

Sources
and
Studies
in World
History

Native Americans Before 1492

The Moundbuilding Centers of the Eastern Woodlands



Lynda Norene Shaffer

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*The Moundbuilding Centers
of the Eastern Woodlands*



Kevin Reilly, Series Editor

THE ALCHEMY OF HAPPINESS

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali

translated by Claud Field

Revised and annotated by Elton L. Daniel

LIFELINES FROM OUR PAST

A New World History

L. S. Stavrianos

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BALKAN WORLDS

The First and Last Europe

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To Aunt Frankye and co-explorers of the Missouri Woodlands Lowell and Leslie, and in memory of another who was in our party and still is always on our minds, Emma Jean Jundy Bland White (1942–1979).

To Mother, in memory of Grandmother Lillie Bell Goodman Cox Cook Tomlin MacWilliams (1888–1979) and Great-Grandmother Alice Virginia Carl Goodman (1869–1954), and to all who tell the stories of those who came before.

OLD STUDENTS OF THE NEW PHYSICS

A bulldozer slashed the breast
of the Indian mound—
 back and forth
 back and forth
scraping ancient soil
bone/pottery/prayer
into a dump truck
until the land was flat

 except

for one hip bone.
It stood upright—
a periscope from Mother Earth—
and drew into its dark socket
 the wide-open wound
 with its ragged edge of grass,
 trees standing nearby
 drooped in dust and shock,
 machines receding . . .

A monarch butterfly
drifted over the site.
She lit on the bone,
slowly flexed her wings.
“When I move my wings
energies change around the world
 round and round and
 up . . . up . . . up . . .
 into the sky.
I can cause storm/hurricane/tornado
when I move my wings.”

“I know,” said the bone.
“Now men have moved me.”

—Marilou Awiakta

CONTENTS

List of Maps and Other Illustrations	ix
Foreword by Kevin Reilly	xiii
Preface	xv
1 Introduction	3
2 The Archaic Context from Which Moundbuilding Emerged	16
3 Poverty Point, the First Moundbuilding Epoch	28
4 Adena-Hopewell, the Second Moundbuilding Epoch	38
5 Cahokia and Other Mississippian Period Centers, the Third Moundbuilding Epoch	51
6 Subregions, Outposts, and the Decline of Cahokia	73
7 Conclusion	84
For Further Reading	101
Notes	103
Bibliography	109
Index	119

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MAPS AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

Chronology of the Moundbuilding Region	6
Maps	
1. The Moundbuilding Region	8
2. Parts of the Moundbuilding Region Outside the Mississippi River Drainage	
(a) Mound sites within the Great Lakes drainage basin	
(b) The Gulf Coast drainage basin and the Atlantic drainage from South Carolina to Florida	9
3. The Hub of the Mississippi River Drainage	12
4. The Poverty Point Site	30
5. The Poverty Point Cultural Area	32
6. Adena Site Locations	41
7. The Moundbuilding Region During the Hopewellian Period	43
8. A Sixteenth-Century Spanish Map Showing Moundbuilding Centers	59
9. Recorded Sites of the American Bottom	63
10. Distribution of Galena at Mississippian Sites in Illinois	64
11. The Moundbuilding Region during the Mississippian Period	74
12. Route of the de Soto Expedition	88

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FOREWORD

I am proud to include Lynda Shaffer's *Native Americans Before 1492: The Moundbuilding Centers of the Eastern Woodlands* in the series "Sources and Studies in World History" not only because it is an interesting history of an important but neglected subject but also because it shows the advantage of taking a global approach. In the hands of a brilliant world historian like Professor Shaffer, we see the region of North America afresh, as part of a rich comparative tapestry. With her as guide, our understanding is shaped by a global vision, a sense of major historical processes, and questions of cultural character that are often beyond the peripheral vision of regional specialists.

This book will be of interest to teachers and students of both American history and world history. Professor Shaffer reminds those who begin the story of American history with European colonization that there was both an earlier and a contemporaneous history of indigenous peoples that strongly affected European experience. English settlement, for instance, was possible north of Florida because the Spanish incursions into this area were repeatedly defeated during the sixteenth century. Further, the patterns of European settlement and the subsequent growth of towns almost exactly duplicated the patterns of Native American settlements and trading centers. We have in this book a formative stage of American history.

World historians too can gain much from this book. When we include American history at all in our surveys of world history, we almost always limit ourselves to the history of Aztec, Maya, and Inca civilizations, ignoring the peoples of what is today the United States. This is so odd (since so many world historians live in North America)

that it suggests the continuation of a colonial settler's inability to see the people for the trees. In fact, Europeans cut down both the people and the trees, leveled the earthenwork ceremonial mounds that had testified to Native American cultural creativity and societal complexity, and called their desecrated graveyard a virgin land. This book helps us retrieve that buried past so that we might begin to understand more about not only the people who lived here (and by comparison their contemporaries elsewhere in the world) but also those who conquered and survived.

The "Sources and Studies in World History" series plans to publish other works by Professor Shaffer on regions in Africa and Asia. Together with the present volume, these will in effect constitute a series within the series, exploring several pivotal but poorly understood subjects in world history.

Kevin Reilly

PREFACE

Perhaps I should begin by explaining why a historian of modern China is writing about Eastern North America before 1492. Almost twenty years ago I became convinced that some of the most interesting questions about China could not be answered merely by studying Chinese history, since answering them required an awareness of events outside China as well as comparisons between China and other parts of the world. Thus I became interested in world history. More than ten years ago one of my colleagues, a senior member of the History Department at Tufts University, suggested that the department should offer some sort of world history course that could serve as an introduction to the numerous courses that we offer on Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Those of us who teach these courses (all of whom were then junior) considered the matter and began examining various world history course designs and texts. Often we were dismayed by what we found. Our own areas of expertise were not always well presented, and sometimes they were ignored completely. We thus decided not to use the existing conceptualizations and together set out to reconstruct world history.

As regional specialists we came from a wide variety of historiographical traditions, and there was little agreement among us with regard to themes or theories of history. It thus seemed wise to abandon any preconceived notions of what would be revealed by a global approach to world history. We began, instead, by negotiating a periodization that all could live with, presuming that the aggregation of our individual expertise about each of the globe's regions during each time frame would provide a vision of the whole. What became clear, how-

ever, was that we did not have all the pieces. No one on the faculty at that time knew anything about North America north of the Rio Grande prior to 1492. And there were other parts of the world where the accessible literature did not discuss the topics and material that we needed. Confronted by the prospect of working on a puzzle that was missing some of its pieces, I decided to fill these gaps, and thus strayed into what was for me *terra incognita*.

This journey into the unknown has been full of surprises. The first was the realization that the largest gaps in the literature were not in obscure or insignificant places. One was West Africa, whence came the gold that tempted the Arabs to cross the shifting sands of the Sahara and then lured the Portuguese down the western coast of Africa through unknown seas, thereby changing the fate of the world. Another was in Maritime Southeast Asia, whence came the fine spices that had drawn Indians, Persians, Arabs, Chinese, and finally the Europeans to the straits region and the islands that are now Indonesia. Indeed, had it not been for this lure to the East Indies, Columbus would not have found what we now call the West Indies, nor would the Portuguese have sought a way around Africa to the markets of India. And the greatest gap of all in our knowledge of the world was the most familiar place, in the very heartland of what is now the United States: the moundbuilding region of Eastern North America.

It is my contention that these places were a significant part of one or the other of the two hemisphere-wide arenas that characterized world history prior to the Columbian voyages, and that we therefore need to include them in our vision of world history. I hope to demonstrate this in three separate essays, each of which will present the history of a region in a way that is consistent with the interpretations of specialists and, at the same time, in a way that can be used by scholars and teachers of world history. This essay on Eastern North America is the first, and it will be followed shortly by those on Maritime Southeast Asia and West Africa.

It is also my contention that a knowledge of the traditional institutions and patterns of interaction within these regions is critical to an understanding of the dynamics of world history. When I set out to write about them I was not looking for similarities and had no intention of comparing them with each other or with other places. Yet in the course of studying the relevant literature, I began to discern not only differences but also certain similarities in their histories, social struc-