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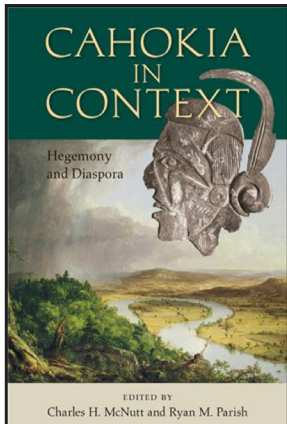
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Cahokia in Context: Hegemony and Diaspora

Charles H. McNutt and Ryan D. Parish, Eds. 2020. Ripley P Bullen Series, Florida Museum of Natural History. [University of Florida Press](https://www.uflpress.ufl.edu/). xiii+411 pp., 11 Tables, 109 Figures, referenc-es, index. \$100.00 (Hardbound).

Reviewed by Brian M Butler, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

In line with its title, this volume must also be placed in context. In recent years many archaeologists who study Cahokia and the American Bottom have concluded that Cahokia's meteoric rise beginning ca AD 1050 was the result of a religious movement that brought a dramatic influx of groups from surrounding areas as well as some much more distant locales, swelling the population to numbers previously unheard of in Eastern North America and creating a vibrant initial Mississippian culture, major aspects of which were ultimately to spread and influence Native American societies over large portions of the Midcontinent as well as the Southeast and Plains. That spread was accelerated, they argue, by what is now called the "Diaspora," the almost-as-rapid decline and dissolution of Cahokia beginning in earnest around AD 1200, in which groups began leaving Cahokia and returning to their original homes, bearing the material and spiritual culture, or at least major aspects of it, acquired from living for multiple generations in the American Bottom. Many aspects of this critical process are yet to be fully documented or understood and not all archaeologists accept the implications of this scenario in their respective regions.

To examine these issues and assess the current state of knowledge, archaeologists representing many areas of the eastern US convened in Memphis, Tennessee in the summer of 2016 for a Mid-South Archaeological Conference. This volume of 18 papers, a hefty 400 pages of text, is the end product of that meeting. The conference was not organized by "Cahokia insiders" but rather by Charles McNutt (principal editor), whose long career had focused on the Mississippi River Valley although not specifically on Cahokia. Charles passed away unexpectedly in December 2017 after just completing the initial round of editing, leaving his colleague Ryan Parish to finish editing and shepherd the volume through to completion. Parish deserves great credit for managing the process and bringing to completion a volume that is far outside his own research specialization.

That said, the volume is a wide-ranging examination of Cahokia's influence across large areas of the Midcontinent and Southeast. The papers are ordered by geographic region but have varying spatial and topical emphasis. About half of the papers focus on specific sites and the presence or absence of artifacts or art styles seen as indicative of Cahokian presence or influence. Other papers present summaries of areas where the data are widely scattered and there are few, if any, "smoking guns." There is also an important temporal divide in which evidence for Cahokian influence or presence that postdates ca AD 1200 is largely seen as the result of diaspora.

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The first two papers represent two somewhat opposing schools of interpretation. Kelly and Brown's aptly entitled chapter "In the Beginning" focuses on the processes that give rise to urbanism at Cahokia while Alt's paper is an exploration of religion as foundational to Cahokia's existence and focuses on the Emerald Mound complex and its importance for the rise of Cahokia. Kelly and Brown acknowledge the importance of religious pilgrimage in drawing non-local groups into the site but that is not their emphasis. None of this is new material, as the principal tenets have appeared previously in a number of publications, but these two papers provide the necessary backdrop for the papers that follow.

There are too many papers to permit individual comment on them all so this review will focus on a few highlights and important themes. Steven Boles argues cogently that the well-known Cahokian flint clay figurines are the most useful artifacts in tracking the diaspora and in understanding the circumstances that ultimately resulted in many of them being deposited in far distant places. In his view these figurines were cult sacra that were not used in exchange but instead were carried by functionaries and priests as they traveled outward during the drawdown of the Cahokian sphere of influence.

The well documented Cahokian intrusion into the north at Aztlan has long epitomized Cahokian "Hegemony" but the more recent exploration of the Trempealeau area complex and Apple River sites provide a more varied and nuanced understanding of Cahokia's reach to the north against the backdrop of non-Mississippian peoples. Substantial Cahokian contact and influence are seen in the Steed Kisker, Red Wing and Mill Creek complexes, but Henning and Schirmer argue that these are not Cahokian intrusions.

On balance, the authors conclude that Cahokia's direct impacts were greater to the south into the Central Mississippi River Valley where evidence for its influence is widespread but where direct evidence of an actual Cahokian presence is scattered and elusive. This is partly the result of the difficulty in identifying early outposts and "missions" amid the plethora of later Mississippian mound building societies in these areas. Still, solid evidence for deep south intrusions is accumulating, most notably at places like the Carson mounds in Mississippi (Johnson and Connoway) and at the Lake Providence mounds in northeast Louisiana (Weinstein and Wells).

Much of the discussion focuses on the evidence for the outward dispersion of groups from Cahokia and their impacts. Major Southeastern sites and complexes specifically addressed in the volume include Kincaid, Carson, Lake Providence, Spiro, Shiloh, Moundville, Etowah, and Lake Jackson. The "Braden Corridor" is not specifically addressed in these papers but plays an important role as a backdrop to discussions of how Cahokian engraved shell and copper exotics reached Etowah, and the subsequent transmission of Etowah-type copper sacra down to Lake Jackson. Sharp and colleagues focus on the appearance of Cahokian stylistic influences in the Middle Cumberland region as a part of the Braden Corridor.

Kincaid Mounds, however, presently pose an awkward problem in regard to the eastern spread of groups bearing Cahokian religion and sacra, in that, despite its strategic location near the mouths of the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, the site shows

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remarkably little Cahokian influence, at least to date. It is almost as if Kincaid is a center of resistance. As Brennan and Pursell note (page 97) “In relative terms, Kincaid is not terribly far from Cahokia and much closer than many of the far-flung destinations with which Cahokia established and maintained contact and exchange networks. Yet there is surprisingly little evidence for direct or continued contact between the two centers.” Early Kincaid materials have proven elusive and may be buried beneath the major mounds, so that precisely what the earliest Mississippian occupations at Kincaid look like is still not clear. The post-AD 1200 appearance of a Cahokia-style microtool industry using local cherts may or may not be a diaspora effect.

Regardless of one’s particular views of Cahokia and its influence, this is a very useful volume that contains something of interest to almost every archaeologist who deals with late prehistory in the core areas of the Eastern US. Several papers could have been condensed substantially as they contain extended description that is not always directly relevant to the conference themes. The volume’s Introduction and Conclusion are also unremarkable which, under the circumstances, is understandable, but there is still much substance between the covers. *Cahokia in Context* is a definite must-read.

A postscript is in order. In its Volume 27 (1) (2020), the *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* has published a group of related papers entitled “Cahokia Dispersion.” In effect these papers, edited by Baltus, Baires, Malouchos, and Mehta, are addenda to the *Cahokia in Context* volume. The most critical paper is the Emerson et al. collective statement “Interrogating Diaspora and Movement in the Greater Cahokia World.” The paper is a nuanced discussion of Cahokian in-and out- migration and their impacts. The timing is awkward but all of these and the *Cahokia in Context* papers fit together thematically, and the additional presentations are welcome.