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Source: Southeastern Archaeology, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Summer 1998), pp. 1-21
Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41890386
Accessed: 06-09-2019 23:49 UTC

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THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF ADENA RITUAL AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

R. Berle Clay

The significant site elements of Adena, accretional burial mounds, paired-post "houses," ceremonial circles, and large earthwork enclosures have been the staple of the Adena concept since the intensive work by William S. Webb and his associates. These elements are reviewed here and linked as parts of a larger ritual landscape. Their seeming complexity, coupled with the lack of "domestic" contexts to go with them, has led to potentially misleading interpretations of Adena stressing social group identity and individual status differentiation. In this paper the Adena ritual landscape is contextualized in our emerging understanding of domestic Adena. Despite the cumulative adaptive success of patterns of exchange rooted in the Archaic Period and central to the Early Woodland, it is suggested that the Ohio Valley Adena ritual landscape (ca 400 BC-AD 250) continued to reflect the cooperation between smaller, mobile social units. The alternative, that adaptive success during the Early Woodland saw the development of increased competition, emerging corporate group identities, and social group boundary formation, seems not to have been a factor in spite of the size and complexity of the ritual structures.

Despite almost a century of fieldwork and often excellent reporting, we face at least two persistent problems in interpreting the Adena landscape. The first is that Adena has been only hypothetically defined in terms of its domestic contexts (camps, hamlets, villages, etc.). Because of this, we still lack extensive archaeological data on some very basic aspects of this impressive cultural phenomenon.

Although it is also a product of how archaeologists have "defined" Adena, the second problem is of a very different character. Despite its conceptual limitations, Adena presents us with impressive variation in what I would call its "ritual elements": mounds, earthworks, and associated structures. Concentrating narrowly on the Ohio Valley, I know of no more elaborate a built environment in United States prehistory, even if we do not fully understand the domestic sites. There may be others that are more extensive, with larger sites or more complex individual elements, but more elaborate, no.

Perhaps as result of this process, archaeologists have had free rein to speculate about vast areas of Adena society and life unchecked by archaeological facts. For example, our lack of domestic data does not mean that Adena did not have a domestic side, but may indicate a flaw in the Adena concept as it has been developed and used. Few would dispute this observation. The tide of data collecting has changed over the past 20 years, and finally evidence from domestic contexts is beginning to hammer interpretations made in ignorance of them, a point I will bring up below.

The impressive earthworks clearly relate to one another, and to a domestic world, in interesting and possibly unique ways. But their complexity continues to invite unchecked speculation. Although a Mound Builder culture is long since dead and buried (Thomas 1894), the complexity of Adena still fosters a spirit of the unique and exceptional that often has persisted in interpretations. But when the ritual sites are linked to an emerging non-ritual world, alternative explanations for the earthworks become apparent.

In focusing on these two problems, I will ignore a third which many may consider central, the taxonomic significance of Adena itself and, importantly, the distinction between Adena and Hopewell. This problem of classification and culture history remains perplexing (cf. Abrams 1992a:92-93). N'omi Greber's recent (1994) observation has neatly identified the question, the taxonomic "contrasts" between Adena and Hopewell make sense in the central Scioto Valley where the type sites are located, but perhaps not elsewhere. The obvious solution, intensive regional studies of cultural sequence, including the variable development of mound and earthwork construction, will occupy the next generation of archaeologists, but is not my concern here.

I will focus initially on the second of these problems, the wealth of mounds and earthworks. I believe a review of the essential site types can counter their innate and fascinating (and possibly misleading) complexity and at the same time contribute to a resolution of the first problem. Turning to it, I will then contextualize these impressive sites in our emerging understanding of domestic Adena.

I owe much to William S. Webb and his fellow workers. Their monographs of the 1930s and 40s reflect a developing awareness of Adena variability and a commendable ability to question interpretations with new explanations. Clearly Webb's development did not follow a consistent tangent: he played constantly with the interpretation of the Adena sites he excavated. Despite
his interpretive flexibility, however, a decisive final synthesis escaped Webb, even though he published two summary volumes with coworkers, *The Adena People* (Webb and Snow 1945) and *The Adena People #2* (Webb and Baby 1957).

Perhaps, as James Fitting and David Brose suggested (1971:31), Webb's work, like that of most early Adena scholars, was so deficient in methodology that any reasonable synthesis was precluded by those shortcomings. But it is regrettable that Webb did not adequately document his changing interpretations. In them, I believe, lay the germs of a synthesis that eluded him. He ignored a built-in interpretative "tension" in his own monographs. I would like to explore that tension and try to pull out some new ideas for Adena settlement interpretation that seem to stem from it. His legacy, critical to this process of reconsideration, was a series of well-documented sites that can stand reexamination even 50 years later.

For Webb himself, we are left with his decision to let variation speak for itself through an ever-expanding trait list, for Webb took Greenman's initial effort (1932) and honed the definition of new Adena traits to a high art. The decade of Adena research that followed *The Adena People #2* was to demonstrate that the Adena trait list was remarkably uncommunicative (Swartz 1971), despite Don Dragoo's (1963) valiant efforts at the culture historical synthesis of the traits themselves on the strength of his interpretation of the Cresap Mound sequence.

**Adena Site Types**

Distancing himself from his Ohio Valley colleagues with both fieldwork and publications, by 1945 Webb had put the essential Adena site types firmly in place. While the result was a product of stepped-up Depression-relief archaeology, it was clearly Webb's prodigious and unmatched capacity to analyze and publish its results over the next decade, and to encourage the labors of his younger coworkers to do the same, that paid off. The elements have changed somewhat in the telling, but it is remarkable how durable Webb's interpretations have been despite their ambiguities. These sites were the burial mounds, circular paired-post structures below the mounds, "ceremonial circle" earthworks, and **large, ditched Adena villages** (Figure 1). With the possible exception of the last (Clay 1987), a misunderstanding on Webb's part due to a lack of fieldwork, all are what I would call ritual sites. By this I mean simply that the sites were not the focus of day-to-day life.

Rarely has one archaeologist provided so definitive a characterization of an eastern United States archaeological culture. However flawed it may have been because it nowhere considered domestic contexts, Webb's characterization established a series of structure types that have led lives of their own. By their size and complexity, they have suggested a rich and varied ritual life focused on death and burial, with deceptively complex social implications. In hindsight, and in ways that Webb never imagined, we can demonstrate now that when these structural types are linked together, they form a distinctive ritual landscape.

**Burial Mounds**

The burial mound was the very essence of Adena, and the type site was the mound excavated by William C. Mills (1902) in the central Scioto Valley of Ohio on Governor Worthington's historic estate called "Adena," the choice of the name was fitting, for there were many examples of mounds in the Ohio Valley (where Worthington once held forth as Military Governor of the Ohio Territory). But Webb relentlessly honed his interpretations of Adena mounds **exclusively** with Kentucky excavations (although he referred to sites excavated in other states) and this has caused taxonomic problems (see Greber 1994). His work began with his pre-professional excavations of the 1920s (Webb and Funkhouser 1928:72-121) and passed through two phases of work at the Ricketts Mound (15MM3), in effect his education in Adena archaeology (Funkhouser and Webb 1935). His mature excavations included Wright (15MM6, 7, 8) (Webb 1940), Morgan Stone (15BH15) (Webb 1941b), Robbins (15BE3, 14) (Webb and Elliot 1942), Riley (15BE15) and Landing (15BE17) (Webb 1943a), Fischer (15FA1c) (Webb and Haag 1947), and many others. Webb's career ended with his anti-climactic excavation and skymy reporting of the Dover Mound (15MS27) (Webb and Snow 1959) after his retirement in 1957.

Webb demonstrated that Adena mounds are structurally variable by identifying 90 "traits" associated with them and the burials they contained (Webb and Snow 1945:32-82). The implications of this classificatory exercise, perhaps a case of taxonomic overkill, have always been problematical. In part this approach represents a fussy and aimless penchant for subdivision and labeling (e.g., the contrast between #79, body, extended in log tomb, singly, and #80, two extended bodies extended in same tomb [Webb and Snow 1945:71]). Variability obviously reflected an underlying complexity in Adena burial customs. No one denies this, but there is little agreement about its significance, perhaps because little attempt was made to structure it or to suggest its relevance for any particular question beyond classification.

Webb played with the sociological interpretation of this variability perhaps in advance of his regional colleagues. For example, he concluded that only special persons were buried in mounds, while commoners were cremated and disposed of in the village. That is, in the
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inhumation/cremation dichotomy, Webb (1942:358-362) saw evidence for the existence of Adena social classes.

Other archaeologists, treating this variation more simply as variation in cultural "traits" lacking the social overtones, have suggested that Adena cremation was an early form of burial (or a late form) followed by (or preceded by) inhumation in log tombs. The significance of the distinctions between mortuary treatments that Webb documented with his trait list was hardly simple, but despite the best efforts of more than one archaeologist, an acceptable sociological or culture-historical scheme of variation incorporating the contrasts it generates has yet to emerge.

Because of this failure it is appropriate to question some underlying assumptions about the programmatic nature of Adena burial ritual. Many researchers view the variation in burial practices as coding important differences in status of the deceased (e.g., Binford 1972:225-226). It is also generally assumed that the higher the status, the more elaborate the funeral ritual, including burial. If such were the case, variation in Adena burial would suggest that Adena society was complex, highly stratified, and had many gradations of wealth and influence. In fact, in this respect, Adena society may have been more complex than any other prehistoric culture in the Ohio Valley.

The conclusions of this *reductio ad absurdum* are a strong argument for the proposition that variation in mound burial probably was not the product of programmatic choices made by Adena leadership in response

Figure 1. The essential Adena ritual site types. (a) burial mounds, the Wright mounds (Webb 1940:Figure 1); (b) the paired post circle (Clay and Niquette 1989:Figure 5-15); (c) the ceremonial circle (Webb 1941a:Figure 4); and (d) the large ditched village (Squier and Davis 1848:Figure XIV, No. 3).
to the status of the deceased. The observed variation among burials may have been more accurately the outcome of largely open-ended mortuary ritual negotiated between social equals with variable or expressly unpredictable outcomes (Mainfort 1989:173). With the exception of a few recent workers, not many have considered this possibility, and certainly not Webb. However it is one that I will emphasize as part of my own view that the societies involved were perhaps far more egalitarian than has been supposed. This position does not deny that differences between burials reflect differences between the living. No doubt they do, although they speak primarily to differences in the context of death and burial, not individual status differences. Rather it emphasizes that mortuary choices in Adena were negotiable, open, and permissive of several possible outcomes in which the context of the funerary act becomes of prime importance.

We have been misled by the size and complexity of the mounds in interpreting the culture behind them. From my perspective, Adena burial mounds become less importantly monuments to the dead than the tangible and variable records of social interaction worked out in mortuary events (see also Mainfort 1989). The change in emphasis is not subtle, but constitutes a considerable “demystification” of Adena. I sense that a similar process of reevaluation is also working its way through the interpretation of Ohio Valley Hopewell (Greber and Ruhl 1989:271-293), which is expectable given the certainty that Hopewell was descended from Adena.

While we have long recognized the interpretive failures of early writers who saw mounds as the products of an ancient and superior race of Mound Builders, we are perhaps only now critically developing alternative explanations. For all his importance in developing Adena as an archaeological concept 50 years after Thomas’s (1894) debunking of the Mound Builder hypothesis, it must be kept firmly in mind that in 1945 Webb could still plausibly argue that Adena originated in the valley of Mexico (Webb and Snow 1945:328-332). Despite his lack of formal training in anthropology, Webb’s interpretation was in step with conventional professional opinion (e.g., Ford and Willey 1941). For some, this interpretation of Adena would persist into the 1960s (Spaulding 1952; Willey and Phillips 1958; Willey 1960, 1966). At the same time, others with more extensive local knowledge, notably James B. Griffin (1943, 1945) and Don Dragoo (1963, 1964), sought a more prosaic rooting of Adena in indigenous cultural traditions north of the Rio Grande.

There are three related major dimensions of mound variability: size, grave accessibility, and permanence of mortuary facilities. Of these, I believe the seemingly critical characteristic of mound size is largely, if not entirely, an irrelevant factor, one that has been consistently misinterpreted by one or another of the various explanations taking the form of “the larger the mound, the greater the importance of those buried within.” This attitude is illustrated quite nicely by artists’ interpretations of Adena mortuary activity at mounds of different sizes (infra Mayer-Oakes 1955:Figure 4, p.18 and Dragoo 1963:Figure 3, p. 28).

Adena mounds were accretional and this implies they were not planned in their final size or form, but rather were open-ended responses to serial burial needs. Every large and complex mound had simple beginnings in mortuary ritual conducted for a limited few, often a single individual (Milner and Jefferies 1987) (Figure 2). In a sense it was those initial burials in their “minimalist” mound structure that may have been the most significant in mound formation; in some manner it was they who triggered subsequent burial additions. Yet, uniformly, the initial mound structures were small and often quite simple. How they may have been related to subsequent interment is not at all clear. I would argue that no one had any idea when a mound was started how big it would ultimately become. At any point during its use the size of the mound was incidental to the more basic fact that the structure was simply a burial precinct. Mound size no doubt reflected socio-environmental factors and implicitly was a comment on the intensity and continuity of local mortuary ritual, with each addition to the tumulus representing a significant social event. But with few exceptions, neither the size nor the shape of the mound seem to have been characteristics inherent in the structure itself or a factor in ritual organization. Neither the bulk of a Miamiisburg mound (Shetrone 1931:Figure100) or a Grave Creek mound (Hemmings 1984), nor their apparent planning, should blind us to the fact that most mounds were much smaller. Even these large examples probably began as smaller structures. Whatever the circumstances involved in the ultimate size of these two large examples, they should not be used to generalize about the mound building phenomenon as a whole.

The second factor, grave accessibility, was a major source of variability in Webb’s trait list. At one end in complexity was the sealed interment, at the other the elaborate log crypt. How the grave was built at either extreme tended to vary; involving earth pits, stones, logs, bark, and combinations of each, but the accessibility of the body, once committed to the grave, had potential significance.

James Brown (1979) has drawn a general distinction between charnel houses and burialcrypts, seeing them as mortuary facilities entailing very different costs and responding to social systems of differing complexity. The “high cost” charnel houses are best known from Scioto Valley sub-mound “great houses,” products of a local Hopewellian society with considerable complexity. The “lower cost” crypts occurred widely in the Eastern United States in less socially complex contexts, for example in Illinois Valley Hopewell.
The third aspect of variation also relates to the nature of the grave. Closed graves and log crypts represent basically different types of interments. The crypt was an intentional investment in a reusable facility, essentially a burial vault, unlike a closed grave that could have been used for an individual act of burial. There is a possibility that at certain mounds grave pits were emptied of their contents, but perhaps not reused (cf. Potter 1970:10), although the emptied pits are difficult to distinguish today from historically vandalized burials. That a crypt had a high probability of reuse may explain the disparity in numbers of individuals buried in a mound with closed graves, like Robbins (Webb and Elliot 1942), and one with log crypts, like Wright (Webb 1940; Mainfort 1989). At Robbins, where all graves were closed, although of considerable variety, 100 individuals were excavated. At the much larger Wright mound, in which all burials were recovered from log crypts, only 21 individuals were recovered, although presently uninvnetoried skeletal parts strongly suggest the presence of earlier interments. At Wright, in contrast to Robbins, labor was invested in long-term mortuary facilities. The burials recovered from the excavated crypts may, in fact, only be the last individuals placed in them.
The significance of this difference between accessible and inaccessible graves raises an important question in Adena archaeology. Because they are highly visible landmarks, Adena burial mounds have generally prompted the interpretation that they contained the graves of high status individuals (e.g., McConaughy 1990:9). Many mounds were large because they were late and contained log tombs (e.g., the large Wright mound). Some authors have seen mound size as a comment on the developing political complexity in Adena culture in general, perhaps due to an increasing importance of agriculture. These arguments, where they have been stated with precision (e.g., Shryock 1987), have not been well received for a variety of reasons (e.g., Clay 1991b; Mainfort 1989).

In a more indirect line of reasoning, it also has been argued that the mounds certainly could not have contained all Adena dead, but rather held an upper class sample. In one way or another this argument stems from Webb’s (1942:361-362) interpretation of the C&O Mounds and usually involves the assumption that the normal form of treatment of the dead was cremation, followed by disposal of the remains in the village.

Clearly there were multiple ways to bury the dead, and mound burial represents only one of them. The path to a mound burial for certain individuals was one outcome of the negotiation within burial parties. While the status of the dead, as well as the status of the members of the funeral party, was important to the outcome of these negotiations, it would be naive to suppose that only the social rank of the dead determined the outcome. Other types of burial took place, but beyond indicating that mortuary negotiations obviously had different resolutions, it is difficult to relate these with certainty to aspects of social structure. Suffice it to say that the context of negotiation varied.

Circular Post Structures

The paired-post circular structure was Webb’s unique contribution to Ohio Valley archaeology. He identified and gave meaning to a pattern that had been encountered by earlier workers, but not recognized for what it was, and the feature type is a monument both to the large scale of Depression-era excavations and the fieldwork skills of Webb’s assistants. Circular paired-post structures were first encountered by him (Webb 1940) below the Wright mounds, followed by examples from the Morgan Stone (Webb 1941b), Robbins (Webb and Elliot 1942), Riley and Landing (Webb 1943a), Crigler (Webb 1943a), and the C&O mounds (Webb 1942).
Despite his contribution, however, Webb never reconciled two quite different interpretations of these structures. With little by way of explanation, he concluded that there were two different categories, identical in shape (circular) and construction (paired-posts). These became his Adena traits #42, for large and unroofed non-domestic circular structures over 97 feet in diameter, and #43, much smaller roofed circles, domestic dwellings, under 60 feet in diameter. The deciding factor seems to have been the question of the roof; Webb saw two possibilities: no for #42, yes for #43. To quote him (Webb and Snow 1945:52-53):

House Traits
(42) post-mold patterns circular, diameter 97 feet or more.

The fact that Adena house patterns are circular is now well established by the finding of 23 such patterns on 9 sites in Kentucky. Records of earlier excavations give abundant evidence that such patterns have been previously found elsewhere, but they were not recognized as house patterns. These patterns occur in the hard clay subsoil in the old villages, under mounds, and are clearly discernible and unmistakable. The diameters are easily measured. The structures seem to fall into two classes: those circles having a diameter of 97 feet or more, a total of four, and those having a diameter of 60 feet or less, a total of nineteen. So far none has been found with diameters between these two dimensions. It is suspected that the significance of this division, if it continues to verified by future excavations, will be found in the fact that the smaller size circles were houses, each of which had a single roof over it, and the larger circles indicate structures no one of which had a single roof over the entire structure because of its excessive diameter. Scattered post-molds in the interior of some of these large circles suggest that "rooms" built against the inside of the circle may have had roofs. This would have left a central area without any roof. This area in the center of the large circles often shows fire action on the structure floor.

(43) Post-mold patterns circular, diameter of 60 feet or less.

The convenient size dwelling house for Adena seems to have been about 37 feet in diameter, although this dimension varies from 21 to 59.5 feet in houses on different sites. The median diameter is 37 feet and the average is 37 feet. Sixty feet seems to have been about the limit in size that would permit the construction of a roof over all, if indeed they were so large. No roof has ever been found, but its existence is predicated on the discovery of interior post-molds arranged in a regular pattern that might indicate roof supports.

Webb's Trait #43 has tended to characterize all paired-post circles as houses, with no attempt to explain the concurrent existence of the larger circles, Trait #42. Central in this argument has been the circular structure below the Morgan Stone mound, a well-excavated circular paired-post structure of considerable archaeologi-
cal clarity that, in addition, formed the template for the first stage of mound construction. This structure burned over the central burial of an adult female. Webb interpreted the funeral context as the partial cremation of a chief or headman on the floor of his house that was burned after his death, and Charles Snow's identification of the individual as "female?" went without comment or explanation (Webb 1941b:285). Ignoring this example of dated male chauvinism, Webb thus christened "the Adena house," and this reconstruction has become a staple of Ohio Valley museum displays, including his own University of Kentucky Museum of Anthropology (as of October 1997).

Webb's Morgan Stone house reconstruction can be questioned on a number of counts; there are other interpretations (Figure 5). First, there is evidence for a construction preceding the post circle, perhaps a scaffold; it is situated inside the post circle, and Webb considered it simply as the "center supports" for the roof by selectively ignoring one third of it. Remove these four center posts as roof supports by adding them to two more supports for a scaffold and, in more ways than one, Webb's domestic house collapses. Secondly, the outward-leaning walls of the reconstruction, despite Webb's comments, are structurally unstable.

Faced with the possible absence of a roof, one is left with a roofless, screened enclosure within which a series of activities took place. These may have involved different, sequential structures. For example the scaffold, if that is what it was, may have actually preceded construction of the circle. The most notable event was the burial of an adult female in the center of the circle. Later her remains were covered with a small mound, after which the post circle was burned down leading to her partial cremation. When the first small mound was constructed, it obviated further use of the activity area; thereafter it could only be used as a burial mound. Because of this and the necessary shift in human behavior that it produced, this initial burial was highly significant (Clay 1986:590).

To this structural critique one must add the fact that neither the Morgan Stone mound paired-post structure, nor any circular paired-post pattern, has evidence for a central hearth or—with exceptions (e.g., Clay and Niquette 1989:46-49)—sub-surface storage or cooking pits. Such interior features are expected of a house and occur widely in Ohio Valley prehistory at a later date. Finally, no post circle was ever repaired or rebuilt, in contrast to houses of later archaeological periods.

The possibility that all post circles were specialized open-air meeting centers entered into Webb's (1943b) interpretation of the paired-post structure below the Crigler Mound (Figure 6). At 56 feet in diameter (1943b:518), Webb admitted that it could not have been roofed, although he proposed that it might have been partially covered. In addition, its interior features, including a raised clay platform opposite an entry and possible bench supports along the walls (Figure 7), led him to conclude that the structure was a meeting place similar in concept to an Anasazi kiva, although unroofed. Furthermore, the lack of "midden" in the mound, specifically potsherds, led him to interpret it as isolated and apart from the village.

I will return to this interpretation. After Crigler, Webb's writings continued his confusion between houses and meeting places. Following careful review of the evidence, Seeman (1986) has perhaps most plausibly characterized all paired-post structures as "mortuary camps." The realization that they might have been unroofed is an addition of my own.
A significant feature in the early earthwork plans published by Squier and Davis (1848) was the “ceremonial circle,” which occurred widely in the Ohio Valley and was well known prior to Webb’s work (Figure 8). As though cut from a template, ceremonial circles were highly similar, perfectly circular and surrounded by a ditch with the dirt thrown to the outside. Some ultimately had mounds built inside them, although possibly built without them, and all had one or more entryways generally pointing in the cardinal directions, which has led to some fanciful astronomical speculation (e.g., Clay 1986:589-590).

For Webb, this class of enclosure was characterized by the Mt. Horeb earthwork (15Fa1). His monograph (1941a) characterized the type, its use, and its distribution. Webb and his workers actually excavated a series of circles (Mt. Horeb, Biggs [15GP8; Hardesty 1964], and the Camargo enclosures, 15MM30, 31 [Fenton and Jefferies 1991]), but published only this one. Understandably, his interpretation was highly influenced by it.
Figure 8. The ceremonial circle, 15GP8, the Biggs Circle, prior to excavation. Also an example of “replacement”: a small burial mound has been started in the open center of the circle obviating its further use. More than one ceremonial circle became “submerged” by an accretional burial mound. (William S. Webb Museum of Anthropology Negative Number #3192, courtesy of Director, Dr. Mary L. Powell).

Although Mt. Horeb contained an inner post circle following the circumference of the ditch, others did not. Other circles contained burial mounds (Biggs), and both burial mounds and paired-post circles (Dominion Land Co., 33FR12 [Cramer 1989]). Several relatively large mounds appear to have been built over circles, ultimately obliterating them (the Gay mound [15CK10] in Kentucky, the Adena mound itself [Seeman, personal communication], and possibly the Grave Creek mound in West Virginia [Hemmings 1984:11-24]). Again, although Webb’s excavation of Mt. Horeb revealed its interior ritual area as virtually a *tabla rasa* devoid of evidence for any activities, this was not the case at other circles. Webb saw in the ceremonial circle a meeting place not unlike the Crigler paired-post example. In fact, his interpretation of the enclosures in effect merged paired-post circles and circular earthworks in form and function. In his failure to report the Biggs circle, Webb missed the point that the ceremonial circles, like the post circles below mounds, could be terminated by further construction.

**Large Ditched Villages**

Finally, the large enclosures, which Webb believed contained Adena villages, surely represent the Major’s major “unfinished business.” There was one example, a large earthwork (Rafinesque 1820; Squier and Davis 1848) that has become known as the Peter enclosure (15FA166) (Clay 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988a, 1988b) in honor of the nineteenth-century Bluegrass antiquarian, Dr. Robert Peter.

The potential importance of the large earthwork enclosures for Webb is emphasized by the fact that they constituted his first Adena trait, despite the fact that he never excavated one and knew the single identified example only from surface collections (Webb 1943c). To quote from his Adena trait list (Webb and Snow 1945:29):

**Earthwork Traits**

(1) Large earthworks associated with other Adena manifestations.

Recent investigations seem to show that long Adena occupancy of any locality resulted in several forms of earth construction... A typical group, but by no means one of the largest, is the Mt. Horeb site, Fayette County, Kentucky... Here a large earthwork that encloses a small Adena village, has another Adena village in its general vicinity, and in the immediate neighborhood are two Adena burial mounds, and two “sacred circles,” one of that has been proven by excavation to have been built by Adena. Such groups of related structures pointing to an extensive Adena community usually are found in the vicinity of a fairly large stream; often located on its high bank or on the hill crests overlooking the valley.
Coming to this site type near the end of his Adena fieldwork, it is clear that Webb felt that the enclosures were the Adena villages that had eluded him elsewhere. In effect, he saw these sites as the domestic side of the culture, which even he recognized was missing in the sites he had excavated. Later workers, with no further information to support the argument, often have concurred in his opinion. Recent work suggests that Peter was quite unlike Mt. Horeb and probably formatted specialized activities (Figure 9), notably the exploitation of barite and galena ores and the production of artifacts from them (Clay 1987).

As Webb would no doubt have established had he excavated at Peter, it was hardly a simple domestic site; there are few others like it in the Ohio Valley. Furthermore, it may be argued (Clay 1988a) that the site was not Adena at all, though there was a phase of Adena occupation at it, possibly after its ditch and walls had fallen into disuse.

Figure 9. The large earthwork, 15FA1166, Peter “Village”: the large post stockade, one phase in the perimeter, is cut by a pit feature related possibly to ceramic production, itself linked to barite artifact production (photograph by the author).

**Webb’s Two Views of Adena Settlement**

Combining mounds, circles, ceremonial circles, and large earthworks, Webb’s legacy contained an unresolved tension between two interpretations of Adena settlement that has gone largely unnoticed. In an in

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**Figure 9.** The large earthwork, 15FA1166, Peter “Village”: the large post stockade, one phase in the perimeter, is cut by a pit feature related possibly to ceramic production, itself linked to barite artifact production (photograph by the author).
ture as an isolated, specialized community enclosure. Lewis H. Morgan’s discussion (1888:215) of both Pueblo kivas and mound builders was clearly in his mind. Webb speculated that the circle was built apart from the village because of its special use. In this interpretation lies the germ of a basic split in space between Adena domestic and ritual worlds.

Webb’s interpretation of Crigler viewed both mounds and post circles as remote ritual structures linked to isolated ritual—certainly mortuary events, perhaps others as well. It is this reconstruction that seems most valid today, and Seeman (1986) has most precisely redefined the function of post circles with his suggestion that they were mortuary camps, not domestic houses.

But for Webb there was, finally, his vision of Adena settlement as wrapped up in his Adena Trait #1. In a sense this interpretation backed away from Crigler and returned to C&O “with a vengeance.” In his 1945 summary volume with Snow, under the heading of Trait #1, and without extensive elaboration on his part, Webb presented the North Elkhorn complex of sites in Fayette County, Kentucky, as the Adena settlement pattern in microcosm. As if to cement their association, all were made parts of 15Fa1. The mounds were the cemeteries, the ceremonial circles were the ritual centers in which kinship rituals were conducted (following a kiva model), and Peter (together with nearby Grimes) was the “settlement.” Perhaps his most extensive discussion of the settlement complex was in his discussion of Adena Trait #1 “Large Earthworks Associated with other Adena Manifestations” quoted earlier.

This largely undeveloped conception of Adena settlement was clearly Webb’s attempt to integrate his interpretation of the Crigler post circle with the Mt. Horeb ceremonial circle in a more comprehensive statement. The resulting cultural landscape was substantially different from his C&O interpretation. In contrast to the C&O pattern, the Elkhorn pattern was nucleated. Essential to it was a large local population living in the vicinity of, if not actually amongst, the earthworks and burial mounds they had constructed and used for ongoing ritual and burial. Such settlement examples—and he mentions others, for example in West Virginia—seem to have occurred where there had been a long period of Adena occupation.

The Achilles heel of the Elkorn pattern as representing any sort of cultural reality is Peter Village. Because of recent, limited excavation, we know somewhat more about the site than did Webb. Although I am far from certain what the final interpretation of that large earthwork will be, several points are critical.

First, the features that defined it as an enclosure—its stockade, followed in time by a ditch and interior bank (Clay 1984, 1987)—are early and preceded much of what we recognize now as Adena (i.e., pre-300 BC). The ditch fill stratigraphy suggests that, defined on ceramics alone, the Adena period of use of the enclosure was probably quite short (Clay 1988b:110), ca. 190 BC and not really “late” Adena for central Kentucky. Finally the activities, as they are known, revolve around enclosure construction and the acquisition and manufacture of artifacts from barite and galena. Given the added rarity of the large, elliptical earthwork in the Ohio Valley, I hesitate to call Peter a “village” any more. At the same time, for various reasons (Clay 1987), Peter was less “ritual” than the nearby Mt. Horeb ceremonial circle. It may well be associated with the manufacture and distribution of galena/barite artifacts in the Early Woodland Period before the major “Adena” features had developed. Its use at a slightly later date may indicate a continuity in regional exchange between non-Adena Early Woodland and Adena itself. It may in fact be far closer in planning and use to the large, defensive, interaction centers that Stothers and his associates have fleshed out for the late Archaic/Early Woodland of Northwestern Ohio (Stothers and Abel 1993:79-85; Stothers and Schneider 1997).

The Peter enclosure currently is best interpreted (on very limited evidence) as a large, special activity site preceding the bulk of Ohio Valley Adena in time, but sporadically used at a later date by Adena artisans. It has scattered parallels in the Ohio Valley in areas where there are concentrations of Adena sites. One is found on the central Scioto near Mound City (Squier and Davis 1848:Plate XIX; Seeman 1981:13), another, the Spring Hill Fort (Thomas 1894:Figure 293 and 418-419), on the Kanawha near Charleston, West Virginia; and there probably were others. Although it is doubtful that all were involved with barite or galena exploitation and perhaps trade (other raw materials may have been involved elsewhere), they could have been special places involved with Early Woodland interregional exchange in general.

Peter Village, however, is only the most glaring “problem” with the Elkhorn Complex. In addition, until proven otherwise by absolute dating, the elements of the “complex” (mounds and enclosures) are best considered coincidental neighbors over the years, neither contemporaneous nor organically linked in an operating settlement system.

Others have found justification for their own views of settlement development, without the luxury of additional data, in Webb’s inability or unwillingness to reconcile his C&O and Elkhorn Complex patterns. For example, it was primarily Dragoo (1964:6-7) who suggested that what he called the “Elkhorn Complex” was late, reflecting a developing tendency for Adena earthworks, dramatically manifest in his late Adena, to occur in concentrated clusters together with large nucleated villages. This developmental interpretation has been used by some (e.g., Shryock 1987) to argue for a significant change in settlement pattern through time in Adena due to a supposedly increasingly effective agricultural economy that cannot be documented.
Such views are probably wrong. Currently there is no evidence from mortuary Adena for nucleation of domestic Adena through time (Clay 1991a:38). Mortuary sites may have become increasingly complex, which is a comment on increasing social complexity in the Ohio Valley. Or, simply, continued use of a ritual site may have contributed a number of mounds and earthworks to a developing complex. But neither case is evidence for the nucleation of population aided or abetted by an agricultural economy.

In one sense, Webb’s characterization of the C&O pattern was perhaps more accurate; Adena domestic sites clearly were scattered. This view, however, was based on the inappropriate interpretation of paired-post circles as domestic houses. More accurately, these submound structures indicate the scattered and often isolated nature of Adena paired-post mortuary camps, not domestic structures. The C&O case is simply another example of the Crigler example, with its complexity probably due to the use of the C&O locality over an extended period of time.

However one looks at Webb’s dilemma, considering the sites he excavated, he never dealt with domestic contexts, and the evidence from the ritual sites simply cannot be massaged into an approximation of the domestic world. That world is being revealed by ongoing fieldwork, and even in the absence of an abundance of data, we can begin to suggest a model of domestic Adena that does not derive simply by implication from the mortuary sites.

Fieldwork over the past twenty years has consistently provided information from non-mortuary Adena contexts (Fischer 1974; Shane 1975; Black 1979; Bush 1975; Carskadden and Gregg 1974; Carskadden and Morton 1989; Grantz 1986; Abrams 1989, 1992b; Niquette and Boedy 1986; Niquette et al. 1987, 1988; Niquette and Kerr 1989; Clay and Niquette 1992; Kerr and Creasman 1995; Schweikart 1997). These data fit neither of Webb’s settlement reconstructions, nor the developmental schemes (Dragoo 1963, 1964) derived from them (Clay 1991a). When they are added to the reinterpretation of sub-mound habitation levels as ritual areas associated with mortuary events (Seeman 1986; Clay 1986; Clay and Niquette 1989), it becomes evident that domestic and ritual sites, including burial mounds and all other earthworks, were not highly articulated in space. In most cases the ritual sites were located well apart from domestic sites, although often clustered with other mounds and mortuary areas (Clay and Niquette 1989; Niquette et al. 1988). In addition, there is a considerable difference in size and complexity between the domestic and the ritual contexts, such that the former suggest little support for theories of social elaboration, specifically social ranking, derived from the latter.

In their dispersal, small size, lack of complex internal structure and substantial domestic architecture, and in the lack of a discernible site hierarchy, Adena domestic sites suggest an egalitarian, relatively low-energy hunting/gathering and horticultural society with minimal investment in site facilities and permanent shelter. Collectively they would seem to imply small, relatively autonomous and dispersed social groups. There is little evidence to support status differentiation within or between groups such as has been suggested from the formal analyses of certain burial mounds (e.g., Shryock 1987; see also Mainfort 1989). Why this is so constitutes the central “Adena” problem of today.

Putting the Parts Together: Fitting Ritual Precincts to a Domestic World

The 1970 Ball State University Adena symposium, Adena: The Seeking of an Identity (Swartz 1971), provides a remarkably candid view of archaeologists struggling with an ambiguous archaeological concept and their commitments to it. The dialogue between discussants, fortunately published in part, ebbs and flows as individuals work their way to the realization that an Adena trait list was getting them nowhere. James Fitting and David Brose (1971:48-49) cautiously eased into a suggested distributional study of Adena traits as one methodological solution to Adena “identity,” perhaps reflecting a mode of archaeological thinking then in vogue, best expressed in David Clarke’s 1968 Analytical Archaeology. They then backed off in the spirited discussions with the others over the distribution of the likes of Trait #17, blocked-end tubular pipes, Trait #191, Adena Plain ceramics, and Trait #43, paired-post circles. Culture historical taxonomy was dead, and I don’t believe they ever tackled the perplexing question of Adena trait distribution.

Brose did not abandon interest in the general time period and was central in organizing the subsequent 1978 Chillicothe Conference that focused on Ohio Hopewell. The results were promptly published (Brose and Greber 1979), and Brose led off (1979) with a seminal article, “A Speculative Model of the Role of Exchange in the Prehistory of the Eastern Woodlands.” In it he posited that the exchange systems of the Late Archaic formed the basis for exchange in the subsequent Woodland Period. While this was not, in and of itself, a novel conclusion, his explication of its larger significance was.

What we know of the settlement pattern for the Ohio Valley suggests the continuation of an economic adaptation with roots in the Archaic Period into the Early and Middle Woodland periods, a point Brose and many others always have stressed (e.g., Dragoo 1963). Horticulture became an element of this adaptation by 2000 BC with the domestication of squash, then starchy annuals, but did not become the dominant source of food until the end of the Woodland Period with the widespread appearance of maize (Wymer 1986). In contrast
to late prehistoric maize farmers, early agricultural societies in the Ohio still made extensive use of resources through mapping-on to them in space and moving between them, supplementing this semi-sedentary strategy with logistic forays as needed (Binford 1980). The Archaic Period legacy, passed on to the Woodland Period after 1000 BC, was human dispersion and settlement fragmentation despite developing native plant domestication.

Brose (1979:7) suggested that under conditions of increasing population density in the Late Archaic and the Early Woodland, and in the absence of a dramatic change in subsistence, “...cultural ecological stability without population reduction...was possible...only where there (was) a potential to utilize resource procurement zones beyond those of the immediate corporate group territory.” Exchange, concretely measured in artifacts and their raw materials (like so many of the Adena artifact traits), and in energy resources including not only food itself, but intangibles such as hunting and collecting rights, was the economic result.

Inspired by Brose, I suggest that cooperative mortuary ritual in Adena (expressed in accretional burial mounds and other ritual sites) likewise reflects just this tendency for dispersed social groups in the time period ca. 400 BC-AD 1 to buffer themselves against local shortages. Through alliances, patterns of potential economic reciprocity were established in an environment with built-in uncertainties and maintained, cemented and expressed in the exchange of marriage partners between exogamous groups.

In this view, suggested in particular by the failure of Adena ritual sites to articulate with specific domestic sites, Adena earthworks were used by allied groups, not single, isolated groups. The sites represented compromise localities, splitting the spatial-social distance between allied local groups. The complex mortuary process, preparation of the dead, grave-side feasting (Clay 1983), and the construction of graves in accretional mounds, represented allied groups “working out” through mortuary ritual the economic consequences of the death of kin. The end results (i.e., the burials) represented most directly the results of negotiations between groups with potentially conflicting interests in control of the dead. With their variable outcomes, the burials reflected negotiated ritual events satisfying competing claims on the persona of the dead. The grave goods represented items of exchange, perhaps balancing goods or services presented or performed during the life of the individual, and preserving reciprocal symmetry between exchanging groups. Importantly, task groups (most directly funeral parties, but in fact of variable composition reflecting the immediate context of intergroup negotiations) moved back and forth between mounds and domestic sites linking the two, but the activities in the domestic and ritual “arenas” remained largely distinct.

But to extend Brose’s idea more broadly to the whole of the “ritual arena,” not simply artifacts and foodstuffs (i.e., the “domestic” world), is to part company with one of the specific implications of his model. He pointed out (1979:8) that if adaptively successful (which it is assumed it was), the results of the sort of exchange he outlined would be to exacerbate the problem of group survival through population growth. In the absence of significant negative feedback limiting population growth, which Brose could not identify:

...the most probable results would be an increase in the regional specialization of particular socioethnic groups, and the increased emphasis on socially reintegrative ceremony, and the maintenance of mechanisms for intergroup contact (references omitted). Smith has suggested that such changes lead to more ramified organizational structures, predominantly extended lineages among quasi-territorial groups that maintain loose contact in spite of seasonal fragmentation. Fried suggests that such systems tend to develop rank lineage, or ramage systems, with the need to control group access to subsistence resources, or to structure exchange and distribution. This should lead to both more distinct regionalism in patterns of socio ceremonial behavior and in the settlement-subsistence systems themselves...Archaeologically this would accompany a change from the more flexible and open social systems of the Late Archaic into those more ranked and well-integrated systems of the Early and Middle Woodland (emphasis added).

For Brose, and I would expect many other archaeologists dealing with the phenomenon of the accretional burial mound with grave associations (e.g., Custer 1987:42), this sort of change is just what happened in the shift from the Late Archaic into the Early Woodland and “Adena.” The result of adaptive success, abetted by interregional exchange, would be population expansion and the concomitant development of territoriality and social distance between groups (e.g., Abrams 1992a:92).

Under this view Adena mortuary sites would be seen as expressions of developing “corporate” identity. The progressive elaboration of ritual sites, such as the developing complexity of Hopewellian ritual expressions in the Central Scioto valley (e.g., the conjoined earthworks of the Scioto-Paint Creek region), might well be seen as the end products of this process of differentiation and boundary building. But for the reasons below, I would suggest that this is precisely what did not happen, or at least it is not expressed in the Adena ritual sites.

Brose’s thinking is useful in that it links exchange and the dynamics of change that it suggests, in the Woodland Period with the earlier Archaic. In fact, the superimposition of Adena mortuary structures on Archaic cemeteries at the William Davis Mound (Seeman 1986:570) in Ohio and the Cotiga Mound (46MO1) (Frankenberg and Henning 1994; Wall 1994) in West Virginia can hardly be coincidental, and suggests that the Archaic-Woodland spatial similarities may be more complex than simply the products of parallel patterns of exchange. Despite the apparent change in mortuary
customs, there may have been a strong ritual continuity between the periods.

But Brose’s model needs some sort of corrective in the absence of an identified negative feedback damping down the very effects that it is supposed to produce: things cannot “develop” indefinitely. Indeed, in the Ohio Valley Adena-Hopewell continuum they did not develop continually, although they became quite complex in the Hopewell “climax” by about AD 200, suggesting the working out of the implications of Brose’s model. But the types of ritual sites identified here for Adena—and also occurring in Hopewell—and his model. The complex, accretional burial mounds occurring in both, were largely a thing of the past by AD 450. The Hopewell “decline” in the central Scioto Valley (paralleled in time by a decline in Adena in other parts of the Ohio Valley), and more broadly the general eclipse of the wide range of ritual structures and contexts considered here, is not adequately predicted by Brose’s model.

Thinking on this problem has not advanced much beyond versions of the Hopewellian “fatigue” factor when faced with increasingly successful and expanding non-Hopewellian local populations. At a somewhat earlier date Dragoo (1976:19) wrote “...More likely causes of change are in the evolving Hopewellian society and its economic base. As agriculture became more efficient and spread to surrounding groups, there was an increase in population and number of settlements. These led in turn to greater competition for land and the development of local authority that could have challenged the powers of the burial cult elite that had been overbearing and opulent.”

From the strictly Hopewell standpoint, Prüfer saw an actual retreat of Hopewellians, inheritors of the whole bag and baggage of the Adena-Hopewell ritual elaboration, to hilltop redoubts (1964:69-70), a movement that staved off, but did not avoid the final Ohio Valley Armageddon. Nice stories, but they remain steadfastly unbelievable in face of the continuing inability of archaeologists working in the time period to identify— for Hopewell as well as Adena—the vigorous non-Hopewell (and presumably non-ritual) contexts that represent the people outside the pale who made the system collapse. This is not surprising given the general lack of evidence for significant changes in the local agricultural economy, such as it was, until after all evidence of Hopewell is gone.

Here Dancey’s (1991) recent problems in the definition of “structure” in Middle Woodland domestic settlement on the strength of his analysis of the Murphy site are instructive. It is not entirely clear that the structure he defines for the site is more than the palimpsest results of continuing, but not necessarily continuous, occupation of a particular locality. But regardless of its “reality,” he stresses the small and indefinite nature of the domestic context contemporaneous with the major Scioto Valley Hopewellian centers.

In his comparison (Dancey 1992) of the Murphy and somewhat later, post-Hopewelian, Water Plant site, however, Dancey (1988) clearly underscores the effects of “adaptation” through the Middle Woodland and into the beginning of the Late Woodland. Water Plant, at ca. AD 600, is a nucleated settlement with definable domestic activity centers—if not actually entirely comprehensible architecture—surrounded by what appears to be a defensive ditch. It is a site that heralds the type of village that was to characterize the Late Woodland in many parts of the Central Ohio Valley (e.g., Shott 1990:275-288).

Yet to end the Hopewellian presence and explain the rise of the nucleated settlement, Dancey resorts to time honored explanations with slightly different twists. While I believe he accurately points to a real change that took place (and that immediately made human settlement far more visible), I do not trust his explanation. Thus, to explain the appearance of nucleated villages like Water Plant following on the non-nucleated (Murphy site) hamlets Dancey (1992:27) suggests an explanation that echoes Dragoo (1976:19):

In summary, the perspective on village origins advanced here is that nucleation occurred suddenly among communities with a dispersed pattern of household or hamlet settlement. The proximate cause of nucleation was predation on the resources (especially stored) of these communities by neighboring Hopewellians who were experiencing population growth at a time of climatic stress on food resources. (emphasis added)

In their assessment of the effects of a successful strategy of inter-regional exchange such as the one Brose proposes, Braun and Plog (1982:517) point out that decline in the frequency of the occurrence of valued exchange goods after AD 200, that is with the decline of Hopewell, “...is conventionally interpreted as indicating a widespread decline in supralocal cooperation.”

But, they continue:

A decrease in the frequency of valuables exchanged in a region could indicate, however, either increasing social isolation or, conversely, decreasing social distance between the interacting parties. Under the alternative view of “tribal” social processes presented earlier, we should expect that, if local productive uncertainty becomes a sustained property of the environment, it will become accompanied by a decreasing importance of short-term negotiated social connections between neighboring communities relative to more long-term stable forms of connection. (emphasis added)

Curiously, therefore, the rise of tribal identity in the middle Ohio Valley may be less reflected in burial mounds and ritual places, such as they developed in the Adena to Hopewell continuum, than in their disappearance after AD 200. What I am suggesting is that the ritual elements that developed in Central Ohio Valley Adena may be principally expressions of a lack of supra-local organization and the products of less structured, nevertheless intense, contacts between far-flung individuals and groups.
The regional nucleation of human settlement that Dancey infers from the Water Plant site after AD 400 represents the development of a level of organization of social groups that may not have existed before, despite the complexity of the ritual elements of the Adena/Hopewell landscape. It was a response to the ultimate effects of Brose’s model of exchange in operation, no doubt increasing population density and a mixture of decreasing resources and/or environmental uncertainties. Its effects were the aggregation of once scattered social groups into nucleated villages, and certainly in the widespread occurrence of defensive features like stockades. What may have been lost in the process was Braun’s and Plog’s “short-term negotiated social connections between neighboring communities,” archaeologically registered, I would add, in the accretional burial mounds, paired-post circles, and ceremonial earthworks of the Ohio Valley Middle Woodland beginning with Adena.

It was in the nucleated village that followed, rather than went along with Adena and Hopewell that “tribal” development most impressively occurred. That very development substituted for the relatively open-ended negotiation between social groups that had existed earlier, the development of internal ranking stemming from leadership in the various aspects of economic life. Within the nucleated village, there was now in Braun’s and Plog’s terms decreased social distance between the interacting parties. This was accompanied, to continue their model, by a decreased importance in short-term negotiated social connections between neighboring communities. Social distance would, I suppose, increase between the nucleated communities as they became more territorially “focused” in what was becoming, even before the adoption of intensive corn-based agriculture (post-AD 900), a more competitive social environment.

Steve Taxman (1994) offers interesting corroboration of at least part of this interpretation. In a study of nonmetric traits in skeletal populations from three mounds in Ohio and four in Kentucky, he points out that there is significant regional variation. While the tightly clustered Ohio mounds (from the Big Darby Reservoir near Columbus) suggest a fairly discrete breeding population north of the Ohio River, the mound samples from Kentucky suggest another distinct population. But the samples from the widely separated Boone and Montgomery counties of Kentucky (involving comparisons of the Robbins, Landing, Wright, and Ricketts mounds) are highly similar suggesting a “…highly mobile free ranging population south of the Ohio River (Taxman 1994:84).”

For Kentucky, these are exactly the sort of population samples that might be expected if the mounds represent communal efforts. The conclusions from this exercise are that from a broad regional perspective, there were different Adena “breeding populations,” for example north and south of the Ohio River. This is expectable and is an indication that Adena is hardly the monolithic “culture” or “peoples” it was once supposed to be. More importantly, Taxman sees his data as supporting my suggestion that the accretional burial mounds represent the cemeteries of composite, exogamous, and not corporate groups. If the latter were the case, biological distance between mounds, and certainly between mound clusters, would be expected.

There is a strong tendency on our part as contemporary observers to unhesitatingly view burial mounds as symbols of corporate identity to which a social group was drawn by respect for its dead, much in the manner of a family cemetery (Charles and Buikstra 1983; Goldstein 1980). Even beyond the question of cemeteries, there is a parallel tendency to view prehistoric architecture in general, certainly where it occurs with appropriate scale as in the case of large earthworks and mounds, as the spatial centers of social groups. This view, that might familiarly be called the “bull’s eye” model, is at the core of the somewhat different interpretations of Adena settlement that Webb developed.

The C&O pattern projected each social group with its burial mound. In this view, human groups dispersed in space, interacting with each other as evidenced by exchange, yet segregating mortuary ritual to strictly corporate structures: mounds, mortuary camps and ceremonial earthworks. Burial inclusion in a mound was a matter of kin group membership tempered, in Webb’s thinking, by local status differences (i.e., the “chief” inhumed in the mound, the commoner cremated and disposed of in the village).

Webb’s Elkhorn Complex pattern integrated all ritual elements together with domestic settlements to form a cohesive whole that was segregated by architecture into specialized activity areas. From the dispersed sites of Mt. Horeb, Webb interpreted a sense of a larger social group performing several stages of ritual behavior, still within a bull’s eye model. The nucleated activity cluster was presumably the ritual center of gravity of the local Adena group; simply stated, it was the center of the corporate hunting and gathering territory. Currently in the Adena heartland, there is little basis for this particular reconstruction.

Given what we know of Adena archaeology, a more appealing schema either shifts the ritual centers to the edges of corporate group territories, or makes territorial boundaries irrelevant to location of the ritual sites (Clay 1991a). As such, these centers shift from being the central places of group territories to loci between different groups that served as hinges between them. Expressive of Brose’s emphasis upon cooperation between groups, they represent the architectural expressions of negotiations between groups.

When the possibility of multiple intergroup cooperation is considered, the ritual settlement becomes an increasingly complicated pattern of overlapping
territories and interacting corporate groups. As ritual sites, because of that interaction, mounds and circles occurred seemingly in isolation. At the same time, they also clustered, reflecting the complexity of intergroup relations in specific and scattered contexts.

Given its Adena ancestry, it is not surprising that a similar question of interpretation arises in dealing with Ohio Valley Hopewell. Over 30 years ago Olaf Prüfer suggested (1964) that the complex, Hopewellian earthwork centers of the Scioto Valley in particular were “vacant ceremonial centers,” stressing a similar lack of articulation with Hopewellian domestic sites. An explanation that has waxed and waned in popularity, recent work with Hopewell domestic sites in Ohio (summarized in Pacheco 1996) appears to validate Prüfer’s concept. While the complex sites of the central Scioto Valley combined mounds, earthworks, and enclosed “spaces” in the way that they never did in somewhat earlier and specifically Adena sites, there is little indication that they were becoming more “domestic” through time.

There has been a lack of studies of Adena ritual complexes, specifically as groups of architectural elements. Recent work suggests that this sort of research, getting at the dynamics of site composition and interrelationship, can prove fruitful. Turning to post-circles, the multiple non-overlapping circles at the Niebert Site in West Virginia (Figure 10) (Clay and Niquette 1989, 1992) seem to reflect potentially contemporaneous ritual activities, perhaps performed by different social groups. In contrast, overlapping post alignments, such as those under the Wright and C&O mounds (Figure 11), suggest sequences of activities through time. Summarizing, grouping of circles reflects both the complex partitioning of ritual space due to social complexity (e.g., Niebert) and continuity in the use of space through time (e.g., Wright).

Mounds also clustered for several different reasons. In part, and most obviously, mound clustering represented continuity in the use of an area for mortuary use from one mound to another through time, perhaps as accretional structures grew to unmanageable size, were finished off, and a new mound begun. This sequential development may have been the case at the Wright mound group in Kentucky. The structure of the smaller 15MM7 may reflect an earlier phase or mortuary activity than the large and complex 15MM6.

Niquette’s analysis of the Kirk and Newman mounds (Niquette et al. 1988) in West Virginia suggests that structures may also have been contemporaneous but differentiated in function. For that cluster, he has suggested staged mortuary ritual moving between mound loci. In the first mound area, represented by the low Kirk mound, appropriate group ritual may have been performed in a prepared “staging” area. At the second, the Newman mound, the deceased was consigned to a sealed grave in an accretional mound.

Figure 10. Multiple, non-overlapping paired-post circles at the Niebert site (Clay and Niquette 1992:Figure 3).

Figure 11. Multiple, overlapping paired post circles below the Wright mound (drawing after Webb 1940:Figure 33).
Because of social stability in certain areas through time, there was continuity in ritual site usage. This could lead to clusters of mounds, perhaps ceremonial circles, and overlapping paired-post circles. At other places, because of multiple, overlapping and intertwined social relations between several groups, there was also structural complexity, expressed in clusters of mounds perhaps with differing functions.

One final aspect of the Adena ritual landscape was the ability of ritual parts to replace one another (Figure 12). That is, a site of one type could be superimposed on another type. I find this aspect especially important because it seems to be limited to the Woodland Period.

An obvious example is Mt. Horeb, where Webb excavated a circle of paired-posts around the inside of the ditched enclosure. If it is true that paired-post circles and circular earthworks enclosed and formatted ritual activity, then those activities were either the same between the two site types, or could be merged, or in some other sense were compatible with one another.

In this type of linking it is clear that paired-post circles and ceremonial earthen circles probably were alternate definitions of similar ritual space, i.e., Seeman’s (1986) mortuary camps. Still it was perhaps not this simple, for if the two forms of enclosure represent different ritual styles, why combine them in a single structure?

In more complex but widespread examples, burial mounds often were built over both the circular enclosure and the post circle. Notable excavated examples are the Biggs site in Greenup County, Kentucky (Hardesty 1964), Morgan Stone in Bath (Webb 1941b), and the Dominion Land Co. site, near Columbus, Ohio (Cramer 1989). In time, the burial mound within might grow to considerable size entirely filling the enclosed space. In certain places the use of the mound itself, once started, appears to have shifted dramatically. Abrams (1992a:89-91) recorded three distinct “phases” of use for the Armitage Mound (33AT434) at the Plains on the Hocking River in southeastern Ohio. After a mortuary phase involving inhumation and cremations (itself following an initial phase of the use of the area for an unspecified function), a final phase of the mound involved numerous small fire pits not definitely linked to mortuary ritual.

In these examples the interpretation of continuity is complicated. Ceremonial circles and burial mounds involved different activities and served quite different functions and to cover the first with the second was to
obviate further use of the open ceremonial circle or paired-post circle. In this case continuity reflects an apparently radical transformation of one type of ritual space into another.

Replacement is perhaps another way to express what Prüfer (1964) once called the “vertical organization of Adena,” a feature that he contrasted, perhaps in overstatement, with horizontal Hopewellian organization. More correctly, I expect it can be considered more generally a feature of Ohio Valley Middle Woodland mortuary organization.

I find it difficult to adequately explain the significance of replacement beyond the suggestion that it points again and again to a basic instability in the Adena or Hopewell ritual centers on the central Ohio Valley. It suggests to me that the structure of inter-group cooperation may have gone through cycles during which ritual cooperation in mortuary was differentially expressed. I assume that such cycles, if they existed, were linked to the life cycles of cooperating groups. I am, however, not prepared at this point to detail this fascinating relationship between site type and small group social group evolution.

Notes

Acknowledgments. This paper stems from a talk, “The Essential Features of Adena Ritual,” given at the Angel Mounds National Historic Landmark, Evansville, Indiana, on April 3, 1991 and subsequently published by the Glenn Black Laboratory of Archaeology (Clay 1991c). I am indebted to Christopher Peebles for the invitation to give the talk, for his considerable editorial skills thereafter, and for the suggestion—and permission to do so—that I consider publishing it elsewhere because of its limited distribution. In its present form I have gone considerably beyond the initial paper. In this effort I am considerably indebted to a number of Ohio Valley colleagues including N’omi Greber, Mark Seeman, William Dancey, Robert Maslowski, David Stothers and Andrew Schmidt for reprints, ideas and comments. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the debt I owe to Charles Niquette with whom I have collaborated over the years on Adena. None of these individuals should be held responsible for errors of fact or interpretation.

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SOUTHEASTERN ARCHAEOLOGY 17(1) SUMMER 1998


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