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BURIAL MOUNDS OF THE NORTHERN SECTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES.

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INTRODUCTORY.

All the works of the mound-builders of our country are exceedingly interesting to the antiquarian and are valuable as illustrating the habits, customs, and condition of the people by whom they were formed, but the sepulchral tumuli surpass all others in importance in this respect. Although usually simple in form and conveying thereby no indications of the characteristics of the people by whom they were erected, yet when explored they reveal to us, by their internal structure and contents, more in regard to the habits, beliefs, and art of their authors than can be learned from all their other works combined. From them we are enabled to learn some traits of ethnical character. The gifts to, or property of, their dead deposited in these sepulchers illustrate their arts and customs and cast some rays of light into their homes and daily life, and the regard for their dead indicated by the remaining evidences of their modes of burial and sepulchral rites affords some glimpses of their religious beliefs and superstitions. The larger and more imposing works, as the pyramidal mounds, the enclosures, canals, etc., furnish indications of their character, condition, strength, and culture-status as a people or tribe, but the burial mounds and their contents, besides the evidences they furnish in regard to the religious belief and art of the builders, tell us something of individual traits, something of their social life, their tastes, their personal regard for each other, and even something of the diseases to which they were subject. What is still more important, the modes of burial and vestiges of art found with the dead furnish us undoubted evidences of tribal distinctions among the authors of these works, and, together with the differences in external form, enable us to determine in a general way the respective areas occupied by the different tribes or peoples during the mound-building age.

Judging by all the data so far obtained relating to the form, internal structure, and contents of these works, much of which has not yet been

BAE 5th ANNUAL REPORT 1884, 9-109. [EXCERPTS ONLY]

published, we are perhaps warranted in concluding that the following districts or areas were occupied by different peoples or tribes. As a matter of course we can only designate these areas in general terms.

(1) The *Wisconsin district*, or area of the emblematic or effigy mounds. This embraces the southern half of Wisconsin, a small portion of the northern part of Illinois, and the extreme northeast corner of Iowa. The effigy or animal mounds form the distinguishing feature of the works of this district, but aside from these there are other features sufficient to separate the works of this section from those further south.

(2) The *Illinois or Upper Mississippi district*, embracing eastern Iowa, northeastern Missouri, and northern and central Illinois, as far south as the mouth of the Illinois River.

In this region the works are mostly simple conical tumuli of small or moderate size, found on the uplands, ridges, and bluffs as well as on the bottoms, and were evidently intended chiefly as depositories of the dead. They are further characterized by internal rude stone and wooden vaults or layers; by the scarcity of pottery vessels, the frequent occurrence of pipes, the presence of copper axes, and often a hard, mortar-like layer over the primary or original burial. The skeletons found are usually extended, though frequently in a sitting or squatting posture.

Walls and enclosures are of rare occurrence in this region.

(3) The *Ohio district*, including the State of Ohio, the western part of West Virginia, and the eastern portion of Indiana. Although the works of this region present some features which are common to those of the Gulf section, there are several peculiar characteristics which warrant us in designating it as a distinct district. Among other of these peculiar features we notice the great circles and squares of the enclosures, the long parallel lines of earthen walls, the so-called "altar mounds," or mounds containing structures chiefly of clay to which the name "altar" has been applied; the numerous carved stone pipes; the character of the pottery and the methods of burial.

(4) The *New York district*, confined chiefly to the northern and western parts of the State of New York, but including also the lake region of the central portion.

As the antiquities of this district have been shown by Squier to be chiefly due to the Indian tribes occupying that section at the time of its discovery by the Europeans, it is unnecessary to note the distinguishing characteristics. The works are chiefly enclosing walls, remains of palisades, and burial mounds.

(5) The *Appalachian district*, including western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, southwestern Virginia, and part of southeastern Kentucky.

The characteristics which appear to warrant us in concluding that the works of this region pertain to a different people from those in the other districts, at the same time seem to show some relation to those of

the Ohio district. Such are the numerous stope pipes, the altar-like structures found in some of the mounds, and the presence of mica plates with the skeletons. But the peculiar features are the mode of burial, the absence of pottery, and the numerous polished celts and engraved shells found in the mounds.

Although it is probable that there are at least three districts in the southern portion of the United States, they appear to pass from one into the other by such slight changes in the character of the works as to render it exceedingly difficult to fix the boundaries between them. I therefore mention the following, provisionally, as being those indicated by the data so far obtained.

(6) The *Middle Mississippi area* or *Tennessee district*, including south-east Missouri, northern Arkansas, middle and western Tennessee, southern and western Kentucky, and southern Illinois. The works of the Wabash valley possibly belong also to this district, but the data obtained in regard to them are not sufficient to decide this point satisfactorily. This district, like the others of the south, is distinguished from the northern section by its larger mounds, many of which are pyramidal and truncated and often terraced, and which were, beyond question, used as domiciliary mounds. Here we also meet with repeated examples of enclosures though essentially different from those of Ohio; also ditches and canals. From the Lower Mississippi and Gulf districts, with which, as we have said, it is closely allied, it is distinguished chiefly by the presence of the box-shaped stone cists or coffins, by the small circular house-sites or hut-rings, and by the character of the pottery. This is pre-eminently the pottery region, the typical forms being the long-necked, gourd-shaped vase and the image-vessels. In this district the carved stone pipes are much less common than in the Illinois, Ohio, and Appalachian districts.

(7) The *Lower Mississippi district*, including the southern half of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. There are no marked characteristics by which to distinguish it from the Middle district; in fact as we move southward along the Mississippi from the mouth of the Illinois river, the works and their contents indicate a succession of tribes differing but slightly in habits, customs, and modes of life, the river generally forming one natural boundary between them, but the other boundaries being arbitrary. For example, the Cahokia region appears to have been the home of a tribe from which at one time a colony pushed northward and settled for a while in Brown and Pike Counties, Illinois. The extreme southeastern counties of Missouri were probably the seat of another populous tribe which extended its borders into the western part of southern Illinois and slightly into northeast Arkansas, and closely resembled in customs and art the ancient people who occupied that part of the Cumberland valley in middle Tennessee. This subsection is principally distinguished by the presence of the small circular house-sites, which are slightly basin-shaped, with a low ring of earth

around them. As we move farther southward into Arkansas the house-sites change into low circular mounds, usually from 1 to 3 feet in height, and in nearly every instance containing a layer of clay (often burned) and ashes.

These small mounds, which are clearly shown to have been house-sites, were also burial places. It appears to have been a very common custom in this section to bury the dead in the floor, burn the dwelling over them, and cover the whole with dirt, the last operation often taking place while the embers were yet smouldering. Burial in graves was also practiced to a considerable extent. As we approach the Arkansas River, moving southward and from thence into Louisiana, the pottery shows a decided improvement in character and ornamentation.

(8) The *Gulf district*, including the Gulf States east of the Mississippi. The works of this section appear to be closely allied to those of the Lower Mississippi district, as here we also find the large flat-topped pyramidal mounds, enclosing walls, and surrounding ditches and canals.

The chief differences are to be found in the forms and ornamentation of the pottery and modes of burial.

As we approach the Mississippi River the distinguishing features gradually disappear, although there appears to be a distinct subdistrict in the northern part of Mississippi, and as we enter the Florida peninsula a change is observed which appears to indicate a different people, but the data so far obtained are not sufficient to enable us to outline the subdistricts.

This districting is to be regarded as a working hypothesis rather than as a settled conclusion which will stand the test of future investigations. It is more than likely that other subdivisions will be found necessary, and that the boundaries of some of the districts given will have to be more or less modified; still, I believe the arrangement will be found substantially correct.

As a very general and almost universal rule, mounds of the class under consideration are more or less conical in form, and are common to all sections where earthworks are known to exist, in fact they form almost the only ancient remains of some localities. Often they are isolated, with no other monuments near them, but more frequently they occur in groups or are associated with other works. Squier and Davis say "they are generally of considerable size, varying from 6 to 80 feet in height, but having an average of from 15 to 25 feet."¹

This is probably true as regards the mounds explored by these archaeologists in Ohio, but is erroneous if applied generally; as very many, evidently used and intended as burying places only, are but two or three feet high, and so far as the more recent examinations made in other sections—especially the explorations carried on under the Bureau of Ethnology—have shown, tumuli of this character are usually from 3 to

¹ Ancient Monuments, p. 161.

10 feet high, though some, it is true, are of much larger dimensions; but these are the exceptions and not the rule.¹

As the authors just alluded to are so frequently referred to by writers, and their statements in reference to the works explored by them are taken as of general application, I will venture to correct another statement made by them in regard to mounds of this character. They assert that "these mounds invariably cover a single skeleton (in very rare instances more than one, as in the case of the Grave Creek mound), which, at the time of its interment, was enveloped in bark or coarse matting or enclosed in a rude sarcophagus of timber, the traces, in some instances the very casts, of which remain. Occasionally the chamber of the dead is built of stone rudely laid up, without cement of any kind."²

I have investigated but few of the ancient works of Ohio personally, or through the assistants of the Bureau, hence I can only speak in regard to them from what has been published and from communications received, but judging from these, Messrs. Squier and Davis, while no doubt correctly describing the mounds explored by them, have been too hasty in drawing general conclusions.

That burial mounds in the northern sections very frequently cover but a single skeleton is true, but that this, even in this section, is universally true or that it is the general rule is a mistake, as will appear from what is shown hereafter. Nor will it apply as a rule to those of the southern sections.

To illustrate the character and construction of these mounds, and modes of burial in them, I will introduce here brief descriptions of the leading types found in the different northern districts heretofore mentioned, confining myself chiefly to the explorations made by the Bureau assistants.

¹ It is somewhat strange that Rev. J. P. MacLean, who has long resided in Ohio and has studied the mounds and other works of the southern portion of that State with much care, should follow almost word for word this and the next statement of Squier and Davis (*Mound-Builders*, p. 50) and adopt them as his own, without modification or protest, when in the appendix containing his exceedingly valuable notes on the "Archæology of Butler County" nearly all the facts given bearing on these points show them to be incorrect.

² *Ancient Monuments*, p. 161.

In the center chamber were found eleven skeletons : six adults and five children of different ages, including one infant, the latter evidently buried in the arms of one of the adults, possibly its mother. Apparently they had all been buried at one time, arranged in a circle, in a squatting or sitting posture, against the walls. In the center of the space around which they were grouped was a fine specimen of *Busycon perversum*, which had been converted into a drinking-cup by removing the columella. Here were also numerous fragments of pottery.

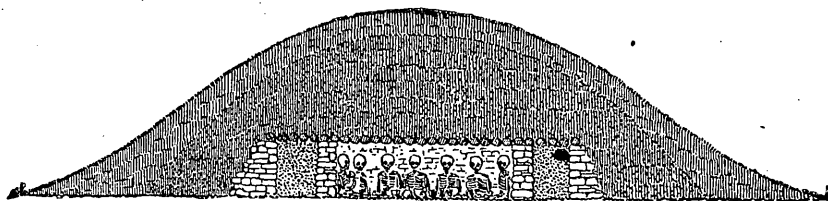


FIG. 11.—Section of mound 16 (Pl. III) showing vault.

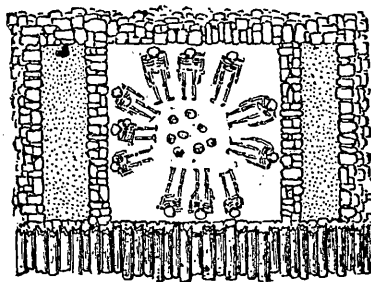


FIG. 12.—Plan of vault, mound 16 (Pl. III).

The end cells, walled off from the main portion, as heretofore stated, were found nearly filled with a very fine chocolate-colored dust, which gave out such a sickening odor that the workmen were compelled to stop operations for the day in order to allow it to escape.

The covering of the vault was of oak logs, most of which had been peeled and some of the larger ones somewhat squared by slabbing off the sides; and the slabs and bark thus removed, together with reeds or large grass stems, had been laid over them. Over the whole was spread layer after layer of mortar containing lime, each succeeding layer harder and thicker than that which preceded it, a foot or so of ordinary soil completing the mound.

As there can be scarcely a doubt that the mounds of this group were built by one tribe, we have here additional evidence that the same people were accustomed to bury their dead in various ways. Some of the skeletons are found lying horizontally side by side, others are placed in a circle in a sitting or squatting posture, while in another mound we find the dismembered bones heaped in a confused mass. In one place is a single huge frame decked with the ornaments of savage

form. In No. 3,¹ diameter 35 feet and height 5 feet, situated in the central portion, was found a stone coffin or cist 7 feet long and 2 feet wide, formed of slabs of sandstone in the usual manner. This was covered first with similar slabs and then the whole incased in a layer of rougher stones. Over this was a layer of hard earth, which was evidently in a plastic state when placed there, as it had run into and filled up the interstices. Above this was a foot or more of yellowish earth, similar to that forming the ridge. In the coffin was the skeleton of an adult, lying horizontally on the back, but too far gone to decay to admit of removal. No specimens of art of any kind were found with it.

No. 4, a trifle smaller than No. 3, was opened by running a trench from the eastern margin. For a distance of 15 or 16 feet nothing was encountered except the earth, with which it appeared to be covered to the depth of 2 feet. Here was found a layer of rough stones covering a mass of charcoal and ashes with bones intermixed. In fact the indications leave the impression that one or more persons (or their bones) had been burned in a fire on the natural surface of the earth near the center of the mound, the coals and brands of which were then covered with rough stones thrown in, without any system, to the depth of 3 feet, over a space 10 or 12 feet in diameter, and then covered with earth. Only fragments of charred human bones, pieces of rude pottery, and stone chips were found commingled with the charcoal and ashes.

Another group on the farm of Mr. J. N. Boulware, near the line between Clarke and Lewis counties, was examined by the same party. This group, which is situated on a bench or terrace from 20 to 40 feet above the Mississippi bottoms, consists of some 55 or 60 ordinary circular mounds of comparatively small size.

In one of these, 45 feet in diameter and 5 feet high, were found, near the top, the fragments of a human skeleton much decayed, and broken pottery, encircled by a row of flat stones set up edgewise and covered with others of a similar character. Below these was a layer of very hard light-colored earth, mixed throughout with fragments of charred human bones and pottery, charcoal and stone chips.

Another, about 60 feet in diameter, was found to consist (except the top layer of soil, about 1 foot thick) of hard, dried "mortar" (apparently clay and ashes mixed), in which fragments of charred human bones, small rounded pieces of pottery, and stone scrapers were mingled with charcoal and ashes.

"As all the mounds opened here," remarks the assistant, "presented this somewhat singular feature, I made a very careful examination of this mortar-like substance. I found that there were differences between different portions of the same mound sufficiently marked to trace the separate masses. This would indicate that the mounds were built by successive deposits of mortar thus mixed with charred bones, and not in strata but in masses."

¹ Counting from the southern end of the line.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

The results of our examination of the burial mounds of the northern districts may be briefly summed up as follows :

First. That different sections were occupied by different mound-building tribes, which, though belonging to much the same stage in the scale of civilization, differed in most instances in habits and customs to a sufficient extent to mark, by their modes of burial, construction of their mounds, and their works of art, the boundaries of the respective areas occupied.

Second. That each tribe adopted several different modes of burial depending, in all probability, to some extent upon the social condition, position, and occupation of the deceased.

Third. That the custom of removing the flesh before the final burial prevailed very extensively among the mound-builders of the northern sections. The bones of the common people being often gathered together and cast in promiscuous heaps, over which mounds were built.

Fourth. That usually some kind of religious or superstitious ceremony was performed at the burial, in which fire played a prominent part. That, notwithstanding the very common belief to the contrary, there is no evidence whatever that human sacrifice was practiced.

Fifth. That there is nothing found in the mode of constructing these mounds, nor in the vestiges of art they contain, to indicate that their builders had reached a higher culture-status than that attained by some of the Indian tribes found occupying the country at the time of the first arrival of Europeans.

Sixth. That the custom of erecting mounds over the dead continued to be practiced in several localities in post-Columbian times.

Seventh. That the character and condition of the ancient monuments, and the relative uniformity in the culture status of the different tribes shown by the works and the remains of art found in them, indicate that the mound-building age could not have continued in this part of the continent longer than a thousand years, and hence that its commencement probably does not antedate the fifth or sixth century.

Nothing has been found connected with them to sustain or justify the opinion, so frequently advanced, of their great antiquity. The calculations based upon the supposed age of trees found growing on some of them is fast giving way before recent investigations made in regard to the growth of forests, as it has been ascertained that the rings of trees are not a sure indication of age.

Quatrefages may not be correct in fixing the date of the appearance of the "Red skins" in the "basin of the Missouri" in the eighth or ninth century,¹ but nothing has been found in connection with the ancient works of this country, supposing the Indians to have been their authors, to prove that he has greatly erred in his calculation. Other races or peoples may have preceded the mound-builders in this region, but better proof of this is required than that based on the differences between the supposed palæolithic and neolithic implements of New Jersey and other sections, as every type discovered can be duplicated a hundred times in the surface finds from different parts of the country.

Eighth. That all the mounds which have been examined and carefully studied are to be attributed to the indigenous tribes found inhabiting this region and their ancestors.

¹The Human Species, English translation, p. 307.