Book Reviews


Most students of American Indian history have heard of Cahokia, the Mississippian city near present-day St. Louis and the largest metropolitan center north of Mexico in pre-Columbian times, which was home to at least twenty thousand and possibly as many as forty thousand Native Americans circa A.D. 1150. The core of the site contains Monk’s Mound, rising over one hundred feet and occupying a base of fifteen acres, making it the third largest single monumental public structure in the western hemisphere (after the Great Temple at Cholula and the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán). Built across a period of two hundred years from A.D. 950 to A.D. 1150, the mound served as ceremonial platform, burial ground, and residence for the ancient Cahokians. First described by whites in 1813 in explorer Henry Brackenridge’s letter to Thomas Jefferson, the central plaza at Cahokia had not been used since the fourteenth century by Indians and was then occupied by Trappist monks, whose gardens flourished on the terraces of the earth mounds. After several changes in ownership and use, as well as decades of relic-seeking by amateurs, portions of the site became a State of Illinois archaeological preserve in 1925 and was designated a United Nations World Heritage Site in the 1980s.

From the 1950s through the 1990s, Cahokia was intensively investigated by teams of archaeologists seeking to explain the mystery of the rise and decline or dispersion of Mississippian civilization. This book recasts the history of archaeological research at the mound city through the recollections of Melvin L. Fowler, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin, who first climbed Monk’s Mound in 1951 and who spent a career interpreting its meaning. The book is cowritten by Biloine Whiting Young, who prompted Fowler to use his wealth of knowledge about the site and his personal acquaintance with two generations of field archaeologists who have worked there to summarize what is known, what is conjectured, and what remains a mystery about the ancient city.

The team-writing works well to serve general readers and scholars alike. We learn of the big discoveries, areas of broad consensus, and areas of sharp disagreement in the many-layered evolution of archaeology at Cahokia. The book updates Fowler’s earlier edited works, _Explorations into Cahokia Archaeology_ (Illinois Archaeological Survey Bulletin, 1969) and _The Cahokia Atlas: A Historical Atlas of Cahokia Archaeology_ (University of Illinois Studies in Archaeology, 1997). It includes discussion of a myriad of ideas and controversies and cites dozens of articles, monographs, and edited works that
cumulatively have made Cahokian studies a subfield within North American prehistory. Beyond this contribution, Fowler uses the book as a personal forum for characterization of fellow scholars whose trowels, spades, and backhoes have unearthed Cahokia's many mounds and features, at times at cross-purposes with his own agenda. While this sometimes distracts the reader from the main story, this second level of historiographical discussion will be of interest to anyone deeply attentive to the history of archaeology in the United States and especially in the American Bottom.

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Blue Jacket, or Waweyapiersenwaw, was a Shawnee warrior and diplomat who lived in the Ohio River Valley from the 1740s to the first decade of the nineteenth century. By 1772 he had emerged as a chief among the Shawnees of the Scioto River because of his abilities as a war leader and his understanding of whites. He opposed white settlement of Kentucky after the Treaty of Fort Stanwix (1768), and he probably fought in the Battle of Point Pleasant in 1774. Despite his resistance to European encroachment upon Indian lands, he learned English, adopted European ways of living, and married a white woman. He was allied with the British during the Revolutionary War, fighting well in the campaign against Vincennes in 1778–1779. He may also have taken part in Captain Henry Bird's foray into Kentucky in 1780. He was outraged by American encroachments on Indian territory north of the Ohio River after 1786. Withdrawing with his people to the Maumee River Valley, he and they allied with the Miamis. He also became an ardent supporter of the Mohawk Joseph Brandt in his efforts to form an Indian confederacy against the Americans.

After the Treaty of Fort Harmar (1789), which he held in contempt, Blue Jacket assumed leadership of the tribal confederacy and helped inflict stunning defeats upon two United States armies, one led by Joseph Harmar in 1790 and the other by Arthur St. Clair a year later. He then helped conduct fruitless peace negotiations with American representatives until the summer of 1793. He led an unsuccessful assault on Fort Recovery in June 1794 and on August 20 was soundly defeated by General Anthony Wayne in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. In 1795, he represented a number of tribes in negotiations