

**Brad H. Koldehoff and Timothy R. Pauketat, editors, *Archaeology and Ancient Religion in the American Midcontinent***

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018. Hardcover, 368 pages, 53 b/w figures and 9 tables. ISBN: 9780817319960. US\$64.95. E-Book. ISBN: 9780817392000. US\$64.95.

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Brad Koldehoff and Timothy Pauketat have edited a comprehensive anthology regarding religion and archaeology in the Midwest United States. Koldehoff co-wrote the first chapter with Kenneth Farnsworth, and 13 additional authors contribute the remaining seven chapters. Throughout this text, the editors have assembled broad insight into numerous aspects of Mississippian culture.

Koldehoff and Farnsworth's first chapter, "From Tubes to Platforms: Transformations in Early Smoking Pipes and Ancient Rituals", is a well-written and insightful presentation of the place and cultural importance of "smoking pipes". The authors bring forth factors such as the importance of the smoke, for example from sacred fires, as being because it floats into the sky for communication with the gods. They also discuss aspects of the transfer of spiritual power through the inhalation and exhalation of smoke. Pipes were said to have life histories, and Koldehoff and Farnsworth outline details regarding various extant pipes. They claim, as well, that platform pipes were centrally involved with the spread of the Hopewell culture and traditions. Data is included regarding pipe types, site locations and notes regarding material and conditions.

Chapter 2, "From Caches to Gatherings: The Reality of Intentionally Deposited Objects in Mississippian Buildings" by Melissa Baltus, gives a detailed discussion of the understanding of humans' place in the world in relation to surrounding "deities, ancestors, animals, (supra)natural forces, and the landscape" (p. 81). She talks about the practice of gathering ordinary tools for purposes related to relationships with supernatural beings in the Cahokia region. Baltus uses pre-Columbian Cahokia as an example of the gathering process being multi-scalar, and she includes significant supporting data from this region. She also includes data regarding tools such as knives and hoes and many other kinds found at over 30 sites. In all, the practice and significance of caching is well-illustrated.

The following third chapter, "Magic Plants and Mississippian Ritual" by Kathryn E. Parker and Mary L. Simon, discusses human interaction with special plants for uses other than just food and shelter, including being used for medicine or to induce spiritual journeys. These plants could also be used to connect with ancestors or other spiritual forces for guidance. The authors describe tobacco, jimson weed, black nightshade and morning glory being used in the Cahokia region to induce altered states, to communicate with spiritual realms and to purify and sanctify, as well to promote community cohesion. Each of the plants is described in detail, including their magical properties. The authors emphasise that these plants had no nutritional value and were esteemed for their mind-altering capabilities. Significant data is presented regarding these four plants at sites where they have been documented.

In Chapter 4, "The People of Mound 72: Ritual and Death, Integration and Community Building at Early Cahokia", Kristin M. Hedman and Eve A. Hargrave explore the significance of the mortuary practices of ancient woodland and Mississippian peoples, with the specific examples of Mound 72 and early Cahokia. Here, they discuss the meaning behind mortuary factors, events, and artefacts to those still alive. Their description gives insight and a vivid picture of the area. As with previous chapters, Hedman and Hargrave include extensive data to support their positions. They discuss the significance of burial, both individual and mass, and talk about sacrificial death and its implications. Their examination of skeletal remains and mortuaries allows for significant analysis, and their findings help to support concepts regarding population growth due to immigration to Cahokia.

Chapter 5, "Putting Religion Ahead of Politics: Cahokian Origins as Viewed through Emerald's Shrines" by Susan Alt, begins by discussing the Emerald Acropolis, east of Cahokia, and the potential relationship between it and Cahokia. She explains that Cahokia developed as part of a religious movement which spread across much of North America at the time. A main focus of this chapter, however, concerns Mississippian constructions that were driven by cosmological beliefs and entities that inhabited the earth and sky. In addition to buildings and shrines, these constructions included widening a ridge to align it with the rare event of the maximum north lunar standstill. Alt states that the Moon was responsible for originating the world of the Caddo, and their high priest was known as "Lord Moon" (p. 224). Also filled with substantial supporting evidence, this chapter gives good insight into an important aspect of Mississippian culture.

John D. Richards and Thomas J. Zych in Chapter 6, "A Landscape of Mounds: Community Ethnogenesis at Aztalan", discuss Mississippian mounds and their varieties, with particular regard to the platform mounds at the Aztalan site in Wisconsin. Evidence is cited for both solar and lunar alignments at the site. The authors discuss specific details about several mounds and describe mound design, chronology and uses. The significance of such mounds in society is highlighted, thus furthering insight into Mississippian culture.

In the seventh chapter, "The Power of Place: Ancient Ritual Landscapes in Southwestern Illinois" by Mark J. Wagner, Jonathan Remo, Kayeleigh Sharp and Go Matsumoto, the authors give insight into the spiritual meaning and significance of physical and cultural features, primarily in pre-contact Illinois, using the Jackson Bottoms of Southern Illinois

as an example. Their detailed discussion highlights the relationship with floodplains and elevated landforms during sizeable floods, which is a considerable concern in this area, and evidential insight is given for different periods. Ritualisation of the landscape is explored in depth.

The final, eighth, chapter, “Ancient Skywatchers of the Eastern Woodlands” by William F. Romain, explores aspects of astronomy in culture throughout the region. Romain begins by saying that there is a 5000-year history of skywatching in the Eastern Woodlands, but that this is an underexplored area of research. He then describes some of the methods useful for this type of analysis and proceeds to discuss examples found in Watson Brake, Poverty Point, Mound City, Toltec and Cahokia. At Watson Brake, Romain describes alignments that roughly approximate those for the June and December solstice sunrises. Intentional alignments of this type are notable and are frequently found at sites of ancient cultures. He suggests two “design points” (pp. 313–315) at Poverty Point that may have served as observation points for these solstitial events, as well as for the equinoctial events in March and September. Romain has found Mound City to be associated with the dead, the Milky Way and the Path of Souls at the time of the solstice in June. He describes solar and lunar alignments at Toltec, and suggests that certain concepts may have made their way from Toltec to Cahokia via rivers. He mentions only an unnamed “major tributary of the Mississippi River” (pp. 319–320) at Toltec, and it would have been helpful to readers had he been more specific. Presumably this is the Arkansas River that joins the Mississippi with Cahokia being located to the north, near the Mississippi at St. Louis. He also discusses the design plan of Cahokia and later relates the cosmos of Cahokia as being quadri-partitioned. He adds significant value to the depth of this volume by including discussion of a valuable aspect of these cultures.

This book is well-written, well-supported and well-edited. Its strength is in the cross-section of aspects of Mississippian culture that were presented. This makes the book a valuable resource for those with an interest in early culture in this part of mid-America. It includes a vivid picture of life in Cahokia and throughout the region, and supplies an extensive collection of valuable research data. One factor to point out, however, is that intentional solstitial events commonly can be more definitively supported than those related to equinoxes, which have a certain chance of being coincidental.

*Archaeology & Ancient Religion in the American Midcontinent* provides significant insight into the culture of this region, and readers will be able to synthesise their own personal understanding when assimilating the information presented here. Koldehoff and Pauketat have produced a volume of great service to the field and it is well worth reading. I enjoyed what it had to offer.