Origins of the Indians of the Middle Mississippi Area

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In agreement with the concept of a relatively late settlement of the New World by American Indians, the great regional diversity in physical appearance has generally been explained in terms of migrations from northeastern Asia. With the development of more sensitive methods of dating archaeological remains, the first appearance of the Paleo-Indian in the New World has been pushed back into the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand years ago. The increase in time-depth allows for a much greater possibility of such factors as genetic drift and selection in the adaptation to different environmental conditions to become operative in the racial differentiation of populations in various geographical areas. This conceptual change obviously has a profound bearing not only on the number of migrations but also on the racial classification of the aboriginal inhabitants of the entire New World. In this paper I would like to present a modified framework for a classification and indicate how it applies to the Muskogean-speaking Indian tribes of the Middle Mississippi area and the South.

In order to obtain solutions to problems of the history of ethnic groups that will withstand the critical examination of the bioanthropologist and archaeologist, the data must satisfy a number of conditions: (1) it should cover a sufficiently wide geographical range, (2) it should represent the necessary time perspective, (3) it should deal with series that constitute statistical samples, and (4) it should involve only populations which really formed inbreeding entities. Needless to say, these four conditions are difficult to fulfill when one deals with sporadic archaeological materials. Whether these conditions are satisfied or not, it is obvious that if we deal with problems of such temporal and geographic scope that the units on a varietal level of differentiation are going to be dynamic, that is, ever changing in their gene frequencies controlling their morphological characteristics, rather than static entities. The relative stability or instability of any particular population depends on such factors as isolation, population size, genetic drift, various forms of selection, and the nature of new groups entering the area.

When one deals with an area as large as continents it is convenient to subdivide the material according to not strictly taxonomic levels of differentiation—levels into which the temporal factor also enters. Analogous examples are the grouping of species into series, or the grouping of archaeological materials attributable to Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and Food Producing peoples. Similarly, I like to speak of varieties or races within the Mongoloid subspecies of Man that can be dealt with in terms of (1) earlier phylogenetically more primitive *Paleoamerind*, (2) more recent derived or modified *Mesoamerind*, and (3) most recent immigrant *Cenoamerind* series. As one approaches the historic present, tribes on each of these levels may be contemporaneous, for it has been established that groups that have undergone only minor differentiational changes have survived as isolates in marginal or refuge areas.

Among the North American Indian—a more or less geographical

concept—such varieties as the Southwestern desert or Otamid variety, the Southwestern Basketmaker or Ashiwid variety, the Eastern Woodland or Lenid variety, and the Southern Archaic or Iswanid variety, would fall into the Paleoamerind series. The Classical Maya and related Central American groups or the Uinicid variety, the later Great Basin Shoshonean tribes or Nootchid variety, the Southeastern or Walcolid variety, the Central Algonquian or Ilinid variety, and the Plains Siouan or Dakotid variety would fall into the derived or Mesoamerind series. Finally, such groups as the Northern and Southern Athabascans or the Deneid variety, and the Eskimo or Inuit variety would fall into the Cenoamerind series.

When this concept is applied to an ethnic group such as the Amerindians who were speakers of languages of the Muskogean linguistic family the problem becomes very complex. The primary grouping is taken at the historic time level and it becomes necessary to work backwards to determine the correlation between the various tribal groups of the area and recognized archaeological entities. These archaeological entities must be accepted by the bioanthropologist in the determination as to what constitutes a particular series. If the series is morphologically homogeneous enough, that is, exhibits reasonably low variability, it can be accepted as a group that has been inbreeding long enough to become stabilized. At the same time we would not get very far if we did not combine our inquiry with an inductive approach. We have to know the number and variability of the more ancient groups, not only of the area under immediate consideration, but also those groups of neighboring areas that may have entered the region and influenced the local population.

Although we have very little information dealing with the Paleo-Indian of eastern United States, depending on a number of isolated finds without precise cultural associations, we are more fortunate when we come to the hunting and gathering peoples on an Archaic level. Here we have well-documented skeletal series found in their radiocarbon dated archaeological contexts. According to the best evidence available, differentiation from a common Paleo-Indian ancestor into a southern Archaic Iswanid and a northern Archaic Lenid variety was well on its way by about 6000 B. C. The Paleoamerind, Early Archaic ancestor of both groups can in all probability be linked with a Gulf-Algonquian linguistic forebear, who under conditions of relative isolation gave rise to the Muskogean and the Algonquian linguistic groups in the Middle Mississippi and Great Lakes areas. Adequate Middle Archaic level skeletal series in both areas are clearly differentiated into Iswanid and Lenid varieties, respectively, by about 4000 B. C. The Archaic Indian Knoll series from Kentucky, and the Old Copper culture-Early Woodland series from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio furnish classical examples.

On the basis of evidence from the Modoc Rock Shelter in southwestern Illinois, which provides a continuous occupational record from 8000 B. C. to 1000 A. D., there occurs a gradual change, involving increase in size and brachycephalization, in the Middle Archaic population. This marks the origin of a derived Mesoamerind population and the origin of the Walcolid variety that largely became associated with the development

of Middle Mississippi and related cultural manifestations and languages which have been placed into the Muskogean linguistic family. Parallel changes are to be found in the taller, more robust Lenid population. Thus, Early Hopewellian skeletal material is practically always Lenid, while Middle Hopewellian material exhibits changes. Before the end of Middle Woodland times some of the Lenid groups migrated to the East to give rise to the relatively unaltered Eastern Algonquian dolichocranial population. The Delaware are an example. Along the southern margins of the Great Lakes area other Lenid entities gave rise to the brachycephalized Adena population, and during the latter phases of the same Middle Woodland level, the Lenid groups that remained behind became the Illinid variety, largely associated with Late Woodland and Upper Mississippi archaeological manifestations—tribes that mostly speak Central Algonquian languages.

By A. D. 900 the Middle Mississippi Phase people are well differentiated, and subsequently become predominantly Walcolid in all southern Illinois and Tennessee-Cumberland Aspect sites. The Upper Mississippi, Fort Ancient Aspect peoples of southeastern Ohio and Kentucky are, like the earlier Adena people, transitional between Ilinid and Walcolid.

Finally, a relatively late derived or Mesoamerind variety developed in the northeastern Plains area. This is the Dakotid variety, largely of Dénéid derivation. Probably not much earlier than A. D. 1200 groups predominantly of the Dakotid variety came into contact with the Caddoan horticultural village tribes that pushed up the Missouri and its branches. Farther to the east in Iowa, southwestern Wisconsin, and northwestern Illinois the Dakotid variety came into contact with Central Algonquian groups, who readily took over the Upper Mississippi culture of their Chiwere Siouan neighbors.

In conclusion it may be stated that in the past the origin of the bearers of the Middle Mississippi culture, which I demonstrated to be highly correlated with the Walcolid variety (Neumann, 1952), was generally explained on the basis of an advent of a new people into the Middle Mississippi geographical area. It was believed to involve the replacement of earlier populations by "more Mongoloid" immigrants from northern Mexico. It is without question that a number of cultural contacts can be demonstrated, but there is little bioanthropological evidence for any large scale migration. Knowledge of the archaeological and racial history of the Indians of eastern United States has now advanced to such a point that all the hypotheses advanced in this paper can be substantiated by data collected on well documented cranial series.

Literature Cited

NEUMANN, GEORG K. 1952. Archeology and Race in the American Indian. Archeology of Eastern United States. pp. 13-34.