

***Cahokia and the North American Worlds.* Sarah E. Baires. 2022. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. iv + 90 pp. \$22.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-10892-876-2. \$22.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-1-10894-610-0.**

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Cambridge Elements digital books are intended to provide concise, authoritative, and focused references for students and professionals. Sarah E. Baires's 94-page book, focusing on the Cahokia mounds site in Illinois, appears in the "Elements of the Global Middle Ages" series. Baires uses this platform to present her views on Cahokia as a living, urban environment with a deep and continuing history—a remarkable place, significant across the ages, from its past residents to those who now visit and view what remains of its infrastructure.

Melvin L. Fowler promoted the interpretation of Cahokia as a city nearly a half-century ago ("A Pre-Columbian Urban Center on the Mississippi," *Scientific American* 233[2]:92–101, 1975). Fowler's initial training as a civil engineer helped him to realize that Cahokia is a planned place, and that the placements of mounds, plazas, and other features had meaning. The general acceptance of Cahokia's urbanism took several more decades, but as Baires's book demonstrates, Cahokia as a city has now emerged in a postmodern interpretive world where "human and other-than-human persons . . . populate its spaces" (p. 1). Baires strives to not only describe elements of the ancient Cahokian world but also quash the antiquated ways of Western scholars who placed cultures on evolutionary scales that reflect degrees of social complexity. This evolutionary scaling essentially ranked the sophistication of non-Western as compared with Western cultures. In concert with the initial skepticism about Fowler's characterization of Cahokia as an urban place, Baires states, "Archaeologically, cities were things of the Old World, not identified in pre-European-contact North America" (p. 13).

One of the most interesting threads in Baires's discussion of the Cahokian urban environment concerns the place and significance of water in the Cahokian world. Water is not only necessary for agriculture; it has strong spiritual and religious connections. Baires describes in some detail the ubiquitous presence of marshy, swampy, and muddy areas of the site that not only provided clays for mounds, daubed buildings, and pottery but were incorporated into the spatial arrangement of the city. Causeways and neighborhoods were constructed along watery places, as well as rotundas that Timothy R. Pauketat and Susan M. Alt have interpreted as "water shrines" (Alt, *Cahokia's Complexities: Ceremonies and Politics of the First Mississippian Farmers*, 2019). Information about the celestial connections of Cahokia's features, including the Woodhenge solar calendar and the lunar alignments of the building grids, also substantiate the intended cosmological aspects of Cahokia's plan.

Absent from the mentioned major features of Cahokia is a thoughtful discussion or even description of Mound 72. It is listed as one of several excavations of "different Cahokia neighborhoods" that date to approximately AD 1050 (p. 22) and as a ridgetop mortuary mound (p. 24), and it is compared to a burial of a female wrapped in shell beads at the Aztalan site (p. 48). What might a mound that contains likely human sacrifices, many of them local young women (Thomas E. Emerson, Kristin M. Hedman, Eve A. Hargrave, Dawn E. Cobb, and Andrew R. Thompson, "Paradigms Lost: Reconfiguring Cahokia's Mound 72 Beaded Burial," *American Antiquity* 81[3]:405–425), imply about urban life, leadership, and women's rights at Cahokia? How do such practices fit into the more bucolic scenes presented of women as farmers who may have gained political power from their provisions (p. 18)?

Sections of the book contextualize Cahokia in chronological time with mound-building traditions in the larger region. Baires discusses the closely related East St. Louis and St. Louis mound groups,

as well as the related Aztalan and Trempealeau sites in Wisconsin that are thought to be destinations of Cahokia migrants. Other major Mississippian mound centers—including Angel (Indiana), Etowah (Georgia), Moundville (Alabama), and Shiloh (Tennessee)—are featured in comparison to and as having potential connections with Cahokia. Ironically, the comparisons include one example based on the discredited evolutionary scale used to measure degrees of social complexity. In this case, it is the “paramount chiefdom” of Coosa, as told by Spanish invaders of the sixteenth century, and for which many scholars studying Mississippian sites “from northeastern Tennessee south to northern Georgia” (p. 56) have found no supporting biological, chronological, social organizational, or material culture evidence for Coosa’s extent into the Upper Tennessee Valley (e.g., C. Clifford Boyd Jr. and Gerald F. Schroedl, “In Search of Coosa,” *American Antiquity* 52[4]:840–845; Lynne P. Sullivan, “Reconfiguring the Chickamauga Basin,” in *New Deal Archaeology in Tennessee: Intellectual, Methodological, and Theoretical Contributions*, edited by David H. Dye, 2016).

Cahokia and the North American Worlds is a generally useful book for an introduction to the archaeology of this highly significant ancient Native American city. It has some rough edges; the book would benefit from another round of copyediting. For someone wanting to learn some basic information about Cahokia, it is a fairly quick read, once one gets past the “-alities” and “-isms” lingo of postmodernist vocabulary. Baires is spot-on in her position that it is time for archaeology to stop using evolutionary scales of cultural complexity as the bases for cultural comparisons. This short book might be more interesting and relevant for its stated audience if there were less about these outdated classifications and more discussion, description, and analysis centered on the archaeological details of the remarkable ancient city of Cahokia itself.

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***Authority, Autonomy, and the Archaeology of a Mississippian Community.* Erin S. Nelson. 2019. University of Florida Press, Gainesville. xv + 186 pp. \$80.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-68340-112-4.**

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The Yazoo Basin in northwestern Mississippi is well recognized in the southeastern United States for having large numbers of Mississippian mound sites; in the northern Basin, Late Mississippian (ca. AD 1300–1550) mound sites are particularly numerous but not well investigated. *Authority, Autonomy, and the Archaeology of a Mississippian Community*, a revision of Erin S. Nelson’s dissertation, is focused on one Late Mississippian mound site—Parchman Place—and it presents the results of a well-defined and carefully constructed research project. One major contribution of this book is a methodologically rigorous analysis of ceramics and radiocarbon dates to refine the culture history into two sequential phases: Parchman I dating to the fourteenth century and Parchman II dating to the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This chronology makes it possible to examine changes in settlement layout and mound construction during the occupation of the site, from which inferences about the social relationships among the inhabitants of the site are made. Nelson concludes that these relationships included balance and difference, with a significant transformation in one social group’s status later in the occupation history of the site. A second major contribution is the use of ceramic vessel types and refined analyses of mound construction histories to build interpretations about persistence and variance in feasting and mound-building practices that contributed to the