

Casual Observations on Angel Mounds Skeletal Material

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Since the beginning of excavations at the Angel Site in Vanderburgh-Warrick counties, Indiana, a rather large amount of skeletal material has been recovered. This material represents the former inhabitants of the most interesting and spectacular aboriginal archaeological site in the state.

During the past summer a preliminary survey was made of this material for the purpose of giving a general picture of these aboriginal inhabitants and as a basis for further and more thorough study in the future.

Skeletal material from all forms of burial disposal, except cremation, has been recovered from this Middle Mississippi site. Burials of adults and children are found throughout the village area with infant burials quite commonly found beneath the floors of houses. Burials are extended, partly flexed and fully flexed. Of special interest are the many human bones found that are not associated with burials.

During the past few years 220 complete or nearly complete burials have been removed. A large number of isolated bones have been found but these have little statistical value. This site can be expected to yield several hundred more burials in future excavations.

From the observations made, a general picture of the individual and his life can be drawn. The average male was of medium stature with rather broad shoulders and heavy musculature. The areas of muscle attachment on the bones are well developed and in some individuals the areas are extremely marked. The head is relative large and probably mesocephalic or low brachycephalic in form. Many males appeared extremely round-headed because of vertico-occipital deformation of the skull during infancy.

Females were relatively short in stature and light in build. The head form varies, but this may be due to some deformation. A large percentage of the female crania so far examined are dolichocephalic and possess a bun-shaped occiput. This is somewhat disquieting in a population that would normally be expected to possess roundheads. When brachycephalic crania occur there usually is some deformation. With the securing of many more individuals in the future the statistical picture may greatly change in favor of brachycephals. The female crania so far recovered are more heterogenous than those of males.

Of special interest is the cranial deformation found in these skeletal remains. The majority of males exhibit this condition in slight to marked degrees. Only a few females have deformed crania, and when present, it is usually only slight. In most cases the deformation is confined to the occipital and posterior parietal regions of the skull. Deformation of the male crania has made measurements of

only slight value in the majority of individuals. Some males show deformation to such a degree that the entire skull is effected.

Generally the health of the population was good for those individuals who were able to survive infancy and early childhood. The life expectancy of these people was rather high for a primitive group. Males could usually expect to reach the age of fifty with some individuals reaching the extremely old age of sixty. Females did not fair so well because of the rigors of childbirth in which many of them lost their lives.

Of the 220 complete or nearly complete burials recovered, 30 of them, or 14%, were of infants and children. This percentage is indicative of the high mortality rate among infants and the lower age groups. Miscarriages and abortions were common as indicated by foetus burials.

A number of pathologies appear in this material. Arthritis seems to have been the most common affliction in the Angel Site population. Approximately 70% of the individuals observed in this survey manifested arthritic lipping of the lumbar vertebrae and arthritic changes in the sacra in slight to marked degrees. Some fusion of the lumbar vertebrae also occurs.

Lesions are quite common in the long bones and apparently represent various types of periostitis, osteomyelitis, and different forms of bone destruction. Such conditions may have been due to any one of several causes, such as trauma, pyrogenic infection, and tuberculosis. A spongy condition of the bone occurs, which may have been due to syphilis.

Another relatively common pathological condition found in the long bones is that of exostosis. The tibia exhibited this condition most frequently.

Evidences of old fractures are not uncommon, particularly in the long bones and the ribs.

Ear exostoses appear in a few individuals, although the percentage is not as high as in some primitive groups. None of the females observed possessed this condition.

Evidence of infection of the mastoid processes appears in a few individuals.

Pathological conditions in the teeth were very common and represented a number of diseases and malformations.

The teeth of young individuals are relatively good but show some wear. Dental caries of all sizes, shapes, and conditions were extremely common in older individuals. Caries occurred most frequently in pre-molars and molars.

Many of the teeth showed abrasions of various types. In some cases the cusps were entirely worn off and the enamel lost from the entire surface.

Impacted molars were occasionally found, the condition being most often in the lower third molar.

The ante-mortem loss of pre-molars and molars is quite frequent in the upper age groups.

Infection of the roots of canines and pre-molars was rather common. In a few individuals this condition was severe and had caused the destruction of considerable areas of the maxillary bone. Occasionally this infection invaded the maxillary sinuses.

A typical example of the dental condition in the upper age group is that of a male approximately 55 years of age. The teeth are extremely worn. First, second, and third lower right molars are missing. Second and third lower left molars are missing. First and third upper left molars are missing. First and third upper right molars are missing. Three of the remaining teeth have large caries. This individual also possessed extreme lipping of the vertebrae due to arthritis which probably was caused by this dental condition.

The skeletal material from this site presents many interesting problems and deserves complete investigation in the future. Until such studies are made no definite conclusions can be drawn.