

Mound Builders and
Monument Makers
of the
Northern Great Lakes,
1200–1600



MEGHAN C. L. HOWEY

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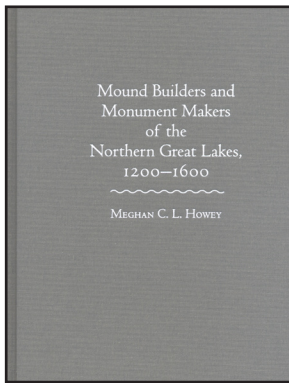
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This interesting volume is Meghan C. L. Howey's expanded doctoral dissertation, which concerns the patterns of mounds and embankment sites across north and central Michigan. The introduction is devoted to retelling the "Myths and Mound-builders" myth, ethnocentric archaeologists, and some discussion of the concepts of liturgy, ethnic fluidity, and social complexity.

In Chapter 1, Howey states archaeologists "can never recover the strong emotive ties that people had to their places, but through artifacts they can understand events and activities occurring at places and assess their social significance" (p. 15). There is a dialectic between people and the landscape, where each creates the other. Following Dillehay, Howey's aim is to "use monuments to anchor a 'symbolically interactive topographically bounded, aesthetical, effective and meaningful landscape'" (p. 15). Monuments are the durable result of group labor erected to mark and commemorate places, events, and persons. They are experienced repeatedly as referents to specific symbolic meanings, attracting people, and legitimizing ideas that are understood across time and space. They are active in shaping the lives of those who build them and those who follow.

Howey suggests that small monuments may not represent rigid ranking or stratification in society. She warns against using simplistic, colonial, unilineal models of social evolution (e.g., savagery, barbarism, civilization; bands, tribes, chiefdoms, states). She then examines the concept of tribe, using a "processual approach to understand what people *do*" (emphasis in original) (p. 19). For Howey, tribe is not a heuristic construct that is a transitional type in cultural evolution models, but is a "processual, historically emergent, and embedded cultural form" (p. 19). Tribes are hierarchically organized: from households to villages to extra-village networks, but this organization is flexible. People rearrange themselves in space and time to meet changing conditions, including seasonality, deaths, and social competition.

Her choice of tribe is curious, given her well-reasoned aversion to colonial typology and how tribe is currently used in modern Indian/government interaction. She does not mention NAGPRA, much less NAGPRA as an object lesson in the theoretical and practical hazards of searching for historic tribes in prehistory. Even as she points out that terminology and models affect our interpretations of the past, she chooses this politically loaded term as her unit of analysis. Perhaps a neutral term (e.g., segmented society?) may have been better.

Chapter 2 summarizes the prehistory of Michigan and recaps Cleland's Biotic/Historic model, which relates the Carolinian Biotic province to subsistence activities of the Miami/Potawatomi, the Canadian Biotic Province to those of the Chippewa, and a transitional zone

that conditions the Ottawa subsistence pattern. She points out that colonial encounters, especially those related to the Fur Trade, subvert our use of European-defined historic patterns to interpret prehistoric patterns.

In Chapter 3, she argues that “patterns and traits marking Late Prehistoric (ca. A.D. 1200–1600) emerged from regional process of tribalization among Anishinaabeg communities in the northern Great Lakes” (p. 55). Before A.D. 1000, people moved freely among multiple environments; after that, less so. There is an increase in maize and fish consumption, and a decrease in terrestrial animal use. Ceramics show “rigid uniformity” in decoration (p. 56), and coalesce spatially into ceramic style zones: Traverse, Younger, Lakes Phase, and Juntunen. Howey equates these zones with tribal territorial systems—multilevel interactions of small groups within larger bands within larger confederacies, to the largest unit: the tribe. At this same time there were shifts in how stone was procured and used, following expectations derived from those who have studied the relationship of stone economics and population logistics, and echoing patterns reported for other Great Lakes states.

Chapter 4 details the shifting use of space from the Late Woodland to Late Prehistoric period. Late Woodland foraging groups aggregated to take advantage of seasonal spawning sites, while Late Prehistoric groups built mounds to bring populations together for rituals and liturgical practices that reconstituted the social order.

Chapter 5 details the use of ditch and embankment enclosures that mirror the mound pattern. Rather than marking resource-enriched areas, these enclosures are isolated and in resource-poor areas. These dual circular embankments, (interpreted as regional centers) show a mix of local and minority of nonlocal ceramics. Data on the lithic-raw-material sources used at such sites suggest segregated communities within each site. Outside each ritual circle are what Howey terms “stations.” These embankments and stations provide a framework that revolves around Bear’s Journey, derived from the Algonquian Midewiwin ceremonial complex. Much like the association of the Gottschall site artwork in Wisconsin with the Ioway Redhorn myth, it is an interesting, if contested, interpretive framework.

In Chapter 6, Howey generalizes from her paired sites to other embankment and mound sites in similar landscapes across the interior of Michigan. These sites are largely archaeologically uninvestigated, so the pattern awaits empirical confirmation. She then uses a GIS-based model of least-cost analysis to compare distances between these sites to discern how people may have moved around the landscape. She states that people purposely distributed enclosures across the landscape to produce “an imbricated cluster of regional precincts” (p. 159) across the state, bookended by two distinct sites. Mikado, near Lake Huron, and South Flats, near Lake Michigan, are hypothesized to have been coastal staging sites where maize was collected for trade across the network of interior sites.

Chapter 7 summarizes all of the above into the idea that tribal people “built, renewed, maintained, and used a suite of ceremonial monuments...to facilitate intra- and inter-tribal interaction and integration.” She reiterates Bear’s Journey as explanation and suggests that same frame of investigation may be used to explain Chaco Canyon and Pov-

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erty Point. She ends with the argument that we need to explain the pre-Columbian past with a pre-Columbian explanation, not one drawn from a post-Columbian mind-set.

The book covers a lot of territory, and Howey may not convince everyone about all of her conclusions. She does not use the voluminous monument literature from neighboring states to see how the Michigan pattern fits, forcing her to reinvent the wheel at times. Nonetheless, this book is thought-provoking and provocative; well worth the read.