

Cultural Complexities of Southwestern Indiana

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The area included within the scope of this brief paper consists of eight counties in southwestern Indiana. On the south, north of the Ohio River, are the counties of Posey, Vanderburgh, Warrick, Spencer and Perry. Contiguous to this southern tier, Dubois, Pike and Gibson counties are south of White River, while the Wabash bounds the region on the west. Extending from the low flood plains of the Wabash and Ohio rivers, north and east, to the rolling uplands of Spencer and Perry counties, a considerable variety of flora and geographical features were available for habitation by people, whose selection of spots to live upon, at times, seem somewhat choosy.

Due to its geographical position the area in question undoubtedly was of strategic importance in times past. The proximity of major water routes such as the Wabash, Tennessee, Cumberland and Green rivers converging as they do upon a major barrier such as the Ohio River in a country abundantly supplied with every requisite for primitive life, it should be surprising indeed if a complexity and abundance of material remnants of vast numbers of aborigines were not found.

During the course of the exploration of the Angel site in Vanderburgh County very little time has been available for reconnaissance of the surrounding area. It is of utmost importance, in connection with the exploration in question, to be familiar with the cultural complexes of the environment and with this in mind, surface survey work has been carried on as time would permit.

By no means all of the material forming the basis of this paper has been obtained personally. The willing assistance of local collectors and students, both past and present, have contributed much, if not most, of the information involved.

Within this area evidence exists of a prolonged habitation by unrelated ethnic and culture groups. Eliminating entirely the questionable significance of Folsom points, found occasionally over the area, we should inaugurate our discussion with the material found locally, indicating a relationship with the pre-pottery shell mound peoples to the south. Two sites in the area have such a relationship. One, located in Dubois County, near the town of Portersville, will be the subject of a forthcoming report by the Indiana Historical Society; the other is located in Pike County, northwest of the town of Coe, on a small tributary of the Patoka River. The site in question was excavated during the winter of 1939-40 by a group of local enthusiasts and little data, not of a material nature, is available. The material recovered is in the hands of Mr. Reavis Campbell, of Boonville, to whom I am indebted for many courtesies. The material from the two sites is such as to imply a marked affinity with the peoples responsible for the shell mounds of Green River in Kentucky and Tennessee River in Tennessee and Alabama. In some respects the two

sites are at variance. The Dubois County site produced no pottery whatever while the site near Coe was ceramic bearing. The methods employed in the exploration of the latter site, however leave much to be desired and it is possible that the limited amount of pottery discovered was not a true part of the shell mound complex. The Coe site is at variance with the Dubois County site in another respect, in that it produced some material indicative of an entirely different culture and which will be mentioned again hereafter. It seems inevitable that the shell mound peoples should be considered as the earliest group inhabiting the area.

At several places along the Ohio River in Spencer, Vanderburgh and Posey counties sites are found which produce distinctive sherds of clay and lithic-tempered wares. This type of material has rather a wide distribution but locally, at least, is limited almost exclusively to deeply buried sites on the banks of the Ohio River. In association with this type of pottery large stemmed points are found and in at least one instance a bell pestle was found on a site producing this type of ware. The affinity of this material is with the Baumer component at the Kincaid site near Metropolis, Illinois, where it underlies the Middle Mississippi manifestation of the people responsible for the large mounds found at Kincaid. The Baumer is an early Woodland manifestation always underlying Mississippi where the two are found in association. The possibility of stratification is present in at least one Vanderburgh County site, which, if the destructive agencies of levee construction have not been too complete, should be explored with profit.

The Hopewellian complex is represented in the area at several points but little is known regarding it, to date. Hopewellian material has been found in Posey County and in Warrick County. Some of the material traits produced from a shell mound near Coe have a marked Hopewellian affinity. It would seem, on the basis of data available elsewhere, that Hopewellian should be post-Baumer.

A site in Warrick County, south of Yankeetown, produces a type of pottery exotic for Indiana. The site in question is on the caving banks of the Ohio River and, if the destructive forces now active continue, it will not be long before the entire site is destroyed. Surface collections have produced a type of extremely well made, thin, clay-tempered ware having clay as the aplastic and bearing upon the surfaces incised conventionalized designs. As an adjunct to the incised technique certain sherds have notched fillets upon the rim. Inside notching of the lip is a characteristic and notches were also found on the rim below a plain rim band. In association with these sherds, upon the surface of the site, are sherds of Middle Mississippi ware. This coincidence of material suggests either cultural stratification, so thinly separated that cultivation has mixed the two, or contemporaneity of the two complexes.

A site near Mt. Vernon was brought to my attention by a local collector, J. J. Geringer, of Evansville. The site in question is of large proportions and should, perhaps, be considered as a series of sites rather than as one site. Surface collections exhibit a ceramic range startling to behold, including plain ware having a micaceous sand content, a simple stamped ware also having a high micaceous sand content, clay-tempered

sherds bearing surface treatments of Hopewellian and Marksville type, gray sandy ware bearing complicated paddle stamped decorations of the Swift Creek form, red-filmed ware, Middle Mississippi sherds and cord-marked sherds which may be Mississippi—either Upper or Middle—or Woodland. It goes without saying that nothing of a definite nature can be said of such an important site when any statement must necessarily be based upon superficial observations. The site in question must be explored, in part at least, for the implications carried by the ceramic complex are tremendous and of far reaching importance.

The Mississippi manifestations in the area are many and considerably varied. The Angel site, in Vanderburgh County, dominates the scene by reason of its spectacular physical features. Explorations now under way suggest that the habitation was rather early for Middle Mississippi and that the regional affinity for the site will be to the southeast, in Georgia and Alabama.

Another Middle Mississippi site, near the mouth of the Wabash River, was explored many years ago by Clifford Anderson for Warren K. Moorehead. Although this site was definitely Middle Mississippi, certain elements within it suggest an Upper Mississippi lateness to the habitation and, in this respect, varies from the Angel site.

In summation we have seen that the time span for the area is a long one. That there are integrations, culturally, from one site and from one period to the other, is suggested by the material at hand. It is to be hoped that certain of these sites may be tested before explorations in the area are completed. The implications cast by the presence in a limited region by abundant materials of unrelated types are too important to overlook. Stratigraphic tests within this area may go far towards the solutions of chronology and sequence of habitation for many of the culture groups inhabiting the Ohio and Mississippi valleys.