

# Modified Predator Mandible and Maxilla Artifacts and Predator Symbolism in Illinois Hopewell

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ILLINOIS STATE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
PRAIRIE RESEARCH INSTITUTE



Studies in Archaeological Material Culture 3



ISBN 9781930487413



9 781930 487413

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## Modified Predator Mandible and Maxilla Artifacts and Predator Symbolism in Illinois Hopewell

Kenneth B. Farnsworth, Terrance J. Martin, and Angela R. Perri. 2015. Illinois State Archaeological Survey. *Studies in Archaeological Material Culture* 3, xv+61 pp., 35 figures, 4 maps, 5 tables, references. \$20.00 (Paper)

*Reviewed by T. Cregg Madrigal, Trenton, New Jersey.*

This slim but well-illustrated monograph is tightly focused on a small but intriguing dataset from the Middle Woodland period of Illinois: large carnivore (dog, coyote, wolf, cougar, bobcat, and bear) mandibles and maxillae that were intentionally modified by cutting, grinding, drilling, or painting. Kenneth B. Farnsworth, Terrance J. Martin, and Angela R. Perri physically examined the specimens when possible and also looked at published reports, unpublished notes, and photographs. While they exclude loose teeth from their review, they do describe and illustrate the sole canid artifact found in a mortuary context made from a postcranial bone, a dog or coyote ulna used as a pendant from the Shyrock site. The authors assume the reader has a basic familiarity with the Illinois Hopewell—the sites at which these artifacts were found are not summarized in any detail.

Farnsworth, Martin, and Perri are cautious and precise with their identifications, show their work, and do not go beyond what the bones warrant. In addition, they correct several earlier misidentifications, primarily bear bones that were mistakenly reported as canid bones. Three poorly preserved teeth from the Elizabeth Site were originally identified as large carnivores, but upon reexamination were determined to be alligator. While most of these misidentifications were made a long time ago by people not trained in faunal analysis, the reanalysis highlights the importance of having professional zooarchaeologists (with access to comprehensive comparative collections) examine all bones from archaeological sites.

The total number of maxilla and mandible artifacts in their sample is relatively small, consisting of 15 bear, 12 canid (most probably from coyote), two wolf, eight cougar, and one bobcat. Predator maxillae found in human graves are usually located near the waist, while mandibles are usually found near the wrist.

Comparison and interpretation are brief but effective. Burial-associated large predator maxilla and mandible artifacts are rare—of the more than 1,500 Hopewell burials excavated in Illinois, only 30 contained these types of artifacts. Interestingly, there is a similar number of Illinois Hopewell burials that contain modified human mandible and maxilla artifacts (only one Illinois burial contains both a human and a carnivore artifact). The human burials that contained predator mandible and maxilla artifacts are almost always male skeletons. One-third of burials also contain beads, and one-third contain flintknapping tools, while groups of projectile points are only found with 13 percent of the burials.

Farnsworth, Martin and Perri do not go into depth regarding the possible meanings of these artifacts, but they acknowledge multiple possibilities, both functional and symbolic. The only interpretation they are actively skeptical of is that the artifacts represent hunting trophies. The fact that “bear and cougar maxillae artifacts were dramatically cut down,



### *Book Review*

pegged back together, often painted, and apparently stored out of sight (perhaps in pouches), sometimes with other exotic artifacts” (p. 55), may support arguments that these were used by shamans, while the “bear- and cougar-mandible artifacts...worn at the wrists, bracelet style” (p. 55) could be interpreted as clan symbols, but neither fact excludes alternative interpretations. The authors quickly survey animal effigy platform pipes and figurines from Illinois and Ohio and point out that these mostly depict predators in what are considered non-aggressive poses, arguably providing additional support for shamanistic, animal spirit, and clan totem interpretations.

Despite these interpretive efforts, this book is intended to be primarily a descriptive report, and at this it succeeds brilliantly. Farnsworth, Martin, and Perri have compiled a thorough review of their subject, presented quality data on ritual artifacts, and corrected earlier errors in identification. Anyone who wants to try to decipher animal symbolism during the Middle Woodland will need to consult this book.