

Lower Mississippi Traits in the Middle Phase in Illinois

Thorne Dovel

Illinois State Museum, Springfield, Illinois

Before commencing to enumerate and describe the traits referred to, it will be well to define what is meant by the term Lower Mississippi traits.

Along the Neches, Angelina and Sulphur rivers of northeastern Texas, the Sabine river of northeast Texas, and eastern Louisiana, the Red river of Arkansas and northeastern Louisiana, is found a cultural manifestation with a nucleus of traits that serve to set it apart from the Middle and Upper phases. The sites exhibiting this diagnostic series (sometimes called Caddoan) I have presumed to designate as Lower Mississippi. Among the characteristic traits are the following:

Probable Determinants, Lower Mississippi Phase

Ceremonial Complex

1. Burials in small cemeteries generally less than ten skeletons. Multiple graves are rare. Dead are buried very seldom with personal ornaments.

2. Pipes are generally of pottery and variable in shape. The following types and varieties seem diagnostic, (a) the equal-armed type with projecting stem bent up and attached to bowl, (b) and the long stemmed pipe of pottery or stone with projecting stem.

Military and Hunting Complex

1. Type PP4. Diagnostic subtypes are stemmed, and pentagonal (or undulate-edged) forms. (Simple triangular present but side-notched subtype virtually absent).

2. Coarse PP1, generally a stemmed form present. (In Texas according to A. T. Jackson, seldom in graves; in Arkansas according to Harrington occasionally found with burials.)

Pottery Complex

1. (a) A coarse grayish brown utility ware, common shape the amphora or related forms decorated chiefly by brush-roughening, incising or applied clay strips (yielding designs in low relief). (b) A second type of excellent quality, black, yellowish brown, or tan with polished surfaces and characteristic designs etched after firing, often with red or white pigment inlaid in the lines. Characteristic pottery forms in this second type include conical bowls, carinated bowls and a characteristic water bottle form (with shoulder low on the body). (c) A third type found in widespread but always occurs in small numbers, a ware painted entirely in red, often with etched designs and having two specialized forms, one of them a beaker resembling somewhat a conventionalized lotus blossom. Fringed or spurred lines usually in the etching technique are common decorative elements in most local. Vertically reduplicated forms, the cockscomb head and complete animal figure standing on the tail flange on shallow bowls, and shallow bowls decorated with knobs or nodes over the whole area but not in large number.

Ornaments of Insignia

1. Sheet copper forms with crude repoussé designs or ornamentation occur occasionally in Lower Mississippi sites.

Middle Mississippi diagnostic traits.

Ceremonial

1. The truncated pyramidal mound of earth as substructures for temples and/or public buildings.
2. The equal-armed pipe other than the projecting stemmed. (Large "biconical" pottery form most commonly,) and the massive stone image pipe, stemless.

Houses

1. Rectangular floor outline.
2. Walls of wattle-and-daub type generally.

Costume and Dress

1. The employment, often in profuse amounts, of marine, cut marine shell and pearls for personal adornment.

Pottery Complex

1. (a) A dull gray type or variants with beaker, plate and effigy vessel forms as well as ollas, water bottles, common shallow bowls, etc. The incised technique is probably the most common. Designs include bands and chains of hachured triangles, spirals, scrolls and arches. (b) A less decorative type but of excellent ware generally with reddish-brown to brownish gray exteriors probably used for utility and storage purposes. The chief forms are the olla and shallow bowl, common type. (c) A painted type, (possibly secured by trading) generally small in amount with two or more colors, less often in solid red. These "colors" include red, black and white and the use of the natural pottery surface at times to give a polychrome effect. The designs in color are similar to those of the dull gray type. The chief form generally is the waterbottle.
2. The pottery trowel.

On account of lack of information, the corresponding traits in the two phases cannot always be compared, as for example, in the case of houses. Reports from Arkansas by M. R. Harrington indicate square (as against rectangular) and round types. The information from Texas is as scanty and less clear. The latest groups of Lower Mississippi appear to have been strongly influenced by the Middle phase, the earlier groups much less.

Some Lower Phase Traits Found in the Middle Phase in Illinois

1. The vertical-necked olla occurs in Illinois chiefly in the Tennessee-Cumberland aspect as at Kincaid and related sites. The olla is rare in some parts of the Lower phase but where it occurs in Texas, along the Neches, and in part of Arkansas and Louisiana, it is of that form.
2. The seed-bowl or seed-bowl olla occurs at Cahokia in the Monks Mound aspect and to a lesser degree elsewhere as in the Spoon River Focus (Monks Mound aspect) and the Kincaid related components of the Tennessee-Cumberland. In Texas and Arkansas, it seems to have developed from the carinated or keel-based shallow bowl and approaches rather closely similar forms of the Middle phase in Illinois and Wisconsin.
3. The scalloped rim or "raised points" on the margins of vessels is common in the Tennessee-Cumberland aspect of Illinois on plates and shallow bowls; in the Lower Mississippi it is confined chiefly to the amphora (Texas) but occurs occasionally on conical and carinated bowls (Arkansas).
4. Vertically reduplicate vessels are found in Tennessee-Cumberland aspect of Illinois and in the Lower phase, in some sites in considerable numbers. (These are vessels in which a usual body form is repeated and set one upon the other, making a composite type.)
5. The short-necked water bottle (or narrow-necked olla) occurs in the Tennessee-Cumberland of Illinois and is common in most aspects of the Lower phase, especially in the Sabine focus.

6. The dead are generally buried without personal ornaments in the Tennessee-Cumberland of Illinois and in the Sabine and Neches focus (Lower Mississippi) of Texas.

7. Burials in general seem to be individual or single, not multiple, in both Tennessee-Cumberland of Illinois and in the Lower phase foci.

8. Both type PP4 (so called "bird points") and type PPT (Woodland) projectile points or knives are found together in the Kincaid and related components and also in the Lower phase foci.

9. Large copper-faced ear disks and spoons of stone and bone with designs in relief on outer surface (now in Illinois State Museum collections) were found by McAdams in a mound in Macoupin County and resemble those from the Spiro Mound and other sites belonging to or related to the Lower phase. There also might be placed a repoussé copper turtle found in a mound in Madison County. This is similar to the repoussé work found in Lower phase sites of Arkansas. As no cultural series accompanies either of these objects it cannot be determined with what manifestations they were associated in Illinois. The stone ear spools look so much like those of Arkansas and Oklahoma that they may be aboriginal importations.

The foregoing list has been enumerated to stimulate others to check relationships toward the Arkansas-Texas-Louisiana region. It is interesting to note that the Kincaid component and several other of the Tennessee-Cumberland sites exhibit traits similar to the Eastern Arkansas aspect.

Other points we should consider are that in the first portion of the survey of the Lake Peoria region by Mr. A. M. Simpson, a member of this section, that the sites that most nearly fulfill the requirements for the Illinois Indians are Middle Mississippi, that the Illinois cabin was a long house or rectangular house according to historic accounts, (in Mississippi and not in Woodland trait), that one tribe of the Illinois, the Michigamea came from northeastern Arkansas and that a river named the Illinois rises in Benton County, Arkansas and flows into the Arkansas River to the westward in Oklahoma. Again the historic location of the Illinois not only in northeastern Arkansas but also in Southern Wisconsin, and in Illinois along the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, especially at Peoria and Cahokia coincides with the large mounds and/or village sites of the Middle phase. It would be premature however to suggest that the Illinois Indians had a Mississippian culture of the Middle phase and were responsible for the pyramidal earthenworks in Wisconsin, Illinois and Northeastern Arkansas. More and careful investigation is needed to clear up this problem.

A few sites noted by Harrington and others in Arkansas contain about twenty, but only one has more than 25, viz. 45.

The technique resembles rather closely the Ohio Hopewellian work of the same type, rather than the more artistic Cahokia Mississippian forms.

The plate form may be accompanied or replaced by the shallow bowl with flaring rim.

The amount of the painted true incrusts considerably in the Eastern Arkansas aspect and shallow bowls, rings and even disks as well as beads are painted with designs or in solid colors.

Harrington in fact places the carinated bowl and this type under the same designation, *Cahokia*. The carinated bowl is lacking from practically all Middle phase sites reported.

It might also be noted that Harrington, Dellinger, Moore and Pierce found the skeletons in a badly disintegrated condition, a circumstance found also in the Tennessee-Cumberland of Illinois, only traces of bone being left. Yet the pottery apparently are late, possibly in the historic period.

The stemmed, 1134 projectile points are found in small numbers in the Kincaid and Cahokia components of Middle Mississippi, the last mentioned being illustrated in Merriam's Cahokia report. This is a common type in the Neches focus and in the Spiro component of the Lower phase. Reports on finds in southeastern sites are not clear as to the cultural relationships of the larger projectile points found.

This river may have been named thus after the Illinois tribes were removed to Oklahoma but have no information on this. There are at present too many statements and facts apparently contradicting the identity suggested above. It is however not without interest to note that the Illinois north of the Ohio River in historic times seem to have confined themselves in Wisconsin and Illinois, that the southernmost tribe of the Illinois live in Arkansas and Oklahoma, on the borders of the Lower Mississippian groups, with which they had in common a not inconsiderable number of traits on the level of the lower or lower units.