

"THE SOUTHERN CULT AT MOUNDVILLE"

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Designs appearing on the Indian pottery found at Moundville, Alabama, as well as on stone, copper and marine shell artifacts from that site, ally the Moundville Indian culture with certain cultures of Mexico and Central America. The most pronounced resemblance is that between the "winged rattlesnake" design of Moundville and the feathered or plumed serpent of the Aztec and Mayan Indians of Mexico and Central America, respectively. Other designs such as the "hand and eye", "warrior", and "death skull" strengthen this relationship.

While the resemblances of these Moundville designs to those of Mexico and Central America were recognized several years ago by early investigators such as Clarence B. Moore and W.K. Moorehead, it was not until A.J. Waring and Preston Holder summarized the "cult" designs in the American Anthropologist, (Vol. 47, No. 1), during 1941 that the "southern cult" was given critical and detailed analyses.

Waring and Holder, in their analysis of the southern cult, made reference to the three most important cult sites: Moundville (Alabama), Etowah (Georgia), and Spiro (eastern Oklahoma). These investigators determined that the design elements of the southern cult could be classified into groups of motifs and designs, the most common of which are as follows:

- I Cross (both Greek and swastika)
- II Sun Circle
- III Bi-lobed Arrow
- IV Forked Eye
- V Open Eye
- VI Barred Oval (genital symbol)
- VII Hand-and-Eye

- VIII Death Motifs (skull-arm bones)
- IX Winged Rattlesnake
- X Anthropomorphized Eagle ("eagle warrior")
- XI Pileated Woodpecker
- XII Cat (stone "jaguar" smoking pipes)
- XIII Spider

Many of these designs and motifs appear in combinations, such as winged rattlesnake with forked eye, pileated woodpecker with barred oval, "eagle warrior" with forked eye, etc.

In addition to these designs, most of which appear on the pottery at Moundville, there are other aspects of the southern cult expressed in objects such as monolithic axes, copper axes, copper ear spools, copper pendants and gorgets, maces (batons of chipped stone), and smoking pipes, most notable of which are the cat or jaguar pipes.

The following tabulations summarize the cult material found at Moundville:

TABLE I
Southern Cult Motifs and Designs on Pottery Vessels

| <u>Motifs and Designs</u> | <u>Number of Pottery Vessels</u> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Greek Cross (appearing alone) | 7 |
| Swastika (appearing alone) | 1 |
| Sun Circle (appearing alone) | 4 |
| Bi-lobed Arrow (appearing alone) | 3 |
| Open Eye (appearing alone) | 3 |
| Hand (appearing alone) | 2 |
| Hand-and-Eye (appearing alone) | 4 |
| Skull (appearing alone) | 1 |
| Bird Tails (appearing alone) | 1 |
| Winged Rattlesnake | 2 |
| -Horned, Antlered or Plumed | 3 |
| -Forked Eye | 1 |
| -Horned, Antlered or Plumed - Forked Eye | 5 |
| Eagle | 1 |
| -Forked Eye | 3 |
| -Forked Eye - Hand-and-Eye | 1 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | 3 |
| -Greek Cross | 1 |
| -Barred Oval | 1 |
| -Swastika - Barred Oval | 1 |

TABLE I continued
Southern Cult Motifs and Designs on Pottery Vessels

| <u>Motifs and Designs</u> | <u>Number of Pottery Vessels</u> |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Skull - Greek Cross - Sun Circle - Hand Appended to Bones. | .1 |
| Skull - Hand | .2 |
| Skull - Hand-and-Eye. | .1 |
| Skull - Forearm Bones | .1 |
| Hand - Sun Circle | .1 |
| Bi-lobed Arrow - Sun Circle - Greek Cross | .1 |
| Bird Tails - Sun Circle | .1 |
| Bird Tails - Swastika | .1 |
| Hand - Open Eye | .1 |
| Hand - Hand Appended to Forearm Bones | .1 |
| Greek Cross - Swastika. | .2 |

2 incised (M.S.M.)

Most of the pottery vessels displaying cult designs are water bottles. Of the vessels enumerated above, all but five are water bottles. These five are bowls. Nearly all of the vessels, including the five bowls, are black filmed with designs engraved through the film into the gray paste of the vessel, with a few incised decorations present. Four of the vessels enumerated above are painted by negative painting. The painted designs are confined to water bottles having unusually narrow necks.

TABLE II
Southern Cult Motifs and Designs on Objects of Stone, Copper and Shell

| | |
|--|---|
| Stone Discs | |
| Rattlesnake with forked eye and horned, antlered or plumed - Hand-and-Eye | 1 |
| Skull - Hand-and-Eye - Bi-lobed Arrow | 1 |
| Scalloped and Border-Incised (Sun Circle form). | 8 |
| Plain Edge and Border-Incised (Sun Circle form). | 1 |
| Plain Edge (Sun Circle form). | 1 |
| Stone Slabs | |
| Scalloped ends | 2 |

TABLE II continued
 Southern Cult Motifs and Designs on Objects of Stone, Copper
 and Shell

| | |
|---|----|
| Copper Pendants and Gorgets | |
| Swastika. | 8 |
| Sun Circle. | 3 |
| Open Eye. | 18 |
| Hand-and-Eye - Open Eye - Sun Circle. | 1 |
| Copper Baton | |
| Warrior. | 1 |
| Copper Plume. | |
| | 1 |
| Shell Gorgets | |
| Warrior. | 2 |
| Warrior with forked eye. | 1 |
| Woodpecker - Sun Circle. | 1 |
| Sun Circle - Greek Cross | 1 |

TABLE III
 Southern Cult Effigy Forms

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Stone Smoking Pipes | |
| Cat ("jaguar"). | 5 |
| Eagle with forked eye | 1 |
| Pottery | |
| Hand Effigy. | 1 |
| "Hunch-back" Human Effigy. | 5 |

TABLE IV
 Southern Cult Objects Other Than Those Bearing Cult Designs or Motifs

| | |
|---|---|
| Monolithic Axe. | 1 |
| Shell Replica of Monolithic Axe | 1 |
| Stone Ceremonial Axes | 3 |
| Stone Spuds (celt with expanded bit). | 2 |
| Chipped Stone Mace. | 1 |
| Copper Ear Spools | 5 |
| Conch Shell Cup. | 1 |

Summary

At Moundville it is evident that "cult" pottery vessels were reserved for burying with the dead. In this study the characteristics of 221 pottery vessels were reviewed. All of these vessels accompanied burials.

Of these 221 vessels, 60 bore definite cult motifs or designs; 88 others either bore designs (scrolls with wing-like borders) which appear related to the southern cult or were of well-made black filmed ware, either in plain or effigy form. The remaining 73 vessels studied were bowls or pots bearing handles, and cannot be said to be related to the southern cult on typological grounds. Thus 148 of the 221 vessels reviewed may be considered ceremonial ware, while the remaining 73, although buried with the dead, are of styles commonly referred to as "utilitarian".

A review of nearly 100,000 sherds from the Roadway Excavations at Moundville strengthens this picture. Out of 97,561 shell-tempered sherds from the Roadway Excavations, only 397 or .4% were of the type Moundville Filmed Engraved (the type containing most of the cult pottery), 1,752 or 1.8% were Moundville Filmed Incised (a type in which cult pottery sometimes occurs), and only 8,918 or 9.14% were Moundville Black Filmed (related by association and surface finish to cult pottery).

Thus only 11.34% of the 97,561 shell-tempered sherds can be considered related to the cult pottery, and the evidence is that only a relatively few fragments of cult pottery are found in the general village (Roadway) excavations, whereas the proportion of cult vessels and "proto-cult" vessels buried with the dead is heavily in the majority as compared with utilitarian vessels used as burial offerings.

As to the general relationship of Moundville to other sites, the following summary of Moundville pottery may serve as a guide. It is based on the 98,850 sherds from the Roadway Excavations.

| | No. | Per cent |
|--------------------|--------|----------|
| Shell-tempered | 97,561 | 98.70 |
| Clay-grit-tempered | 1,133 | 1.15 |
| Limestone-tempered | 12 | 0.01 |
| Sand-tempered | 143 | 0.14 |
| Fiber-tempered | 1 | .007 |

Various estimates of the age of Moundville have been put forth as follows:

| <u>Source</u> | <u>Year</u> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Ford and Willey <u>American Anthropologist, Vol. 43</u> (Based on view that DeSoto would have visited the site had it been in existence, and these authors do not hold that it is typologically ancient enough to have been populated and abandoned prior to DeSoto) | 1700A.D. |
| Alex Krieger (In various papers and statements) | Prior to 1540 A.D. |
| J.B. Griffin <u>Journal of Washington Academy of Sciences, Vol. 34, No. 9.</u> (Suggested that DeLuna brought Mexican Indians into Southeast and injected cult into area.) | 1560 A.D. or later |

So far, no historic material has been found at Moundville, and only a small portion of the midden and surface sherds are of types commonly associated with historic sites in Alabama (i.e., McKee Island pottery types - relatives of Ocmulgee Fields pottery types).