



AMERICAN LANDSCAPES

Hopewell Ceremonial Landscapes of Ohio

More than Mounds and Geometric Earthworks

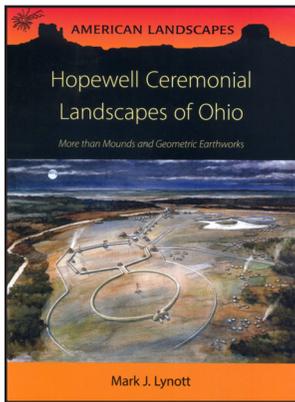


Mark J. Lynott

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Hopewell Ceremonial Landscapes of Ohio: More than Mounds and Geometric Earthworks

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Reviewed by Mark F. Seeman, Emeritus Professor, Department of Anthropology, Kent State University.

Mark J. Lynott (b. 1951–d. 2014) was a gifted archaeologist and a warm, nurturing person. He died suddenly and unexpectedly, and although he leaves a broad legacy for his many friends, colleagues, and the public, his recent book *Hopewell Ceremonial Landscapes of Ohio* is a strong, enduring contribution of his field work and current thinking that provides a lasting professional capstone, the value of which will extend across generational time. This is fitting, because generational time as long-term commitment to place is a main theme of this book. Mark was the chief archaeologist and administrator of the Midwest Archaeological Center and took a particular interest in the development and research potential of Hopewell Culture National Historic Park in Chillicothe, Ohio. This book is largely an outgrowth of that interest, and in particular, of his development of a long-term, multi-disciplinary program of archaeological research at the Hopeton earthworks a few miles north of Chillicothe and in the valley of the Scioto River. The Scioto-Paint Creek confluence area with its spectacular natural features and concentration of earthworks, mounds, buildings, and wooden-post constructions was a key aspect of the Hopewell world. Although the book has *landscape* in the title and is the first in a series on American Landscapes, it really parts company with landscape archaeology as it has developed from its base in British phenomenology and concern with scale, resolution, deep history, and the development of cultural meaning by interacting with the land. For Lynott, landscape is rather focused on a particular type of landscape—that constructed by erecting huge geometric earthworks and using them for a variety of social and religious purposes. *Culture history* is not a dirty word and this book is good, empirically based culture history. At one point in the book, Lynott comments that there are two types of archaeologists, dirt diggers and big thinkers (p. 88). It is clear from this book where his affinities lie.

The *first chapter* of *Hopewell Ceremonial Landscapes of Ohio* begins with a history of Ohio mound and earthwork investigations by explorers, antiquarians and early professional archaeologists—moving the reader along from a Mound Builder race to the professionalization of the discipline. This chapter provides a very good historical treatment with engaging and rare photos of the period. Here Lynott also summarizes various current and sometimes competing models of Ohio Hopewell behavior, drawing notably on the work of Spielmann, Lepper, Pacheco, Yerkes, Byers, and Romain. One area that deserves a critical eye is the multi-color timeline presented on p. 23, with Ohio Hopewell dipping down to perhaps as early as 150 B.C. and extending forward to A.D. 500, thereby considerably overlapping with an Adena taxon posited as extending from 600 B.C. to A.D. 200 in the same

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region. The implication is that two very different modalities of ritual practice coexisted for hundreds of years in the same setting. The early works covered in this chapter provide the classic two-edged sword: we are fortunate to have the accounts and they must be considered in our own interpretations, but their quality provides special challenges. Much of the rest of the book is a call to recognize that there is still much to be done on Hopewell archaeology in the dirt of southern Ohio using contemporary methods, particularly geoarchaeology and geophysics.

The *second chapter* of the book summarizes a number of issues involved in the construction of Ohio's major Hopewell earthworks as ceremonial landscapes. This begins with a look at the distribution of Hopewell-related sites across eastern North America and poses the question, "what makes them Hopewell" (p. 37)? Lynott does not really answer the question, but notes this problem and other problems, at least in Ohio, are compounded by a coarse chronology based on a "disarray of radiocarbon results" (p. 60, 75), a scarcity of stratified sites (p. 58) and in some cases, ceramics that are "non-descript and generally lack diagnostic decorative characteristics" (p. 59). Here also are discussed various labor estimates relevant to mound and earthwork construction draw from a variety of sources—a useful summary supporting the notion that the major Ohio constructions required access to a non-local labor pool (pp. 65–72). Also presented in more detail are various interpretations by other authors regarding Ohio Hopewell settlement, cosmology and alignments, and the Great Hopewell Road. The Great Hopewell Road is of particular interest. When it was first described in the 1990s it was easily the biggest news story in Ohio archaeology. Lynott's position is that it should be considered a hypothesis requiring future work, and that its existence can neither be confirmed nor denied (p. 87, 88, 225).

The *third chapter* is the heart of the book. It details Lynott's and colleagues' work investigating the Hopeton earthworks—a large, compound, and relatively unknown geometric construction that is part of Hopewell Culture National Historic Park. Lynott's multidisciplinary team has provided us with a better description and chronology of the site than has ever existed before. Several important points are made here. First, modern geophysical techniques (in the right hands) are capable of teasing out new and important structural information from large Hopewell sites, even if they are plowed down and/or previously have been excavated. For example, the plan of Hopeton is shown to be not nearly as symmetrical as Squier and Davis presented in the 19th century and that has been taken as gospel by generations of archaeologists.

A second point made in this chapter is that excavation and soils analysis indicate that the entire A horizon (humic zone) as well as the upper B horizon (weathered parent material) was stripped from the site prior to construction (p. 106) by Hopewell hands. This amounts to a huge increase in the time required to build the finished works. The soils used for the subsequently built earthen walls were multiple and carefully chosen for both their building and symbolic values. Very few Hopewell features or construction efforts were found within the "vacant" earthwork enclosure at Hopeton (p. 118–119), and the single building discovered is interpreted as a non-domestic structure relating to ceremonial activities (pp. 120).

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A third point relates to a large suite of radiocarbon dates, indicating that the main earthwork was constructed over multi-generational time and not finished quickly. Twenty-two radiocarbon dates are presented, most derived from small pieces of carbonized wood (pp. 110–111). Lynott interprets the span of radiocarbon dates to indicate that the earthworks were constructed over a span of four to six generations (pp. 112). This amounts to finishing different segments of the earthwork at different times rather than building up a given segment stratigraphically over time. If so, this could largely answer the perceived labor shortage posited earlier. Based on a graphed comparison of radiocarbon dates in this chapter, Lynott suggests a similar period(s) of use for the Hopeton and Hopewell ceremonial landscapes, and while true against his time frame of 6,000 years (p. 135), it may not be true in considering a smaller time frame relevant to what could be described as Ohio Hopewell practices. Also, it should be kept in mind that most of the Archaic and later Woodland dates from these sites were actually obtained from materials that the investigators thought would be Hopewell. Finally, at least one section of the Hopeton earthwork was constructed (or more likely renewed) ca. A.D. 1000: well after the Hopewell era. This is consistent with a pattern of ritual emulation for this time period, as has been noted elsewhere. Lynott interprets small Hopewell scatters in the vicinity of Hopetown such as Overly, Cryder, and Red Wing as special purpose sites, the former contrary to the views of its excavator.

Chapter Four compares work at Hopeton with field work done at Ohio's other major Hopewell earthworks such as Newark, Marietta, Seip, Hopewell, High Bank, Spruce, Hill, Anderson, Mound City, Shriver Circle, Fort Hill, Fort Ancient, Foster's Crossing, Pollock Works, Miami Fort, Turner, and Stubbs. This is a chapter rich in the thick description of what is known about these sites and a great summary of recent work. It should be noted that such Ohio Hopewell earthworks as Portsmouth, Piketon, Frankfort, and Circleville, are not discussed, probably because they have not seen much recent (or any) work. For global conceptions of Ohio Hopewell, however, they should remain firmly in the conceptual picture.

Chapter Five is a little confusing, but presents more data and also some of Lynott's synthetic conclusions regarding Ohio Hopewell landscapes. Based on the excavations at Hopeton, plus more limited work at High Bank, Anderson, Mound City, Seip, Shriver Circle, and Hopewell, Lynott concludes that soil stripping as preparation was an important part of the Hopewell ritual programme in the Scioto Valley (p. 221) and contrasts this practice with construction modes in adjacent drainages (p. 222). He further concludes, specifically in reference to Hopeton, that there is no evidence that the circular part of the enclosure preceded the square portion of the embankment, thus compromising a proposed supplementation of earlier Adena practices based on circular modalities, previously suggested by Byers (p. 221). Lynott notes that the "dirt data" at the Hopeton and Pollock Works earthworks suggest continuous construction and/or capping, thus compromise Byer's (2004) argument for the nondisturbance of a sacredly constructed, inviolate earth. Conclusions of this nature are then followed by brief comments ranging from the selection of earth and stones for mound construction, gravel deposits as "ending" ceremonies for mound construction, and the purpose

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of ditch or barrow features. There is then a description of the Riverside site, a ritual staging area associated with the Hopewell site, which seems logically to belong in a preceding chapter. This in turn is followed by a description of the Moorehead Circle at Fort Ancient, the buildings in front of the Seip-Pricer mound, the huge post circle and buildings at Stubbs, and finally the North 40 site investigations outside Mound City. I think the intention was to fill out the landscape concept with additional activities that took place in and around the major earthworks, but it is not entirely clear from the presentation. If so, then a notable omission from any such discussion are the specialized blade-production sites associated with many of the earthworks and little discussion of one of the most important Hopewell landscape features of all: Flint Ridge.

The final chapter, *Chapter Six*, again makes the call for more and better field data regarding, especially, a radiocarbon chronology. Lynott points out that the two best-dated sites, Hopeton and Pollock, suggest prolonged periods of use, thus compromising certain aspects of interpretations by others, notably Byers, DeBoer, Romain and Carr, who argue for particular site sequences or contemporaneities that cannot be justified from the available evidence (pp. 246, 247, 249, 251). He also calls into question Pacheco's model of Ohio Hopewell household organization grounded in the Brown's Bottom excavations, using as his comparison a Mississippian household and a questionably dated house in the Hocking drainage as counterexamples (pp. 251–254). Perhaps a more careful review of the seasonality data, refuse-disposal options, and site structure at Brown's Bottom and other, more recently excavated sites (such as Lady's Run and Balthasar) would permit different conclusions on this score. They had to live somewhere. The book ends with a suggested step-by-step protocol for future research (p. 260).

Mark Lynott has given us a successful account of the earthwork centers of southern Ohio and one that complements previous treatments focusing on grave lots, ritual production, and artifact-based interaction. It is a useful addition to our understanding of Ohio Hopewell and it will be read by generations to come.