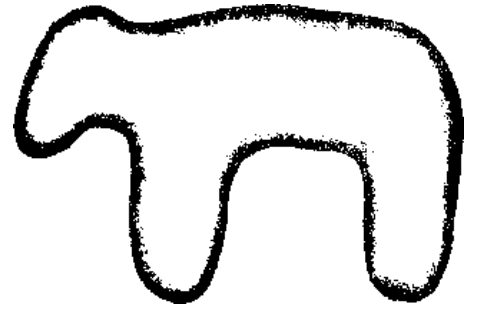




Mound and Burial Styles of the Woodland Era



The Mystery of the Mounds

Monuments of past civilizations lie scattered in many parts of the world. Egypt has the pyramids, England has Stonehenge, and Greece the Acropolis. Out of the jungles of Cambodia rise the towers of Angkor. The isle of Crete offers the sprawling palace of King Minos at Knossos. The stone cities of the Mayas adorn Mexico's Yucatan.

However, in the continental United States there are relatively few massive relics of prehistory. Our forefathers greatly regretted this lack when they came here in the 17th and 18th centuries. People in search of myths and stories usually find answers if they work at it. In the youthful Thirteen Colonies the people had little to work with such as stories or myths, but as they spread southward and westward they found strange earthen mounds beyond the mountains and in the valley of the Mississippi River. It was these "strange earthen shapes" that served as the beginning for their romantic tales of lost civilizations.

The mounds lacked intrigue, beauty and elegance, as they were only mere piles of earth. Some were colossal, like the Cahokia Mounds in Illinois, 100 feet high and covering 16 acres; others were mere rises of the earth. Some stood in solitary grandeur above broad plains, while others sprouted in thick colonies. All were overgrown with trees and shrubbery, so that their outlines could barely be distinguished, although, once cleared, the mounds revealed their artificial nature by their regularity and symmetry of shape. Within many of them were human bones, tools, projectile points, and jewelry.

The Moundbuilder Myth

There were so many of these earthen heaps that they seemed surely to be the work of an energetic and ambitious race. As the settlers fanned outward during the 18th and 19th centuries, they found scarcely an area that did not show traces of moundbuilding activity. In the North, almost every major waterway was bordered by clusters of mounds.

To some of the settlers, the mounds were nuisances to be plowed flat as quickly as possible. To others they were places of handy refuge in time of flood. But to the early antiquarian, the mounds were the work of a vanished race who had incredible persistence in erecting them over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, and then had disappeared from the face of North America.

Archeologists Reveal "Truth"

By the early 19th century, hundreds if not thousands of these mounds had been examined, measured, and partially excavated by the settlers whose imaginations were stirred up by them. These pioneering mound studies revealed the extreme variety in forms of earthworks. Some mounds tended to be low, no more than three or four feet high, and took the forms of gigantic birds, reptiles, mammals, and men. These huge image mounds seemed quite clearly to be of a sacred nature--idols, perhaps. Such effigies were common in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa, and scarcely found anywhere else. They represented the tail end of a period now classified as the Woodland Culture.

The timeline for this Woodland Culture dates from about 500 B.C. to about 1200 A.D. Under this one name, Woodland Culture, there are three subcul-

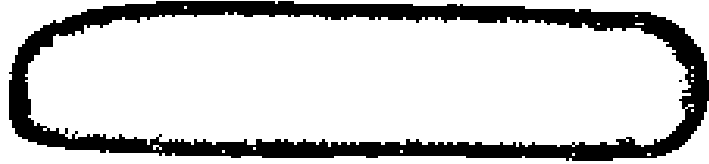
tures in the effigy mound building era. The Early Woodland, also called the Red Ochre, the Hopewellian classified as Middle Woodland, and the Effigy as the Late Woodland. The timelines on these three list the Red Ochre at about 2,500 years ago. The Red Ochre people were so named from the red ochre, or crushed iron ore, they used as funeral materials placed under and over their burials. The Hopewellian mounds of the upper Mississippi Valley are dated at about 2,000 years ago and are associated with the Ohio Hopewell groups. The Effigy, so named because of the "shaped mounds," were built from about 800 to 1,600 years ago. The large "earthen cameos" were built in the shapes of mammals, birds and reptiles. At Effigy Mounds National Monument, there are currently 31 bear and bird effigy mounds protected with the park.

Mound Types

During the Woodland period, there were four styles, or shapes, of mounds in use. The most common of the mound styles during this Woodland time frame is the CONICAL. The conical mound was a round, dome-shaped mound usually about 35 to 45 feet across and about four feet high. Conical mounds were most often used as burial mounds.



The next mound style is the LINEAR. An oblong, “cigar” shaped mound which is usually classified as a ceremonial mound--one absent of burial material. However, there have been a few within the Midwest that did contain some evidence of burial material.



The next style of mound is the COMPOUND. This mound is a combination of the linear and the conical mound. It looks like a string of beads with a dome--linkage--dome--linkage--dome--etc. The “dome” portions of the compound mound contain the burials. The linkage contains no artifacts and may be just an earthen connection from one dome to the next.



The last of the styles, the EFFIGY, meaning “in the shape of,” is shaped like mammals, birds, or reptiles. They are of various sizes and usages. The effigy mound is both a ceremonial mound and a burial mound. However its main use seems to be ceremonial, as only about 20 to 25 percent of them contain any burial material. The burial or ceremonial objects within the effigy are usually located within the heart or head area.



Burial Types

In addition to the four styles of mounds, the Woodland people used four types of burials. The types were not related to the mound style, as at times burials were intermixed within the same mound.

The most common burial type was the BUNDLE burial, where human remains were left outside until most of the flesh was gone. The bones were then bundled together with a piece of string and placed in a small, shallow rectangular pit.

The next style was CREMATION, in which the body was burned. Ash and charred bone fragments that

did not burn completely were left behind. These materials were collected and placed in the burial mound.

The third type of burial was the FLEXED burial. The flexed position, sometimes called the sitting or fetal position, was a flesh burial. This type of burial was more than likely a recent death and burial.

The EXTENDED burial, also a flesh burial, is very similar to what we use today where the body is laid out flat. This, like the flexed burial, was probably a recent death and burial.