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This volume examines how pre-Columbian societies in the Americas envisioned their cosmos and iteratively modelled it through the creation of particular objects and places. It emphasizes that American societies did this to materialize overarching models and templates for the shape and scope of the cosmos, the working definition of cosmospace. Noting a tendency to gloss over the ways in which ancestral Americans envisioned the cosmos as intertwined and animated, the authors examine how cosmospaces are manifested archaeologically, in the forms of objects and physically altered landscapes. This book's chapters, therefore, offer case studies of cosmospaces that present themselves as forms of architecture, portable artifacts, and transformed aspects of the natural world. In doing so, it emphasizes that the creation of cosmospaces offered a means of reconciling peoples' experiences of the world with their understandings of them.

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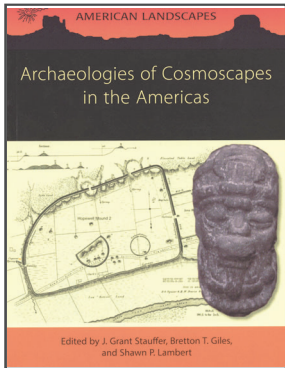
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## Archaeologies of Cosmoscapes in the Americas

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*Reviewed by Dr. Thomas E. Emerson, Upper Mississippi Valley Archaeological Research Foundation, Macomb, IL*

*Cosmoscapes* contains two overview chapters and eleven case studies, aptly described by the editors (p. 253) as kaleidoscopic in scope or, by one of the contributors David Freidel (p. 245), as “thought experiment essays.” Readers should keep these comments in mind as they work their way through the volume’s content. The individual chapters are heavily weighted toward North America and the Mississippian era (seven chapters), with a foray into the Hopewell period, and the remainder touching on the Maya and Aztecs. The volume is dedicated to F. Kent Reilly III, the founder of the Mississippian Iconographic Workshop at Texas State University, and his influence is clearly felt throughout the essays.

*Cosmoscapes* can be characterized as reflecting the recursive relationship of materiality and the cosmos as manifested and negotiated through human intermediaries. The interest of social scientists in the materialization of the cosmos has become current since their rediscovery of relational ontologies and animism; however, humanity has been striving to create earthly fabrications of the cosmos since at least the beginning of the Mesolithic. The builders of Göbekli Tepe, the Neolithic crafters of Stonehenge, and early Christian architects and worshippers all imaged earthly cosmoses. In fact, what makes the materialization of the cosmos so interesting is its long duration and virtual universality among human societies.

Freidel’s characterization of his efforts as “thought exercises” captures the spirit of the studies—it recognizes how one must approach the emic reconstruction of materialized cosmologies of past societies. Such efforts are hindered by the incompleteness of the archaeological evidence; the temporal loss or shifting of cultural meanings, even with the availability of analogies of possible descendent communities; and the internalized and unconscious assumptions of the researchers. It is perhaps axiomatic that the authors who place their interpretations within the broadest cultural framework may produce the most enduring tropes.

Joy Mersmann and Grant Stauffer’s (Ch. 8) studies of large post positioning in the Cahokia Precinct to understand the relationship between pole-raising events, their visibility, and site layout (p. 163) best illustrate the challenges researchers face when seeking to capture cosmic landscapes. Hampering their efforts is the unknown construction histories of the more than 120 mounds that once dotted the 3,335-acre landscape that controlled visibility and the sample posts they record all come from an area of less than three acres. James Duncan and Carol Diaz-Granados (Ch. 9) have long interpreted the palimpsest of American Indian drawings in Picture Cave as

understandable through nineteenth-century and modern Dhegihan (actually Osage) ethnography. Unfortunately, despite their estimable efforts to disentangle these images created in the dark zone of the cave, the lack of visibility (so any patterning is more likely happenstance than planned) and the difficulty of dating images created over several millennia by numerous individuals seeking spiritual guidance continue to be limitations. The interpretive challenges are daunting but perhaps no author faces more of a challenge than Melinda Martin (Ch. 10) who advocates for a pathway through iconic ceramics of the Middle World between the vortexes (tornadoes) of the Mississippian Earth Mother (Above World) with the vortexes (whirlpools) of the Great Serpent (Below World)—tracing these invisible pathways is doubly difficult.

The Mesoamerican essays include densely argued interpretations of cosmoscapes. They are so data packed that they require a deep knowledge of the cultural context to be fully appreciated. Such essays include Juan Mendez, David Freidel, and Daniel Aquino's (Ch. 6) examination of Classic Mayan greenstone mosaic masks as powerful compositions joining together mosaic segments to represent forces of the natural world, especially snakes, and by extension political dynasties; Annabeth Headrick (Ch. 7) delves deeply into the intricate iconography of the famed Aztec Calendar Stone to discover subtle references to archaic bloodletting and autosacrifice and postulates its key role in royal Aztec power dynamics; David Freidel (Ch. 12) explores the shared meanings of Maya royal tomb rituals, Teotihuacan interments, and the North American Cahokia Mound 72 and the Spiro Spirit Lodge events, identifying them as active cosmic portals operating within a directional quincunx, and given the virtual universality of directional traditions and the axis mundi in the Western Hemisphere's cosmoses, his analysis is convincing. The lone example exploring the Hopewell cosmoscapes is provided by Bretton Giles, Brian Rowe, and Ryan Parish (Ch. 11) in a retelling of the significance of the extensive deposits of Hopewell Mound 2. In a greatly detailed exposé, the authors unpack the deposits' complexity to reveal them as being fluid, recurring, and animate forces rather than tableaux locked in a state of perpetual stasis. This reflection of movement and temporality runs through a number of the essays.

Four chapters deal with objects as cosmoscapes, all from the central Mississippi River valley and dating to the Mississippian era. I find these essays to be well grounded in both archaeological context and through the constrained use of the ethnographic record. Madelaine Azar and Vincas Steponaitis (Ch. 2) assemble a well-reasoned hypothesis that the rim-effigy jars of late precontact people likely carried referents to cosmic unity and played a role in promoting ritual and social solidarity. Steven Boles (Ch. 3) assembles the limited number of distinctive Cahokia female figures and, in examining their distribution outside of Greater Cahokia, sees them as markers of Cahokia diaspora in conjunction with the dispersion of beliefs concerning the Earth Mother. The recent discovery of hallucinogens among precontact Eastern Woodlands societies has opened new aspects to be explored in their relationship with the cosmos. Shawn Lambert (Ch.

4) builds on his identification of *Datura* use, to propose the presence of what he labels as hallucinogenic bundles of *Datura*, special compound vessels for preparing and perhaps consuming the potent mixture, and specialized ritual practitioners who performed the critical rituals associated with its use. As evidence for the use of mind-altering drugs increases, so does the potential for broadening our understanding of American Indian spirituality. Tunica-Oneota interaction and ritual exchanges form the topic of David Dye and Toney Aid's essay (Ch. 5). Here Dye continues to explore the social and political ramifications of ritual interactions within the context of religious sodalities, ritual adoption, the exchange and purchase of inalienable objects of power, and perhaps even the exchange of ritual specialists, all "sedimented in rituals resembling contact period calumet ceremonies" (p. 100).

Balancing the eclectic selection of studies, the editors provide introductory and concluding essays to position the contributions within a select theoretical framework. Grant Stauffer et alia (Ch. 1) situate cosmoscapes in the literature of the last few decades, emphasizing relational ontologies, animistic worlds, microcosms, and macrocosms. With this background they divide the contributions into those that investigate the ontologies of landscapes, the cosmoscopes of objects, and those of placemaking and cultivating. Such segmentation of the "cosmos" also pervades many of the discussions within the volume, even to the point of identifying the sacred versus the mundane in some contexts. These cosmic segmentations, often situated in an almost functional context, seem counterintuitive in a world that according to many relational ontologies is a unified wholeness as contrasted with the hypothesized Western world of science. The concluding chapter by Shawn Lambert et alia (Ch. 13) revisits the essays and retrospectively places them in theoretical context. These two chapters provide a solid basis for evaluating cosmoscapes both as theoretical formulations and interpretive tools. In thinking back over the volume, I would advise the reader to start their exploration of these cosmoscapes by reading both the editors' introductory and concluding essays prior to approaching the individual essays—the results will be a more rewarding understanding of their broader context.

*Cosmoscapes* is an intriguing volume, diverse in both topic and theory. Some essays can be challenging for a reader not seeped in the local cultural history. However, it excels in presenting a window into some current trends in the mobilization of art history and iconography, aspects of relational ontology, materiality, cosmic visions, animism, the challenges of ethnographic analogies, and the segmented world of microcosms and macrocosms. Perhaps again, David Freidel (p. 246) captures the tenor of the essays when he, to loosely paraphrase, says "[l]ike all extraordinarily [complex] offerings of the past discovered in the present ... [these] will continue to be subject to analysis and debate."