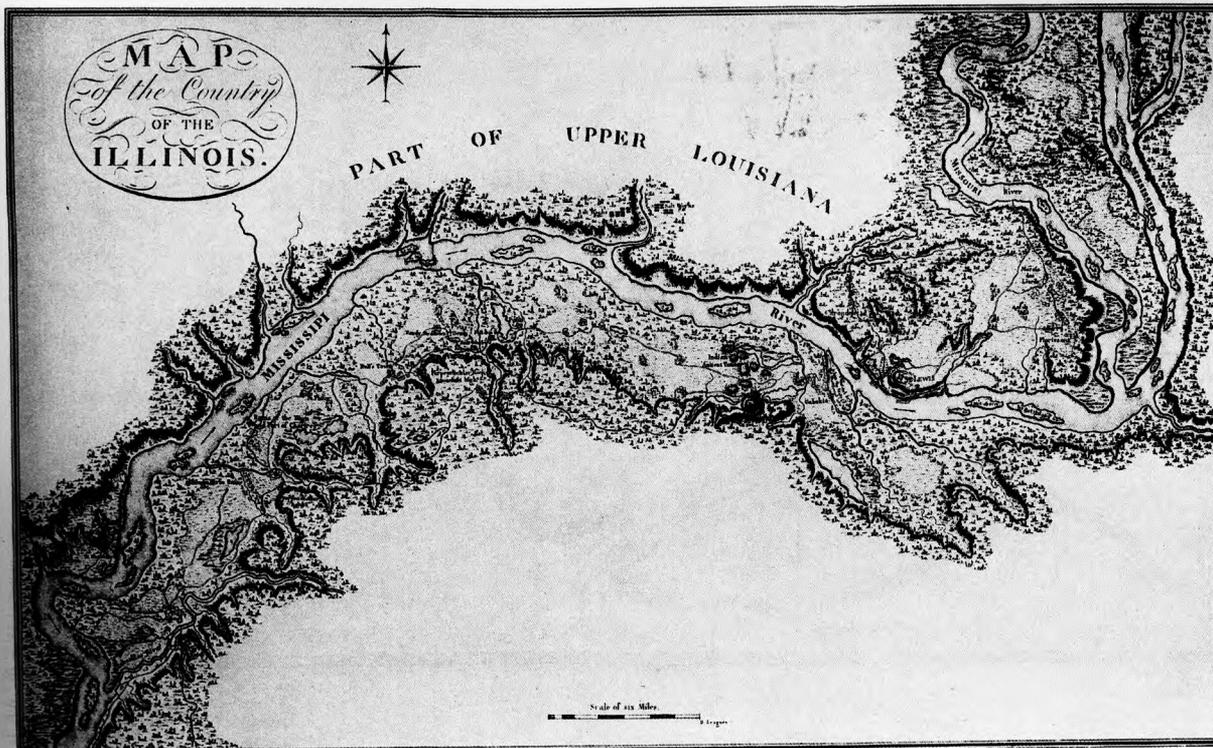


Fig. 5 Early map of the Mississippi River near Cahokia, based on a French survey by General Georges-Henri-Victor Collot in 1796 and published in French and English in Paris in 1826. This map, oriented with west at the top, shows the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers at right, the Kaskaskia River at far left, and includes the location of "Indian Antient Tombs," now identified by archaeologists as the Lunsford-Pulcher site in St. Clair County, Illinois. Although the early mission village of Cahokia is indicated on this map, Monks Mound and the other mounds that constituted the great Mississippian-period settlement only a short distance away do not appear on this survey.

throughout the Southeast. Archaeologists date the beginning of the Mississippian period to around A.D. 1000 and have calculated its ending to the mid-1500s in the South and the mid-1600s in the Midwest, depending upon when Spanish and French contacts occurred.

In outlying areas, social organization was more egalitarian, economies more a mix of hunting and gardening, and settlements more prone to relocation two or three times in a generation. This, in fact, was the character of much Indian village life in the subsequent post-contact period with certain exceptions such as the Natchez. During the 1500s in the southeastern United States, European diseases rapidly diminished the populations of native peoples. Consequently, the amount of arable land available per capita became so great that competition for resources was reduced. A societal organization of the Mississippian pattern was no longer a necessary or sustainable way to manage human relations in the smaller, surviving communities. In the central and northern Mississippi valleys there was an earlier episode of apparent depopulation of Mississippian centers, Cahokia included. This depopulation took place around 1400, more than a century before the first Spanish landfall on this continent, so European diseases accidentally introduced by the Spanish cannot have been the explanation.

THE CAHOKIA SITE AND ITS ORGANIZATION

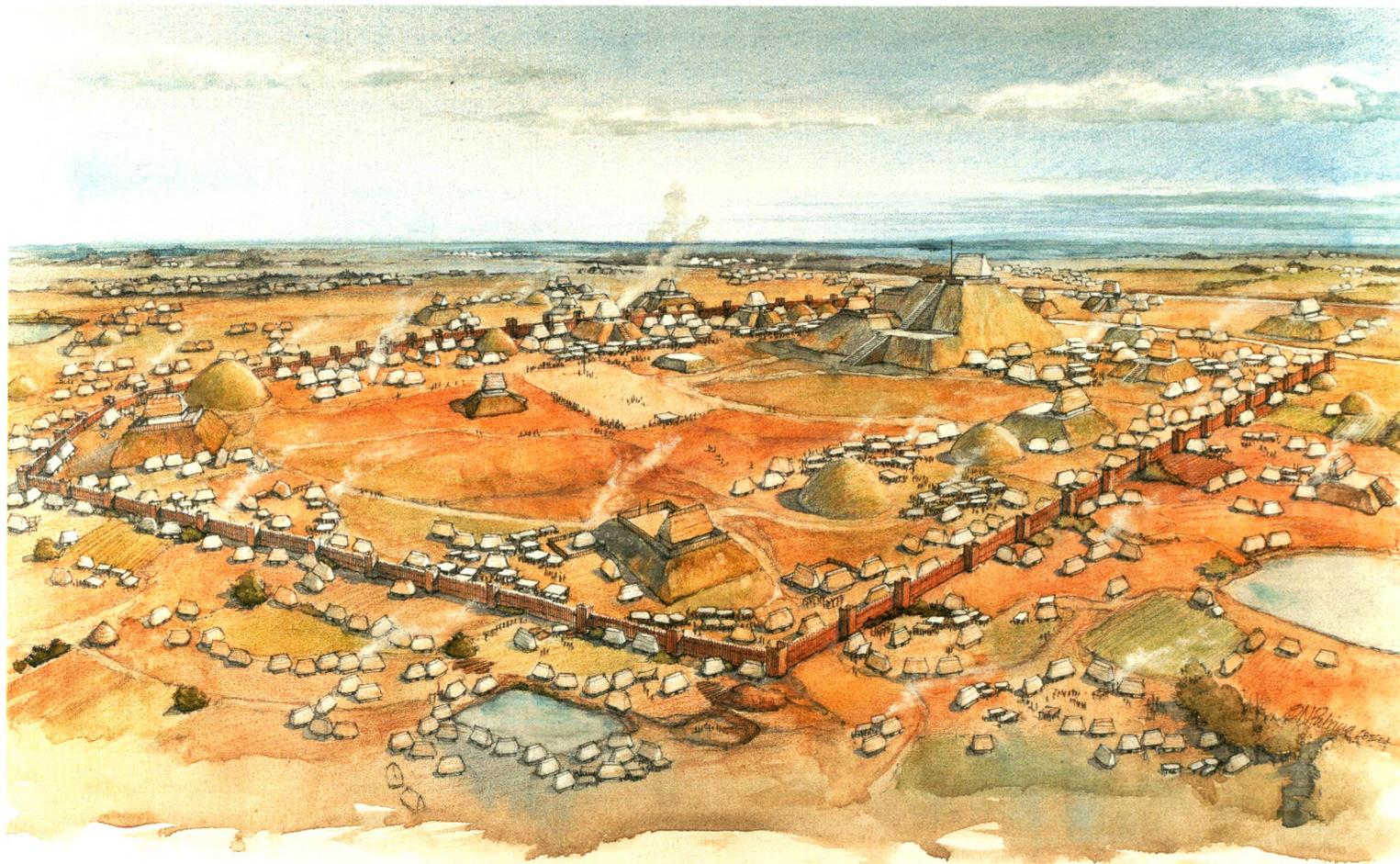
Broadly defined to include the nearby East St. Louis mound group, the Cahokia site stretches over 10 miles

(16 km) of rich bottomland from the banks of the Mississippi River eastward almost to the bluff line at Collinsville (see figs. 20–21 in the essay by James Brown). What we know of prehistoric Cahokia comes almost entirely from the investigations of archaeologists and allied scientists from over a score of universities, colleges, museums, and cooperating agencies. Cahokia's ancient residents left no written records and no native peoples possess oral traditions that specifically identify Cahokia or even recognize its existence. Indeed, Cahokia had already been abandoned by its builders three centuries before Father Jacques Marquette and explorer Louis Jolliet passed through the St. Louis area in 1673. Indians who lived at the site from time to time during those three centuries lived in the shadows of mounds whose function belonged to an earlier era.

To judge from its commanding size, Cahokia must certainly have been a destination of religious pilgrimages and political embassies. To this might be added commercial missions, except that the Cahokians' economic exchange beyond the American Bottom more likely took the form of reciprocal gift giving between elites rather than market transactions. There would, of course, have been many opportunities for lower-level, private bartering in the background between retainers of the elite.

The Cahokia site proper, excluding the East St. Louis and other outlying mound centers, occupied an area of 5–6 square miles (16 square km).⁷ To a foreign visitor the most obvious characteristic of the site would have been

Fig. 6 View looking northwest across the ceremonial and residential center of Cahokia, the largest Mississippian settlement with approximately 100 mounds in the immediate area; rendering by Steven Patricia.



the hundred and more earthen mounds, most of them platforms on which would have been constructed lodges and temples framed with vertical pole walls and capped with gabled and thatched roofs. If the late-surviving Natchez temple can be used as a model, carvings of birds in heroic proportions would have stood silently on the ridgepoles of some structures. Monks Mound and the Grand Plaza fronting it formed the inner sanctum or inner city of Cahokia, and amounted to the prehistoric Illinois equivalent of a Vatican City in the heart of Rome. The Grand Plaza was an artificially filled and leveled square that contained and was flanked by smaller mounds (fig. 6).⁸ In its day the Grand Plaza was probably the scene of Indian games that had ritual importance beyond their entertainment value.

Cahokia's inner sanctum was enclosed by a palisade of vertical logs with bastions or defensive towers set at intervals.⁹ East, west, and north of this defined area, there were other major plazas with their own flanking mounds and structures.¹⁰ Domestic dwellings, sweat lodges, drying racks for pumpkin rings and maize, and facilities for their storage would have been scattered throughout the site.

Three thousand feet (one kilometer) west of Monks Mound, a ward of domestic habitations was cleared and in its location was erected the first of a series of monumental circles of wooden columns that have come to be known as sun circles or "woodhenges." One woodhenge that has recently been partially reconstructed for visitors to Cahokia was originally 410 feet (125 meters) in diameter and consisted of forty-eight vertical log posts evenly spaced around the perimeter and a central pole.¹¹ South of Monks Mound's Grand Plaza and palisade, evidence has been found of another post circle of similar description in a ritual area discovered during the excavation of what archaeologists have labeled as Mound 72 of the numbered Cahokia mounds.¹² Within this mound itself archaeologist Melvin L. Fowler of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee found in 1967 the burial of a principal figure of the Cahokia hierarchy laid out on a bed of 20,000 flat shell beads arranged in the shape of a falcon.¹³ Also found in the same mound were funerary offerings (fig. 7) and the graves of scores of many individuals believed to have been human sacrifices, including fifty-three young women and, nearby, four men beheaded and buried side by side.¹⁴

CAHOKIA CHRONOLOGY

Archaeologists have divided the history of the Cahokia site during the Mississippian period into a series of phases: Lohmann (1050-1100), Stirling (1100-1200), Moorehead (1200-1275), Sand Prairie (1275-1350), and Oneota (1350-1650). Each phase is defined by its diagnostic pottery types, its distinctive domestic and public architecture, its level of sociopolitical integration, and its relationship to neighboring peoples. In the two centuries preceding the Lohmann phase, for example, Indian populations in the American Bottom lived in a number of small, independent, nucleated settlements



Fig. 7 Cache of projectile points; Illinois, St. Clair County, Cahokia, Mound 72, c. A.D. 1000; chert, l. 3.0-6.5 cm; Illinois State Museum, Springfield. Cat. no. 195.

based on hunting, fishing, gathering, gardening, and maize cultivation, with dwellings surrounding a small open area or courtyard. This courtyard often contained a central pole flanked by four pits that may have stored sacred corn and other seeds that had ritual significance to the whole village rather than to individual households. Viewed from the perspective of its origins, this way of life belonged to the terminal centuries of the Woodland period that preceded the Mississippian period. Viewed from the perspective of its destiny, this maize-farming, courtyard-centered, village life helped to define a period that John Kelly has called Emergent Mississippian.¹⁵ It foreshadowed the later pattern of large temple towns with major plazas.

In the beginning of the Lohmann phase there was a major change in community structure. Cahokia became a center of social, religious, and political power of such strength that individual families were able to populate the outlying countryside in what amounted to family farmsteads without fear of attack.¹⁶ The sovereignty of the Cahokia leadership was expressed in major public works such as the first post circle or circles, the enlarging of Monks Mound, and the practice of human sacrifice in ritual dramas related to agricultural fertility and the mourning of elite personages, such as was found in the excavation of Mound 72. Monks Mound appears to have been constructed in a series of fourteen stages starting just before the Lohmann and continuing through the Lohmann and Stirling phases: that is, begun just before 1050 and completed around

1200.¹⁷ During the Lohmann phase there is evidence of interaction with the lower Mississippi valley and indications of influence in matters of religious beliefs and practices from state-level societies in Mexico. One example of such influence was the introduction of World Renewal and World Centering rituals calling for human sacrifice.¹⁸

The Stirling phase witnessed Cahokia's widest cultural influence. Cahokians' contacts beyond Cahokia during the Stirling phase are evidenced by examples of a distinctive pottery type called Ramey Incised (fig. 8).¹⁹ This pottery is found as scattered imports or local copies from the middle Missouri River valley in the northwest to the Wabash River valley in the east and northward into Minnesota and Wisconsin. Much of the same area was occupied during the seventeenth century by Indians speaking languages of the Siouan family (to be discussed below).²⁰

While Cahokia was in its Stirling phase, a distinctive, new, agriculturally based culture called Oneota was maturing in Wisconsin alongside the marshy borders of the Mississippi River and among the lakes and streams of southeastern Wisconsin. Oneota ceramic decoration came to be replete with elements and derivations of a falconine thunderbird theme that had deep roots in Wisconsin as a common form of Woodland period "effigy" mounds, which were burial mounds of animal form.²¹ This ceramic motif resembled falcons that appeared on embossed or repoussé sheet copper plates in the fully developed Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (SECC).²²

During Cahokia's Moorehead phase, ground-level public buildings became larger, but there was a reduction in the total population along with some apparent need to protect the inner city from domestic or foreign enemies. Energy was diverted from constructing or enlarging mounds to maintaining the palisade around the Cahokia center, with exceptions like Mound 34.²³ Evidence from excavations in Mound 34 show that Cahokia played a seminal role at this time and before in the development of the iconography of the SECC found in southeastern sites such as Etowah in Georgia, Moundville in Alabama, and Spiro in Oklahoma (see the essay by James Brown in this volume).²⁴

During the Sand Prairie phase at Cahokia, residences were built in former ritual precincts and public areas and Cahokia ceased to be a hegemonic cultural force. The latest Sand Prairie ceramics from Cahokia have much in common with those of the contemporary Crable site, some 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of Cahokia and the last surviving town and phase of Cahokia-related Mississippian culture in the central Illinois River valley. Crable was heavily influenced by its Oneota neighbors and vice versa to an extent that ethnic mixture is likely.²⁵ That is, Crable possibly became a multitribal town like so many known in Illinois and the Midwest during the postcontact period.

By the time Cahokia was abandoned around 1350 and Crable no later than 1450, the Mississippian pattern

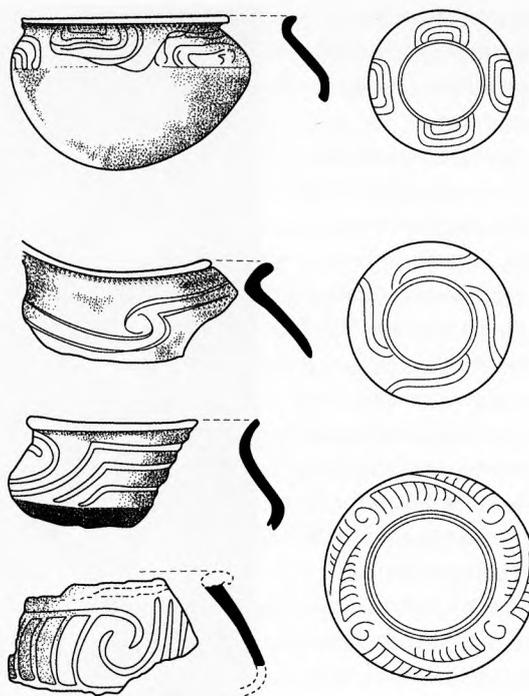


Fig. 8 Ramey Incised pottery of the type found at Cahokia; drawing by Elizabeth Reese Baloutine after Dick 1955.

of life in Illinois directly influenced by the Cahokia model had ended. As a cultural force in the northern Mississippi valley, Cahokia had been replaced by the Oneota model now spreading widely across the same area.²⁶ The difference was that for the Cahokia interaction there was a single center for the diffusion of material and ideas controlled by an elite. Cultures of the Oneota pattern were more egalitarian; each participating band and village shared the same level of power and influence. There were no temple mounds in Oneota and no great plazas. Nor is there any evidence of human sacrifice. A new uniformity of style spread across the upper Midwest through exchange and peaceful communications. The intergroup relationships during this period of Oneota interaction were probably made possible by networks of fictive kinship that were created by symbolic adoptions.²⁷

After 1350 the American Bottom became a cultural backwater, but the Cahokians were not there to witness it. By this time most were well away from Cahokia, some undoubtedly on their way to acquiring a new guise as Oneotans. Other Oneotans made a desultory entrance into the American Bottom, but they never constituted a major presence.²⁸ Finally, to return where we began, the known occupants of the Cahokia area during the period of documentary history were largely representative of the Illinois Indian nation along with, of course, the newly arrived French and later English and American settlers.

POLE CEREMONIALISM

One of the most unexpected and most unique structural features of the Cahokia site was surely the sequence of post circles that have come to be called sun circles or woodhenges. These features have usually been associated only with observations of the sun (fig. 9). Certainly one of their functions was to serve as sighting

posts for solar calendars when viewed from near the center posts. The distance from the equinox sunrise position on the horizon to either solstice sunrise position at the latitude of Cahokia is very close to 30 percent, which is one-twelfth of the horizon arc. Each of the six woodhenges has a number of poles that is exactly divisible by twelve in the pattern shown in table 1.

Warren L. Wittry discovered the original five woodhenges west of Monks Mound in 1961.²⁹ Subsequently Melvin L. Fowler demonstrated the presence of a sixth woodhenge at the location of Mound 72, south of Monks Mound.³⁰ Mound 72 included the burial of an elite individual and, as such, supports an understanding of why woodhenges were constructed as complete circles. The woodhenges defined a sacred area in the form of a cosmogram or image of the universe. The perimeter was a conflation of the circle of the horizon with that of the ecliptic or apparent path of the sun around the earth. In other words, woodhenges were a representation on one plane of the obliquely intersecting planes of the horizon and the ecliptic. The quadrants of the circle presumably represented seasons, as has been documented in Pawnee and Sioux belief.³¹ The central pole functioned as an observation station for the woodhenges when used as solar horizon calendars, but in its cosmological role the central pole symbolized the Cosmic Axis, which was also seen as a Spirit Trail, a route to the hereafter.³²

The woodhenges served community functions, or at least functions related to the top levels of Cahokia society. Among the Caddoan Hasinai of Texas, for example, post circles were constructed as part of



Fig. 9 View looking east toward Monks Mound across the reconstructed woodhenge at Cahokia.

the mourning ritual for important religious leaders.³³ Single posts with pennants attached were a common feature of mourning rites in the midcontinental United States. The Choctaw embellished such poles with a spiral of vines to aid the spirit in its climb to the next world,³⁴ which may have been a more general practice at one time. While living among the Timucua Indians of Florida in 1564–65, Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues sketched a row of seven tall poles on top of which were attached war trophies in the form of human arms, legs, and scalps (see fig. 26 in the essay by David Dye in this volume; see also fig. 10).³⁵ Each of these poles was wrapped with one or two ropes or vines that formed a pattern like that of the vines attached to Choctaw mourning poles. If this Choctaw and Timucua practice

Table 1 The Cahokia Woodhenges

Woodhenge	Posts	Radius (in feet)
I	24	120
II	36	204
III	48	205
IV	60	238
V*	72	233
Mound 72	48	207

*Only the sunrise arc was present for Woodhenge V. The number of posts given is that which the woodhenge would have had if it had been complete, based on the spacing of the posts.



Fig. 10 Theodor de Bry (Flemish; 1528–1598), after an original painting of 1564 by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (French; c. 1533–1588), *Offering the Skin of a Stag to the Sun*, 1591; from *America*, 1st ed. (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1591), pt. 2, pl. 35; Rucker Agee Map Collection, Birmingham Public Library, Alabama. Cat. no. 279. This engraving by De Bry records the ritual offering to the sun of a stag's hide atop a ceremonial pole, while other members join their chief and shaman in chants of celebration.

has an expression within the SECC, it could relate to the spirally striped poles seen on engraved shells that are as yet unexplained.

The camp circles of the Osage and Omaha tribes are also known to have served as cosmograms—images of the universe. Tipis spaced along the north half were those of sky-associated clans and those along the south half were those of earth- and water-associated clans.³⁶ As in the case of the woodhenges, a camp circle cosmogram can be understood as a flattening together of the ecliptic plane with that of the horizon. The Osage and Omaha association of north with sky rather than earth is a Mesoamerican perception and is a clue to some past cultural influence from Mexico. In Mesoamerica the sun can be seen in the northern half of the sky at midday during part of every summer, so north was logically associated with “up” and south with “down.” The sun is never seen in the northern half of the sky at midday anywhere in the United States, so it was south that was more logically associated with the sky, as in the symbolism of the Medicine Lodge ceremony of the Great Lakes area.³⁷

THE CAHOKIA COUNTRYSIDE

Most of the archaeological investigations at the Cahokia site have consisted of salvage excavations that rescued cultural resources from threats posed by highway construction, commercial and residential development, agricultural activity, capital improvements at the Cahokia Mounds State Historic site, and the erosion of mounds and pathways (fig. 11). One product of this salvage work was the discovery of the Cahokia woodhenges and the subsequent generation of a phase chronology for Cahokia anchored to radiocarbon dates.³⁸ The woodhenges were major discoveries and so important that their finding led shortly to the rerouting of a major section of what is now Interstate 255. Originally scheduled to pass through Cahokia west of Monks Mound, I-255 was moved to the east and beyond the limit of the Cahokia site. This shift protected the integrity of Cahokia itself, but it threatened other smaller sites that then had to be excavated archaeologically to preserve the information they contained.

Among the smaller sites affected by the relocation of the highway were two referred to by archaeologists as BBB Motor site and the Sponemann site, but a few miles east of Cahokia. In their day these settlements constituted two of many ceremonial and civic nodes within a network of farmsteads in the rural Cahokia countryside. Mark Mehrer has described nodal farmsteads as centering on “households that specialized in hosting community activities” and “homes of locally prominent families who were part-time ceremonial specialists but who produced their own food.”³⁹

A consideration of nodal households within their communities of scattered farmsteads reveals exactly what one would expect of a society whose religion was centered on a variety of ceremonial bundles, pipes, and other sacred objects in the care of a kin



Fig. 11 This aerial view of Cahokia, taken around 1970, shows the housing development that had encroached upon the site between East St. Louis and Collinsville, Illinois, since the 1920s and that was finally removed in the 1980s.

group elder, the leader of a dream society, or the officer of a warrior society. In other words, the Cahokia countryside was organized very much like many Indian communities of the postcontact period, and, in fact, very much like many Indian communities of the present day. The community comprised a social infrastructure with the potential for existing independently of Cahokia’s “high church” leadership when the opportunity arose.

Thomas Emerson has argued that such nodal farmsteads were locations where the religious and civil power of the Cahokia elite maintained contact with an otherwise widely scattered farming sector of the total Cahokia society.⁴⁰ The specialized nature of these nodes is inferred from such evidence as their physical layouts and the material remains recovered, including a series of sculptures made of a red fireclay called “flint clay” that was mined in an area west of St. Louis.⁴¹

Excavations at the BBB Motor site uncovered two sculptures known as the Birger and Keller figurines (see figs. 16–17 in the essay by Kent Reilly in this volume).⁴² Excavations at the nearby Sponemann site resulted in the discovery of three other sculptures, the Sponemann, Willoughby, and West figurines.⁴³ The subjects are all female and appear to represent different aspects of a goddess related to fertility in nature and agriculture. This and other evidence points to the existence in the Cahokia community of “a fertility, world renewal, mortuary complex that dominated rural Cahokian religious beliefs and rituals” and survived in part as the annual Busk or Green Corn ceremony widely practiced during the postcontact period in the Southeast.⁴⁴

WHO WERE THE ANCIENT CAHOKIANS?

Cahokia was the product of one or more American Indian peoples whose modern descendants should be familiar in name and story, but who were they? The candidates can first be grouped by major language stock or family. One of these, the Algonquian family,

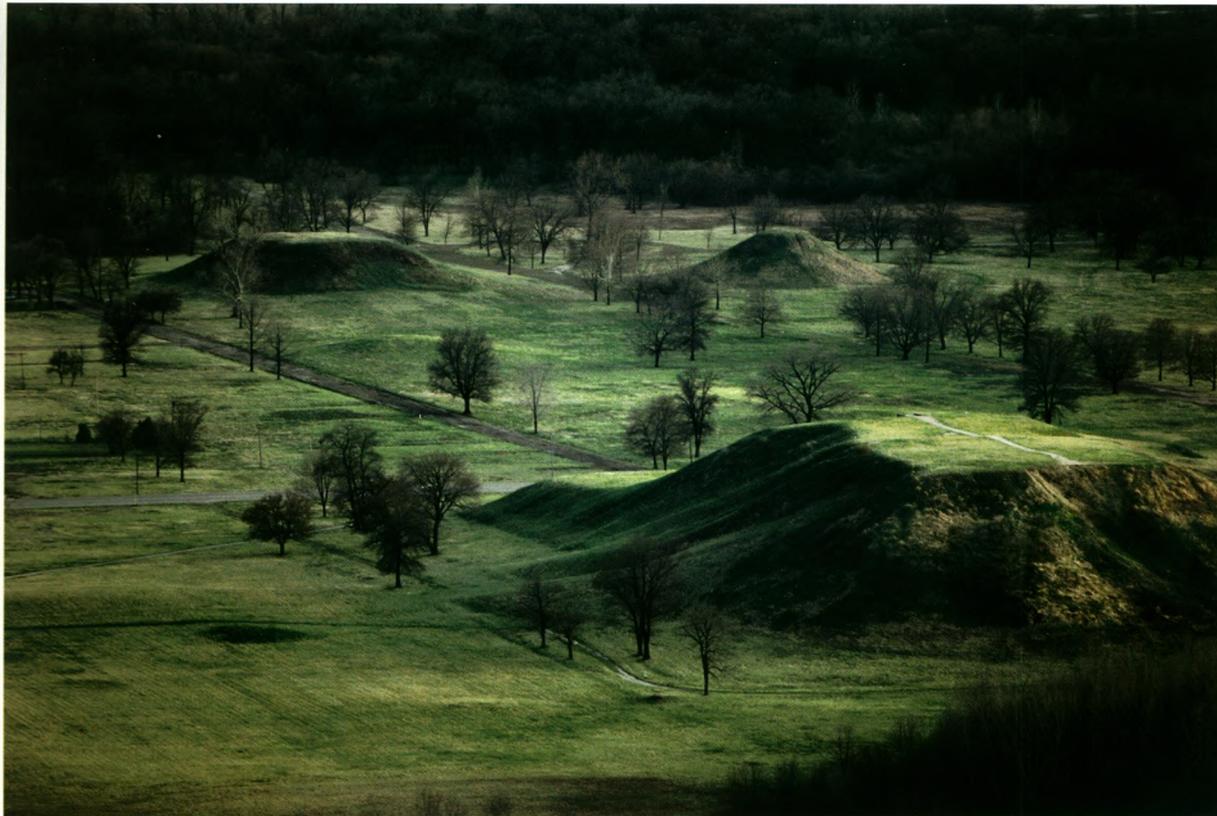


Fig. 12 View of Cahokia, taken in 1992, looking southwest over Monks Mound, the Grand Plaza, and two other, well-preserved mounds, numbers 59 and 60, known as Round Top and Fox Mound, respectively.

was present in historic times in the American Bottom in the person of the Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Peoria, Tamaroa, and Mitchigamea branches of the Illinois nation. Contrary to earlier beliefs, the evidence of archaeology today indicates, however, that the Illinois nation did not enter their namesake state early enough to have participated in the Mississippian development at Cahokia.⁴⁵

A second family of contenders would be tribes of the Muskogean language family, which includes the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek among others. Although no Muskogean tribe is known to have lived in Illinois at any time, Muskogean speakers descend from people who undoubtedly did have a way of life of the Mississippian pattern centuries ago in the southeastern United States. Another factor mitigating against a Muskogean ethnic identification for Cahokia, however, is that after the initial rise of the Cahokia polity, Cahokia's external relations were largely to the north, northwest, and west of Cahokia into areas of Illinois and other states almost exclusively Siouan in language, making Siouan speakers themselves more likely candidates.

Another possible ethnic association with Cahokia would be the Caddoan family. At the time of European contact, Caddoan speakers lived in villages spread through the Plains from Texas north to South Dakota. It is unlikely that Caddoans ever occupied Cahokia, yet Cahokians must have interacted with Caddoan speakers. The evidence for this association includes engraved shellwork and fireclay sculptures manufactured at Cahokia but found in Oklahoma at prehistoric sites presumed to have been ethnically Caddoan, as well as projectile points in styles typical of the Caddoan area

found among offerings of arrows buried with the elite personage of Mound 72 at Cahokia.⁴⁶

The area Caddoans occupied constituted a natural route for influences coming from Mexico toward the Cahokia area. Such a route would have paralleled any that followed the Mississippi River north from the Gulf of Mexico. A "scaffold sacrifice" by arrows once performed by the Skiri band of the Caddoan-speaking Pawnees was unquestionably of Mesoamerican origin, but it is not known whether it was transmitted directly from Mexico through the Plains or was received by the Pawnees from a Mississippian center like Cahokia as a secondary center of diffusion.⁴⁷ A related practice of scaffold execution by arrows, for example, was observed among the Natchez Indians in Mississippi in the early 1700s.⁴⁸

The Siouan language family takes its name from the Sioux proper or from the Dakota, whose branch of the Siouan family was once distributed from northwestern Wisconsin across Minnesota into the Dakotas and Canada. More immediately to the north and west of Cahokia in historic times were the Winnebago or Ho-Chunk and the closely related Iowa, Oto, and Missouri tribes. These last three are usually grouped as the Chiwere Sioux or just as the Chiweres. There is little doubt that ancestors of the Chiwere-Winnebago interacted at some level with Cahokia. They were the immediate neighbors of the large Mississippian temple towns of the central Illinois valley that comprised a sequence of important outlying manifestations of Cahokia Mississippian influence.⁴⁹ The cultural relationship of Chiwere-Winnebago speakers and Oneota culture to Cahokia Mississippian has been a matter of speculation for many years.⁵⁰

A division of the Siouan family that is more likely to have included actual participants in the Cahokia development is the Dhegiha or Dhegiha Sioux. Dhegiha speakers include today's Omaha, Ponca, Kansa, Osage, and Quapaw tribes. When first encountered by Europeans, the Dheghas lived west of the Mississippi River from Arkansas to Iowa with the Osage being closest geographically to Cahokia. One Dhegiha tradition describes the lower Ohio valley as the starting point for Dhegiha migrations. The Quapaw are not known to have ever lived in the Cahokia area; tradition and history place the Quapaw's original and later homes well south of Cahokia. On the other hand, Osage-Kansa and Omaha-Ponca traditions move the balance of the Dheghas through the greater Cahokia area at one time in their histories, although it is difficult to determine when this shift occurred.⁵¹ The Osage and Kansa are said to have lived together as one people for a while on the Missouri River, after which they followed separate tributaries of the Missouri toward their historically known territories of residence in western Missouri and Kansas. The Omaha and Ponca similarly lived together as one people when following the Missouri River upstream into northwestern Iowa and southeastern South Dakota. There the Ponca separated from the main body of the Omahas.⁵²

A second tradition gives a common origin for the Omaha and the Chiwere-Winnebago north of the Great Lakes.⁵³ This and the preceding tradition are not contradictory when examined in their contexts. The Siouan language family as a whole is believed to have originated in the lower Ohio and central Mississippi valley area sometime before 500 B.C.⁵⁴ Traditions of Dhegiha roots in the area of the central Mississippi valley could thus have had a basis in historical memory, albeit one lacking a timescale useful to archaeology. Traditions of an origin in the far north have their basis in mythological origins associated with a Seven Stars constellation, which could have been the Big Dipper.

This constellation has seven main stars and is seen in the night sky seemingly north of the Great Lakes. Knowing such mythological connections, one can understand the importance of sevens in much Siouan social organization—Seven Council Fires and seven tribes in Sioux origins, seven bands in Teton (Western Sioux) social organization, a Council of Seven Chiefs and/or Seven Pipes among the Omahas, Iowas, and Otos, and the Hidatsa association of their Dog Soldier societies with the seven stars of the Big Dipper.⁵⁵

THE CAHOKIA DIASPORA

Societies with a Mississippian level of sociopolitical organization remained alive and healthy in the deep South until the sixteenth century and the advent of European diseases to which they had no resistance. In the lower Tennessee and Ohio valleys and in the central Mississippi valley, including Cahokia, Mississippian settlements and temple towns were abandoned about 1400 leaving behind what Stephen Williams has called

the Vacant Quarter.⁵⁶ The same phenomenon occurred in the central Illinois valley, where there is no archaeologically visible Indian occupation for two centuries after 1450.

After A.D. 1200 bison hunting was becoming more visible in the archaeological record among the village farming cultures of the Missouri valley and in the prairie margins of the Plains. By 1300–1400 Indian populations along the upper Mississippi River were being drawn toward the Plains to take advantage of this resource, thereby reducing the population pressure around Mississippi valley centers such as Cahokia.⁵⁷ In time bison became numerous enough to provide an economic resource for Indians east of the Mississippi in Illinois, although not until the 1600s.

Coupled with factors that could have given Cahokians an area into which to move were factors that would have allowed them to take advantage of the opportunity presented. Studies of maize show that toward the end of Cahokia's Mississippian occupation, Cahokians were using increasing amounts of an eight-rowed corn that is known to have had many advantages over the Midwestern twelve-row corn that until then had been cultivated in the American Bottom. With a shorter growing season and greater drought resistance, the eight-rowed Northern flint corn was an ideal crop for areas west of the well-watered American Bottom. It was also the crop of choice for all tribes of the Midwest when the post-contact period dawned.⁵⁸

Rather than thinking of the disappearance of Cahokia as its downfall or collapse, with all the negative associations of those words, one may more positively consider it as a successful readaptation permitted by "a serendipitous concurrence of events permitting resettlement outside of the circumscribing confines of riverine bottomland environments."⁵⁹ Why, for example, "should the abandonment of Cahokia be represented as a collapse or death rather than as a well-considered trade-off for new options available to Indians of the time, successfully leading to ways of life familiar from later history?"⁶⁰

There is much to be said for seeking the inheritors of Cahokia's cultural legacy west of the Mississippi among Dhegiha speakers, specifically among the Omaha, Ponca, Osage, and Kansa, with more to be learned from studying the beliefs and cultural backgrounds of the Chiwere-Winnebago. There has long been speculation that at least some sites of Oneota culture in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska were Dhegiha in origin.⁶¹ Interacting with preexisting Oneota peoples to the north and coming to resemble them in matters of style and economic adaptation, Cahokia Mississippians may prove to have become Oneota.

Before Cahokia, the highest recognized level of sociopolitical integration in the American Bottom was the courtyard-centered agricultural hamlet whose inhabitants were probably members of a single lineage. The rise of Cahokia led to the creation of a new fabric of rural society that apparently outlived Cahokia itself and

survived in the form of large multiclan tribes like those of the Dhegiha and Chiwere-Winnebago—egalitarian in outlook yet complexly integrated in matters of religion and social roles. Thomas Emerson has suggested that “the creation of an organized stable rural population” may have paradoxically been a factor in the disintegration of Cahokia’s central authority.⁶²

The overarching civil and religious authority of Cahokia’s central government must have provided a political environment that enabled the integration of scattered rural households. Once supported by an ideology that sanctioned human sacrifice, Cahokia’s central authority under the direction of its ruling elite could have been found redundant during the Moorehead phase and dispensable during the Sand Prairie phase. It would not have been a disorganized, revolting peasantry that left the American Bottom. Rural Cahokians must have been pre-adapted to cooperative life in multiclan tribal villages like those found in the Midwest during the postcontact period.

NOTES

1. Le Page du Pratz 1972, pp. 333, 338.
2. Kelly 1990b, pp. 113–15.
3. Walthall and Benchley 1987.
4. Walthall and Benchley 1987.
5. Messinger 1808.
6. Griffin 1952b, pp. 361–64; Milner 1998, pp. 2–3.
7. Fowler 1989; Fowler 1997.
8. Dalan 1993.
9. Fowler 1989, p. 198, fig. 10.1.
10. Brown and Kelly 2000, fig. 3; Chappell 2002, frontispiece and fig. 42; Pauketat 1998a, fig. 1.2
11. Wittry 1969; Wittry 1996.
12. Fowler et al. 1999, pp. 141–59.
13. Fowler 1991, fig. 17; Fowler et al. 1999, p. 132, fig. 1.7.
14. Fowler et al. 1999, fig. 6.6.
15. Bareis and Porter 1984; Kelly 1990a; Kelly 1990b; Milner 1998, p. 20.
16. Milner 1991, p. 33; Pauketat and Emerson 1997.
17. Reed, Bennett, and Porter 1968.
18. Hall 1999; Hall 2000; Hall 2001.
19. Stoltman 1991.
20. Hall 1991, figs. 1.4, 1.5; Springer and Witkowski 1982, fig. 1.
21. Benn 1995.
22. Benn 1989, figs. 4a, 7d; Hall 1991, fig. 1.6; Link 1975.
23. Milner 1998, pp. 147–50, 171.
24. Brown and Kelly 2000.
25. Esarey and Conrad 1998.
26. Hollinger and Benn 1998, fig. 1.
27. Hall 1987.
28. Jackson 1998.
29. Pauketat 1998a, p. 17; Wittry 1969; Wittry 1996.
30. Fowler et al. 1999.
31. Walker 1980, p. 54; Wittry 1996, p. 33, n. 3.
32. Hall 1998, pp. 61–62, 63.
33. Bolton 1987, p. 156; Demel and Hall 1998, p. 219.
34. Swanton 1946, pl. 89.
35. Wittry 1996, p. 30, fig. 3.3.
36. Fletcher and La Flesche 1972; Fowler et al. 1999, p. 183, fig. 15.2.

37. Hall 1997b.
38. Fowler and Hall 1972; Fowler and Hall 1975.
39. Mehrer 1995, p. 166.
40. Emerson 1995, p. 435.
41. Milner 1998, p. 101; Emerson and Hughes 2000.
42. Emerson 1982.
43. Jackson, Fortier, and Williams 1992.
44. Emerson 1995, p. 9; Witthoft 1949.
45. Esarey and Conrad 1998, pp. 55–56; Grantham 1993.
46. Brown and Kelly 2000; Emerson et al. 2002; Fowler et al. 1999, pp. 108, 114–15.
47. Hall 1997a, pp. 86–94.
48. Le Page du Pratz 1972, fig. on p. 355; Swanton 1946, pl. 83.
49. Conrad 1991.
50. Griffin 1960; Griffin 1995.
51. Fletcher and La Flesche 1972, pp. 37–41; Ridington and Hastings 1997, pp. 44–47 and fig. 5; Vehik 1993; Yelton 1998.
52. Henning 1993; Ridington and Hastings 1997, p. 53.
53. Dorsey and Thomas 1907.
54. Springer and Witkowski 1982.
55. Hall 1993, pp. 28–29; Hall 1997a, pp. 181 n. 8, 182 n. 18; Walker 1980, pp. 115, 296 n. 25.
56. Milner 1998, p. 173; S. Williams 1990.
57. Boszhardt 2000; Hall 1991; Henning 1998.
58. Hall 1991, pp. 22–25 and table 1.1; Hall 2001.
59. Hall 2001.
60. Anonymous reviewer cited in Chappell 2002, p. 78.
61. Chapman 1952; Henning 1998; Wedel 1959; Yelton 1998;
62. Emerson 1995, pp. 447–48.