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Reclaiming the Hopewellian  
Ceremonial Sphere



200 B.C. to A.D. 500

A. Martin Byers

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Including this new volume (above) and his Ph.D. dissertation, A. Martin Byers has published three monographs and five thematic-book chapters interpreting Hopewell social structure and ritual (primarily in Ohio) between 1987 and 2015. His *cognitive-archaeology* studies, his *action-constitutive theory* of Hopewell earthworks, and his interpretations of Ohio Hopewell as an *ecclesiastic-communal cult* made up of *cult sodality heterarchies* would be difficult material to evaluate in a short book review. For MCJA readers interested in delving into Dr. Byers' 1600+ pages of Hopewellian studies, they include:

**Byers, A. Martin**

- 1987 *The Earthwork Enclosures of the Central Ohio Valley: a Temporal and Structural Analysis of Woodland Society and Culture*. Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Albany.
- 1992 The Action-Constitutive Theory of Monuments: A Strong Pragmatist Version. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 22(4):403–446.
- 1996 Social Structure and the Pragmatic Meaning of Material Culture: Ohio Hopewell as Ecclesiastic-Communal Cult. In *A View From the Core: A Synthesis of Ohio Hopewell Archaeology* (edited by Paul J. Pacheco), pp. 174–92. Ohio Archaeological Council, Columbus.
- 1998 Is the Newark Circle-Octagon the Ohio Hopewell “Rosetta Stone”? In *Ancient Earthen Enclosures of the Eastern Woodlands* (edited by Robert C. Mainfort, Jr., and Lynne P. Sullivan), pp. 135–153. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
- 2006a The Earthwork/Habitation Dichotomy: A Central Problem in Ohio Hopewell. In *Recreating Hopewell* (edited by Douglas K. Charles and Jane E. Buikstra), pp. 62–73. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
- 2006b The Mortuary “Laying-In” Crypts of the Hopewell Site: Beyond the Funerary Paradigm. In *Interacting with the Dead: Perspectives on Mortuary Archaeology for the New Millennium* (edited by Gordon F. M. Rakita, Jane E. Buikstra, and Lane A. Beck), pp. 124–141. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
- 2010 The Turner-Hopewell Axis: Exploring Interaction Through Embankment Form and Mortuary Patterning. In *Hopewell Settlement Patterns, Subsistence, and Sacred Landscapes* (edited by A. Martin Byers and Dee Ann Wymer), pp. 228–242. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
- 2011 *Sacred Games, Death, and Renewal in the Ancient Eastern Woodlands: The Ohio Hopewell System of Cult Sodality Heterarchies*. AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD. [547 pp]
- 2015 *Reclaiming the Hopewellian Ceremonial Sphere: 200 B.C. to A.D. 500*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. [440 pp]

**M**ultiple Hopewellian monumental earthwork sites displaying timber features, mortuary deposits, and unique artifacts are found widely distributed across the North American Eastern Woodlands, from the lower Mississippi Valley north to the Great Lakes. These sites, dating from 200 b.c. to a.d. 500, almost define the Middle Woodland period of the Eastern Woodlands. Joseph Caldwell treated these sites as defining what he termed the “Hopewell Interaction Sphere,” which he conceptualized as mediating a set of interacting mortuary-funerary cults linking many different local ethnic communities. In this new book, A. Martin Byers refines Caldwell’s work, coining the term “Hopewell Ceremonial Sphere” to more precisely characterize this transregional sphere as manifesting multiple autonomous cult sodalities of local communities affiliated into escalating levels of autonomous cult sodality heterarchies. It is these cult sodality heterarchies, regionally and transregionally interacting—and not their autonomous communities to which the sodalities also belonged—that were responsible for the Hopewellian assemblage; and the heterarchies took themselves to be performing, not funerary, but world-renewal ritual ceremonialism mediated by the deceased of their many autonomous Middle Woodland communities.

Paired with the cult sodality heterarchy model, Byers proposes and develops the complementary heterarchical community model. This model postulates a type of community that made the formation of the cult sodality heterarchy possible. But Byers insists it was the sodality heterarchies and not the complementary heterarchical communities that generated the Hopewellian ceremonial sphere. Detailed interpretations and explanations of Hopewellian sites and their contents in Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Georgia empirically anchor his claims.

A singular work of unprecedented scope, *Reclaiming the Hopewellian Ceremonial Sphere* will encourage archaeologists to re-examine their interpretations.

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