

Abrams, Elliot & Freter, AnnCorinne, eds. (2005). *The Emergence of the Moundbuilders: the Archaeology of Tribal Societies in Southeastern Ohio*. Athensm OH: Ohio University Press. ISBN 0821416103. 264 pp.

Reviewed by Paul Patton, June 2007

The Emergence of the Moundbuilders is a collection of research papers that outlines the trajectory of human culture in the Hocking Valley, Southeastern Ohio. Aside from focusing on the artifact assemblages of the tribal groups in the Hocking Valley, the editors and contributors center on the ways environment impacts the development of human life ways and how those life ways impacted the surrounding environment. The book serves as a significant contribution to the prehistoric studies of the Ohio Valley but furthermore, offers important application of anthropological models in understanding the diversity present in tribal social organizations.

The Emergence of the Moundbuilders begins by describing the past archaeological research in the Valley and details the environmental setting including faunal and floral components, precipitation and climate variables, geomorphological and geological features, and variations on these factors. After establishing this backdrop, the editors discuss how tribal populations utilized the resources available in their environments (e.g. botanicals, clays, chert, landforms, etc.) to move from a nomadic way of life to one of ever-growing sedentism. The second chapter, which in many ways, serves as an extension of the first, uses GIS technologies to demonstrate site clusters and changes in settlement patterns and frequencies from the Middle Archaic Period (5500-3000 B.C.) to the end of the Middle Woodland Period (ca. A.D. 400).

The chapters following this introduction give specific data from excavations throughout the Valley at sites dating through the Late Archaic Period (beginning ca. 3000

B.C.) to the Late Prehistoric Period (ending ca. A.D. 1450) to explain cultural changes and evolution. Chapters are organized with regard to the chronology of the sites they describe, beginning with the Late Archaic Bremen and Walker sites. Following the analyses of these sites, chapter five discusses terminal Late Archaic feasting and aggregation with focus on food preparation, cooking methods, and the beginnings of larger scale tribal organizations. Chapter six follows this trajectory by detailing excavations of early communities in the Hocking Valley, their structural placement, and association with burial mounds; the contributors of chapter six present a model that burial mounds served not only as monuments to the deceased but territory boundaries of affiliated lineages. The next chapter focuses on ceremonialism in the Hocking Valley with particular attention given to The Plains Mound center; the authors suggest that transitions from ridgetop mounds to a central burial location suggests that smaller tribal groups were banding together to develop a larger tribal network.

Chapters eight through eleven turn their focus to the Late Woodland and Late Prehistoric Periods. Particular interest of these chapters is given to the further development of horticulture and maize agriculture, as well as transitions in lithic tools, domestic structures, and land usage. Strong emphasis is placed on geomorphological and botanical data as they directly imply the move from more temporary villages to greater sedentism. Changes in settlement patterns are argued to be the result of agricultural needs. These data are summarized by the editors in the final chapter where they redefine what the term tribe means and reestablish the chronological markers for the Valley's prehistory using a processual periodization based on cultural and behavioral trends.

The major contribution of *The Emergence of the Moundbuilders* to the field of archaeology is the clear demonstration that tribalism was sustained with “a great degree of variability” and “organizational flexibility” while simultaneously, tribal societies express a “conservatism or resilience” in life ways (192). Ultimately, the approaches utilized by the editors and contributors are firmly grounded in environmental and processual theory. From an environmental perspective, *The Emergence of the Moundbuilders* demonstrates with precision the complexity of the intimate relationships human populations and societies share with the environment they inhabit. The overall analysis and language of the book make it generally available to the layperson while simultaneously providing data and analyses that are academically invaluable.