

Egypt, Greece, and Rome were sometimes buried with pomp and splendor, yet many royal funerals have left little or no trace. Sometimes rulers are buried in a fashion similar to their subjects. Religious or political ideologies may be strong influences. Much also depends on whether the power of the leadership is threatened. Lavish ritual performances have often been staged to establish or reassert political stability.

Fashions of funerary ostentation or simplicity can be traced in archaeological evidence. The adoption of Christianity in northern Europe was linked to a brief flourishing of elaborate pagan burials (such as the ship burials at Sutton Hoo, England) and a subsequent change toward simple burial. Often the innovative funeral fashions of a ruling group have been emulated by lower social groups. Within two hundred years of Emperor Nero's decision to bury his wife rather than to cremate her, inhumation was common throughout the Roman Empire.

Mortuary analysis also attempts to relate the dead to the living through the placing of the dead. The change from burial under house floors to cemeteries away from settlements in the southeastern European Late Neolithic-Copper Age (fourth millennium BC) has been interpreted as a power shift from community identity to individual prestige in the exterior domain of hunting and warfare. The places of the dead may also mark political centers or boundaries, thereby demonstrating claims to ancestral land.

In recent years there has been a conflict over reburial and repatriation of human remains. In many postcolonial countries, particularly North America and Australasia, where living traditions link indigenous communities to distant dead, archaeologists have been asked to rebury or to return collections of human remains. In Australia, 15,000- to 9,000-year-old bones from Kow Swamp were reburied by aborigines, preventing further study. Reconciliation is sometimes possible, however—for example, by the provision of “keeping places” where bones are curated by indigenous representatives.

[See also Burial and Tombs; Paleopathology; Pyramids of Giza; Ranking and Social Inequality, Theories of; Reburial and Repatriation; Sungir; Sutton Hoo.]

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#### MOUNDS OF EASTERN NORTH AMERICA

Earthen mounds built by ancient Native American peoples are nowadays found throughout the Eastern Woodlands of North America, from the Gulf Coast in the South to the Great Lakes in the North. Particularly large concentrations of these earthworks occur in the Midwest and the South, often in or near the valleys of major rivers such as the Mississippi, the Illinois, the Ohio, and the Tennessee. The mounds themselves were made in a variety of forms, usually round or rectangular. In some cases they attained monumental proportions: The largest such earthwork built in pre-Columbian times, the Monks Mound at the Cahokia site near St. Louis, is about 100 feet (30 m) high and 1,000 feet (300 m) long.

Not surprisingly, these mounds have been the subject of archaeological interest for quite some time. Through most of the nineteenth century, the prevailing opinion among Euro-American antiquarians was that the local natives were too uncivilized to have built such grand earthworks; instead, the mounds were attributed to a vanished race of Mound Builders. There was much speculation as to the identity of these mysterious people:

Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Toltecs were all mentioned as possibilities. It was not until the end of the century that this myth was finally demolished. In 1894, Cyrus Thomas, a scholar at the Smithsonian Institution, published the results of his extensive research, which proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the mounds had indeed been built by indigenous peoples, ancestors of the historic Native American tribes. Thomas's work was extremely important, for it ended the rampant (and often racist) speculation and marked the emergence of archaeology as a scientific discipline in North America.

By the middle of the twentieth century, archaeological attention had turned to questions of culture history. Many were struck by the general similarities between mound-building practices in North America and those in Mexico, particularly after AD 1000. Some proposed that eastern North Americans had been strongly influenced by Mexicans in pre-Columbian times and that mound-building traditions had been adopted by the former from the latter. While this theory was popular for a time, it has, over the past thirty years, fallen out of favor, largely for lack of evidence. Mexican artifacts are virtually nonexistent in eastern North America (and vice versa), a strong indication that sustained contact never occurred between the two areas. Moreover, we now know that mound building in the Eastern Woodlands goes back thousands of years, long before the alleged Mexican similarities appeared. Hence, this tradition is best understood as an indigenous development, which, at various times, incorporated ideas that were widely distributed among the native people of the Americas. The broad similarities that exist between eastern North American and Mexican mounds (and indeed among mounds throughout the New World) seem now to be more the result of shared heritage than direct contact.

**Archaic Period Mounds (5500–500 BC).** The Archaic Period inhabitants of eastern North America were hunters, fishers, and gatherers who followed many different lifeways adapted to local

conditions. Over time, certain regions showed signs of increases in population, sedentism, and territoriality. Such factors may have played a role in the building of the earliest mounds.

The oldest mound yet discovered dates to about 5500 BC and was located at L'Anse Amour on the Labrador coast. It was a low circular pile of boulders, just over 1.6 feet (.5 m) high and some 30 feet (9 m) in diameter, that covered the grave of a child.

Somewhat later, during the third millennium BC, burial mounds started to appear in the central Mississippi Valley and neighboring drainages, mostly in Missouri and Illinois. Generally located on hilltops, these low earthen mounds typically contained the graves of one or more individuals.

Farther south, in the Lower Mississippi Valley, considerably larger mounds, sometimes in groups, were being built by 3500 BC. These earthworks were generally conical or loaf-shaped, generally 6.5 to 23 feet (2 to 7 m) high. Limited excavations have not revealed any burials, so the function of these early mounds is still unknown. Mounds of similar size, some with burials, dating from the fourth through the second millennium BC have also been found in eastern Florida.

This southern tradition eventually produced the largest Archaic Period earthworks ever built: the Poverty Point site in northeastern Louisiana, which was used between 1800 BC and 500 BC. The site is today marked by a large pear-shaped mound some 70 feet (21 m) high, a smaller conical mound 20 feet (6 m) high, and six concentric ridges that form a semicircle slightly more than 0.6 mile (1 km) in diameter. The function of the bigger mound is a mystery. The smaller mound was once believed to be a funerary structure, but recent work has cast doubt on this interpretation. The ridges were used for habitation, as evidenced by postholes, pits, and associated middens. Some archaeologists believe that Poverty Point was a large, permanently occupied town; others believe it was a sacred site where people who lived in the surrounding region would sometimes congregate. Whatever the case, these Archaic mounds bespeak a growing level of social

complexity among the hunting and gathering peoples who built them.

**Woodland Period Mounds (500 BC–AD 1000).** The Woodland Period was marked by several trends. One was the spread of agricultural economies, largely based on the indigenous plants of the Eastern Agricultural Complex. A second was the emergence in some regions of pronounced social inequality, marked archaeologically by the elaboration of graves. And a third was the appearance of large-scale interaction spheres (such as Adena and Hopewell), which facilitated not only the exchange of material goods but also the spread of rituals, symbols, and beliefs. It was in this context that mound building became commonplace across much of eastern North America.

The most typical Woodland Period earthwork was the dome-shaped or conical burial mound. Sometimes such mounds had a relatively simple internal structure, containing little more than earthen fill with one or more burials interspersed. More often, however, they consisted of a ritual facility that had been used for some time and then sealed under a cap of earth. The nature of the facility itself was variable. Some were wooden buildings that were dismantled prior to being capped; others were cryptlike enclosures built of earth and logs; yet others were low earthen platforms usually less than 3 feet (1 m) high; and many were specially prepared surfaces that had been stripped of topsoil, burned, floored with clay, or enclosed by screens or embankments. Whatever form they took, all these facilities were connected in some way with rituals involving the dead, used either as places where corpses were cremated or defleshed or as mortuaries where human remains were stored. Before the facility was sealed, remains of the dead were typically placed on the floor or buried beneath it. Burials were also commonly placed in the overlying earthen cap. Some mounds contained only one facility and cap, while others grew larger through many such cycles of use. The largest examples were more than 66 feet (20 m) high. Overall, the mounds shared many characteristics, but these characteristics were combined

in myriad ways, as though a common pool of symbols and ritual practices were drawn upon to create a wide range of local manifestations.

In some areas, burial mounds were accompanied by large earthen embankments. By far the most elaborate expression is attributed to the Hopewell culture of southern Ohio (ca. AD 1–500), who used embankments to build huge geometric enclosures—often square or circular in shape—that were grouped with mounds in a variety of ways and typically encompassed dozens of acres.

Square or rectangular platform mounds were also constructed during this period, mostly in the southern states. In some cases these seem to have been used as ritual platforms, similar to the platforms found inside some burial mounds except that they were never capped. In other cases, however, the platforms were surmounted by buildings, either temples or elite residences. By AD 800, this pattern was common in the Coles Creek culture of the Lower Mississippi Valley, where it presaged later Mississippian developments.

The western Great Lakes area saw the appearance of a distinctive Effigy Mound culture after AD 300. Burial mounds of this culture were shaped like birds, mammals, turtles, and other creatures. Such earthworks were generally less than 3 feet (1 m) high but often more than 328 feet (100 m) across.

**Mississippian Mounds (AD 1000–1700).** The end of the first millennium AD was a time of profound change, as people throughout the Eastern Woodlands turned to maize agriculture for sustenance. Sedentary hamlets and villages became the typical settlements. In the North, communities remained largely egalitarian. In the South, however, the social inequality seen in Woodland times grew more pronounced, as centralized hierarchical polities became the norm. These southern cultures, collectively called Mississippian, elaborated the practices of mound building that had pervaded the area for centuries.

Although burial mounds continued to be made in many places, the dominant form of monumental earthwork was now the rectangular platform mound

with a wooden building on its summit. This building was usually a temple or the residence of a chief. Most Mississippian mounds were not constructed in a single episode but rather in multiple stages. After a mound had been used for a time, the building on its summit would be dismantled and another layer of earth would be added; a new building would then be erected on top. As this cycle was repeated, the mound's dimensions would grow. Mounds 10 to 39 feet (3 to 12 m) high were common; occasionally they reached heights of 66 feet (20 m) or more.

Mississippian mounds sometimes occurred singly but were often grouped around a plaza that served as a venue for ceremonies and other public events. A large civic-ceremonial center could have well over a dozen mounds and cover dozens of acres.

Building such mounds and mound centers required considerable labor, which was mobilized by chiefs through tributary and other obligations. Indeed, the mounds themselves were powerful religious symbols; not only were community rituals held there, but constructing a mound was a ritual act accompanied by appropriate ceremonies and offerings. While it is difficult to reconstruct fully the nexus of meanings associated with mounds, it is a reasonable guess that the placement of residences atop such powerful icons legitimated the authority of the chiefs who lived there.

[See also Adena Culture; Cahokia; Hopewell Culture; Mississippian Culture; Moundville; North America: The Eastern Woodlands and the South; Poverty Point; Southern Cult.]

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## MOUNDS OF THE AMAZON

Five types of archaeological mound have been noted in the Amazon region: shell refuse and artificial mounds, artificial earth platforms for entire villages, earth mounds and ridges for cultivation, causeways and canals, and figurative mounds, both geometric and biomorphic.

The shell mounds of the Amazon region are found on both flooded and unflooded land at rivers and estuaries in the Guianas, the mouth of the Amazon in Brazil, the mainstream of the Amazon in Brazil, along tributaries in the Bolivian Amazon, and at the mouth of the Orinoco. Most shell mounds are piles of human refuse that accrued mainly between 7500 and 4000 BP, but a few seem to have artificial mounds, and later cultures established dwellings and/or cemeteries on top of the earlier shell mounds. Nine early shell mounds in the eastern Amazon have been dated, all in the same general chronological range. All are of pottery-age cultures. So far, no preceramic shell mounds have been documented, a great surprise to archaeologists, who expected the tropical forest habitat to have limited sedentary settlement in the Amazon. The shell mounds appear to have been created by the activities of aquatic foragers who did not use agriculture to a great extent. Plant remains and plant organic

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