

Remarks on the Physical Type of Certain Middle Mississippi and Southeastern Groups

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It has been generally concluded for some time that archaeological Middle Mississippi is ancestral to the historic Southeastern Indians. Archaeological remains have been correlated with historical Southeast groups on the basis of cultural inventories, especially ceramic traditions, while ethnologists have had the unique opportunity of reference to early and unusually detailed accounts of native life as recorded by Spanish and French explorers, notably DeSoto, in the Southeast in early post contact times. It seems clear from the historical record that DeSoto encountered numerous groups that were practicing what is generally recognized as a Middle Mississippi culture. Archaeological evidence seems also to bear out this relationship. The affiliation then has been made on the basis of alleged demonstrable cultural continuity without the benefit of active or formalized support of physical anthropology. It is somewhat surprising that the physical approach to the problem has not been attempted in that population relationships, and therefore movements, migrations and likely cultural contacts, may be reconstructed on physical evidence with a degree of certainty not attainable by other anthropological means. This paper is a report on a project designed to establish more firmly, on the basis of physical anthropological evidence, the association of archaeological Middle Mississippi and historical Muskogean.

The problem is of two parts:

1. Establishment of the subject Southeastern groups as valid members of a specific variety of Amerind and,
2. Association of the varietal type with a population of the Middle Mississippi Phase.

In order to achieve these objectives a series of crania from five Middle Mississippi components and from four Southeastern tribal groups (Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Yuchi) have been analyzed anthropometrically. Neumann (2) has fully described a Middle Mississippi series of forty-five undeformed adult male crania from the Spoon River Focus of central Illinois. These crania served as the type series for the Walcolid variety of the North American Indian. The archaeological material associated with the skeletons has been reported by Cole and Deuel (1).

A group of eight skulls of known tribal affiliation, including three male Choctaw, one male and one female Yuchi, one female Creek and two female Chickasaw were available in the Indiana University collection and will represent the Southeastern Muskogean in this paper. While the Spoon River series is adequate and suitable for statistical treatment, the crania of known tribal affiliation do not constitute a valid statistical sample, but furnish important evidence because they are a

homogeneous group. Although all are adult and none deformed, four (or one-half) of the crania are female and therefore second best as indicators of racial characteristics. It must be emphasized then that the series of Southeast crania presented here are to be regarded with reservation. Additional skulls will strengthen the series in every respect.

Description of the various series under consideration is not possible here but in summary comparison the historic crania taken collectively appear to be significantly close to the Walcolid type in observational morphology. The historic male skulls (Choctaw and Yuchi), like the Spoon River Focus Walcolids, are medium to large in size and muscularity. The Walcolids and historic males are ovoid or ellipsoid in shape and within a range of three index points of one another in length-breadth proportions. Brow ridge size and frontal height center around medium, frontal breadth is moderate while slope is generally medium but sometimes slight. Sagittal elevation is generally absent or small, parietal eminences medium, lambdoid flattening absent to small, the occipital most often medium in position and infrequently low, while breadth is moderate. Mastoids are either medium or large; platybasia is absent. Face size tends to large with rhomboid or square orbits of medium or less inclination. The nasals are medium in size and exhibit a slightly concavo-convex profile. The nasal root height is moderate while nasal root breadth and nasal bridge height and breadth tend around medium. The malars are medium to large in size and height and show pronounced lateral projection and sometimes medium but most often a large degree of projection to the front. Prognathism is generally medium but can be less.

The historic males were found to be closer to the Walcolid type (a male series) than any of the females. The Choctaw males, as compared to the Walcolid series, have slightly smaller and rounder but essentially identical vault configuration. The length-height proportions are likewise similar—both high. The Choctaw are slightly smaller in facial dimensions but are the same indicially. The Choctaw and Walcolid nasal and orbital structures are identical.

The Yuchi male is close to the Walcolid except that the vault is somewhat round, a condition due to the appreciable shorter glabella-occipital length. The latter, however, falls within two standard deviations of the Walcolid. The length-height ratio is the same for both groups. The facial characteristics are identical in both size and proportion, the Yuchi being closer to the Walcolid than are the Choctaw in this respect. The Yuchi nasal structure is very nearly identical but somewhat more narrow in relation to length. The male Yuchi orbital dimensions and proportions are identical to the Walcolid.

In a word, the Walcolid, Choctaw and Yuchi males have been found to be highly similar morphologically and anthropometrically. Metrically and indicially the skulls are essentially identical except that the Yuchi is somewhat more round-headed than the Walcolid or, to a lesser extent, the Choctaw.

The comparison then of forty-five male Middle Mississippi skulls, from the Spoon River Focus, Illinois, with eight crania of known South-

eastern affiliation, has shown them to be closely related physically and both valid members of the Walcolid variety of Amerind. A continuity of physical type is therefore demonstrated, corroborating the archaeological-historical correlation heretofore made with cultural data.

Literature Cited

1. COLE, FAY-COOPER, and THORNE DEUEL. 1937. Rediscovering Illinois: Archeological Explorations In and Around Fulton County. Chicago.
2. NEUMANN, GEORG K. 1952. Yearbook of Physical Anthropology 8:213-255.