

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CHICAGO AREA

BY

WILTON MARION KROGMAN

University of Chicago.

In 1927 Mr. George Langford of Joliet, Illinois, published his report on the Fisher Mound group, near Channahon, Illinois.¹ This report, the result of years of careful personal investigation, called the attention of the scientific world to a site offering the possibility of the establishment of a relative chronology for the prehistoric cultures of the Upper Mississippi Valley area. In 1926 the University of Chicago had inaugurated the Archaeological Survey of Illinois under the direction of Dr. Fay-Cooper Cole. Mr. Langford very courteously invited the cooperation of the Survey, with the result that during the field seasons of 1927-28, and for several weeks in 1929, the writer was privileged to conduct archaeological research in and around Joliet and Channahon. In addition Mr. Langford has placed at the disposal of the Survey all the data gathered by him. It is with a deep sense of gratitude that the Survey acknowledges his generous cooperation.

THE FISHER SITE.

The Fisher Mound group is composed of nine mounds and 50 circular pits. Two of the mounds are large, the "East Mound" (EM) five feet high and 50 feet in diameter, the "West Mound" (WM) six feet high and 60 feet in diameter. The others are of varying size. The pits average 30 feet in diameter and two to three feet in depth, with a rim (now leveled by ploughing) approximately two feet high. Pits 1 to 34, inclusive, surround the two big mounds; Pits 35 to 48, inclusive, make a second group to the northwest; and Pits 49 and 50, small twin pits, are southeast. A careful examination of ten or more of the largest of these pits has not yielded any definite trace of a superimposed wooden structure, yet it has been concluded that they represent, in all probability, the remains of housesites.

The possibility of a chronological sequence at the Fisher Site is due to the fact that the two large mounds are stratified in such a manner as to give definite "levels" of occupancy, each of which presents a distinct physical type as well as characteristic cultural differences. Figure 1 schematizes the structural details of the West Mound.

¹ *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 153-206. 1927.

It is at once obvious that the *Dark Seam* above and below the Ash Layer offers an important bit of evidence as to sequence of burial, viz., in the oldest burials both seams are intact; in the next oldest the lower seam is penetrated while the upper is not. Finally, the *Black Seam*, further up, establishes a third landmark.

The general characteristics of the Fisher Site, mound and pits, as described in notes furnished by Mrs. Langford, may be presented as follows:

Surface: Post-European; human burials all brachycephals; iron, brass, silver, wood, bone, stone, shell artifacts, and porcelain beads. Found superficially in mounds EM and WM and in SE in its entirety. Also adjacent to SE and near Pit 6 and several other pits.

Upper Level. Zone I: Brachycephals predominate; no artifacts or pottery. Found as intrusive above the Black Seam in EM and WM; as bundle burials in NGP and SSW; and as articulated intrusives in several smaller mounds. *Zone II:* Mesocephals buried in a crouching position; occasional stemmed arrows, bone tools and coarse grit-tempered sherds. Found in EM and WM between Black Seam and Ash Layer; also NGP, SSW, NW, W, and SW; as shallow ash pockets around the Pits.

Middle Level. Zone I. Mesocephals buried on the side; plain grit-tempered pottery; bone culture extensive. Found in SM and WM between Black Seam and in Ash Layer and in SSW in part. In the Pits represented by intrusive cache and refuse pits with few human burials, some partially burned, with burned artifacts. *Zone II:* Brachycephals buried upon the back; profusely decorated shell-tempered and moderately decorated grit-tempered pottery; less extensive bone culture. Found in EM and WM below the Ash Layer and in SSW in part. In the Pits found as refuse and food holes, as human burial in P21, and as refuse-hole between wall and center. *Zone III:* Irregular burials of brachycephals; no pottery or artifacts. Found in EM and WM below the Ash Layer.

Lower Level. Zone I: Non-prognathic mesocephals buried on the side. Found in EM and WM, and several burials in SW, NW, and SSW, and in Pits as scattered antler material and worked flint. *Zone II:* Crouching orthognathous dolicocephals; several marine shell ornaments the only artifacts. Found in EM and WM.

As regards extent of time, no conspicuous gap between Zones is evident. The widest gap seems to be between the Middle and Lower Levels, that between Middle and Upper being considerably less.

The two Big Mounds seem to have been built up as follows: The Lower Levels burials are difficult of analysis. The lowest zone containing "concealed" burials shows that all of the skulls found there are long-heads. The gravel above, below, and to the sides of them was relatively clean, with very little soil or soil-stained gravel. Graves in the zone above showed slight disturbance of gravel with traces of brown dirt similar to that resting elsewhere upon clean gravel and beneath the 12 inches more or less of dark surface soil. Here, mesos predominate.

Apparently there was no mound over these Lower Level skeletons in the two big mounds, this being also true in the small mounds NW, SW and SSW.

Nor does the prolific Middle Level Zone II of the two big mounds appear to have been part of a mound structure, for if conditions have been observed correctly, the top of the Ash Layer was once an exposed surface deposit and the spot was not as conspicuous as is the barely distinguishable mound SSW. The soil above the Ash Layer seems to be the first transported material of a considerable amount, so that the mounds as they now stand were really the work of those ascribable to the Upper Level, and Zone I of the Middle Level, the brachys of the Middle, and the mesos and dolichos of the Lower, being in no sense mound-builders. SE, as has been explained, is of post-European origin.

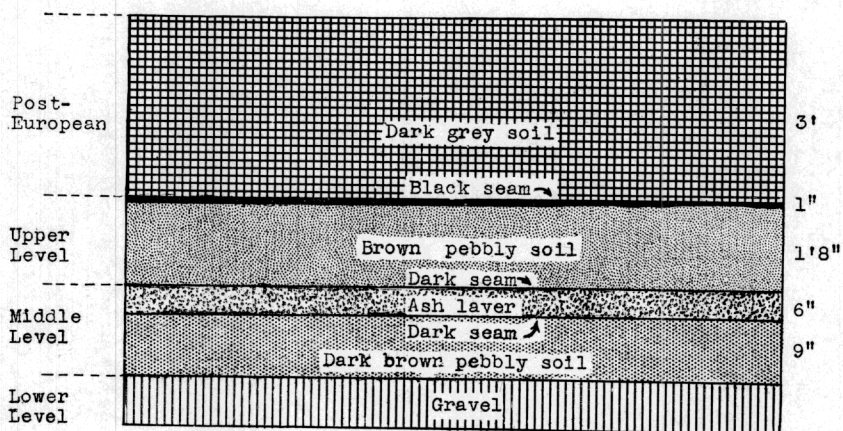


FIG. 1. Structure of West Mound.

1. Upper 3' of mound composed of loose dark surface soil; (continuous).
2. *Black Seam*— $\frac{1}{2}$ "–1" of dense black vegetable material; (continuous).
3. Brown pebbly soil, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' thick; a hard compact mixture of dark earth and gravel becoming coarser at the bottom; (continuous).
4. *Ash Layer*—6" thick, white ashes plus charcoal above and coarse brown soil plus ash below; contains broken animal bones and clam-shells, burned and unburned; deposits thickest over graves and in between made up of mixture of ash plus very hard light grave earth mixed with pebbles; ground level about here; (continuous).
5. Basic layer—9" thick brown pebbly and sandy soil, latter resting upon main gravel deposit.

NGP and W although older are comparatively modern. This is true of NW and SW except for the concealed gravel burials which, like those in the two Big Mounds, show no signs that they were responsible for the structures above them. SSW contained Middle and Lower Level burials whose plane of origin was at or below the present ground level. Massed Upper Level burials had intruded, but no mound was built over them,

a distinction possibly accorded only to those buried in the flesh. That all of the mounds are quite recent compared with the earlier burials beneath them, is, probably very near the truth. Apparently the early burial spots were detected by late comers who deposited their own dead in the same place.

Nowhere upon the Fisher Site has there been found any trace of a stone or wooden structure. The Pits which we supposed would disclose large post-holes and remains of wooden beams did nothing of the sort. They yielded a few small holes near the side walls and many charred branches and rushes but nothing more. Most of the Pits had each a central fire hearth and several had ramps or causeways from the center sloping upward to the rim. The rims were high and the Pits rather

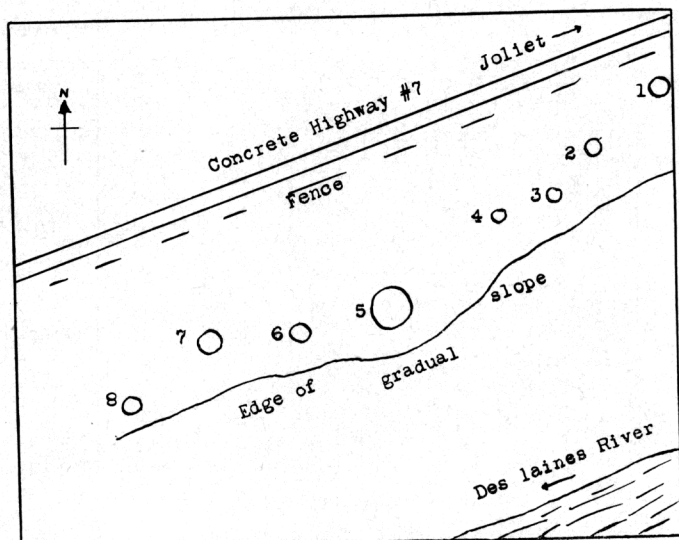


FIG. 2. Sketch map of the Adler Site.

deep making a total depth of 6 to 8 feet which required a ladder or some means for exist. The interpretation of the Pits is that they served as permanent shelters, the high side walls acting as wind-breaks and the central fire hearth furnishing artificial warmth. For protection from sun and rain overhead, a hedge of branches and rushes appears to have extended around the side wall leaning to the center where a large opening remained to permit egress of smoke.

The Pits are older than the intruding food holes and although may be very much older, possibly contemporaneous with Lower Levels burials, this latter is but an impression and rests upon an unsubstantial foundation. Surely the Pits may be ascribed to early Middle Level and are older than the various burial sites before mounds were heaped over them.

THE ADLER SITE.

A second important site near Joliet is that known as the Adler Mounds, situated $11\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Joliet, on the right bank of the DesPlaines River. The group consists of eight mounds as shown in Figure 2, ranging in size from 50 feet in diameter and five feet high, to 15-25 feet in diameter and one-half to one foot high.

The general structure of the eight mounds did not show any marked variation, one mound from the other. An oblong trench, averaging six by ten feet, and oriented in no particular direction, was dug through 12 inches or more of rich black surface soil, another 10 inches or so of black soil containing stones, and finally 30 inches of compact stones, sandy clay, and small gravel. The bottom was cleared of protruding stones and the primary burials laid in, extended side by side, spaces around the walls being occupied by secondary burials of disarticulated

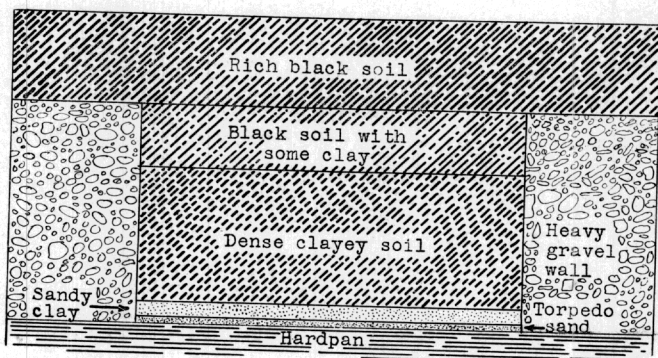


FIG. 3. Structure of Adler Mounds.

skeletons. The grave was then filled in with dirt containing buff sandy clay, which in turn contained greatly weathered and fragmentary human bones. Apparently this earth had been brought in from the outside, possibly from another grave site, for several feet of digging in the vicinity was needed to reach earth containing clay. The filled-in earth was covered by 18 inches or more of rich black soil. (See Figures 3, 4, 5.)

As far as could be ascertained each mound contained only one primary burial chamber, usually located near the center of the mound. All were purely burial mounds in which the skeletons were grouped in a single, comparatively small, central burial chamber.

The Adler culture as represented by the primary burials is very distinctive: mode of burial and artifacts present characteristics not found at Fishers. Burials Ad. M5-7 and Ad. M5-8 (see Figure 6)



FIG. 4. (*Upper left*) View, looking south-by-southeast, of excavation in Adler Mound 6, showing location of central burial chamber.

FIG. 5. (*Upper right*) The earth stratification as shown in Adler Mound 6. To the right can be clearly seen the typical heavy gravel "wall" of the central chamber. From above down can be seen the successive strata of loam, black clayey soil, and heavy clay-gravel mixture, terminating with the hard-pan below.

FIGS. 6 and 7. See explanation on opposite page.

yielded caches of bone awls and a stone platform pipe. The mound Ad. M3-5 evidenced a very distinctive pottery unknown to the Fisher Site. Ad. M5 presented contact with the Upper Level of the Fisher group in the form of intrusive burials, Ad. M5-1, Ad. M5-5 and Ad. M5-6, (see Figure 7) lying from 18 to 30 inches below the surface. Ad. M5-6 overlay the north corner of the central primary burial chamber. Finally Ad. M8 presented evidence of post-European contact in the instance of an intrusive burial which had buried with it a small brass circular buckle or brooch.

SUMMARY.

The problem of the chronological correlation of the Fisher and Adler sites is an interesting one. More important, however, is the relation of these two sites to the general Upper Mississippi Valley culture.

As a point of departure, it may be stated that the culture of the Fisher Middle Level is to be identified with the Fort Ancient culture of Ohio. The lower zone of the Middle Level, and the Lower Level, seem to tie up with the Pits. The Upper Level of Fisher appears to be related to the intrusive culture at Adler (Ad. M5). At both sites we have post-European.

The primary culture at Adler does not appear to be related to any of the other cultures found at Fisher and Adler. If one may presume upon more or less fragmentary evidence as a basis, the Adler primary culture bears some resemblance to the Hopewell culture of Ohio,² specifically with reference to the use of mica, the presence of a stone platform pipe, and typical Hopewell pottery design.

A recapitulation in order of priority, would offer the following chronological sequence:

1. "Hopewell," Adler primary. (Hopewell of Ohio?)
2. Fisher Lower Level and Fisher Pits.
3. Fisher Lower Zone of Middle Level and Fisher Pits.
4. Fisher Middle Level and "Kankakee River Refuse Heap."³
5. Fisher Upper Level and intrusives of Adler.
6. Post-European at Fisher and Adler.

² For a summary of the Fort Ancient and Hopewell cultures, see Shetrone, H. C., "The Culture Problem in Ohio Archaeology." *Amer. Anthropol.*, Vol. XXII, 1920, p. 144 ff.

³ Langford, *op. cit.* p. 203.

FIG. 6. (*Lower left*) Ad. M5-7 and Ad. M5-8, former top and to left, latter bottom and to right. Back of M5-7 can be noted a cache of bone awls, a flint knife and two antler-tip punches. At the right shoulder of M5-8 is another cache of bone awls. The stone platform pipe was found under the occiput of M5-8.

FIG. 7. (*Lower right*) Ad. M5-6 (seen full length) and Ad. M5-5. These two intrusive burials were both extended, with the head of M5-5 upon that of M5-6. To the right of M5-6 can be noted the excavation for the central burial chamber.

This chronology cannot presume to be more than a tentative alignment of cultures. In the first instance it is rather dangerous to refer to the Hopewell culture on the strength of but a few traits. One cannot say whether these were borrowed from or by the definite Hopewell culture of Ohio. Again the priority of the Adler primary "Hopewell" is conjectural: it may be contemporaneous with the Fisher Lower or even Middle Level, yet if it were one would expect an interrelationship between these sites, but a scant 10 miles apart. Certain it is that Adler antedates Fisher Upper Level, and certain it is that the Fisher Mounds and Pits yield an exact relative correlation. It remains for future investigation to fit the archaeology of the Chicago area, as typified by these two sites, into the general scheme of the Upper Mississippi Valley. When this is done it is our hope that the key for the interpretation of the origin and succession of cultures shall have been provided.

The problem of absolute time is one which can be solved only through the cooperation of the geologist. In all excavations soil conditions have been carefully noted and "contour" readings taken at five foot intervals, giving an accurate picture of the soil stratification of the mound or village site. Various erosional peculiarities have been noted as they occur. The investigations now being conducted under the direction of Dr. M. M. Leighton, Chief of the Illinois Geological Survey, on the relation of soil profiles, bids fair to throw much light on the important problem of the exact date and duration of occupation.