

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN OKLAHOMA ARCHAEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Through the Work Projects Administration the University of Oklahoma has sponsored archaeological work throughout the state. The projects have been under the direction of Dr. Forrest E. Clements of the Department of Anthropology. Excavations in the Grand River Dam area in northeastern Oklahoma have resulted in the discovery of two new Indian cultures whose presence had not been previously detected in Oklahoma.

The first of the new cultures is represented by the Hopewellian sites. They are village refuse areas where broken pottery, stone implements, fragmentary animal bones, and other debris have accumulated in the top soil and in shallow pits in the subsoil during the period when the Indians inhabited the sites.

The sites usually cover several thousand square feet and perhaps five have been found in the area. They are located near the confluence of Honey Creek and Grand River and on the Cowskin or Elk River in Delaware County, usually on the second alluvial terrace. The houses must have been light, temporary structures since no traces of a permanent house type have been found associated with this culture. Remains of bison and deer and charred hickory nuts indicate that hunting and gathering were important in the economy of the culture but the abundance of manos and metates for the grinding of corn implies that agriculture was also practiced. Since all bone implements and the few burials found at the sites had nearly completely decomposed, we may assume a reasonable antiquity for the culture. In addition, stratigraphic evidence from bluff shelters show that this is one of the earliest cultures in this part of the state.

The Hopewellian complex is found in such widely separated areas as Louisiana, Illinois, Ohio, New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa and Missouri and some close resemblances have been pointed out in some of the sites in Florida. The Oklahoma complex is most closely related to the sites found near Kansas City and forms part of the northern complex of Hopewellian sites found in Missouri, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. All of the sites are prehistoric and none can be linked with known protohistoric or historic peoples.

The second new culture found in this area was also an agricultural and hunting group, lacking permanent houses. This culture has been designated the Neosho Focus. Nearly all of the sites were found below overhanging cliffs in relatively isolated and well-protected areas. The sites are small and the accumulation of ash and debris was frequently two to three feet in thickness. The people were also a pottery-making group and owing to the protected nature of the sites a few well-preserved, fully flexed and partially flexed burials were found in addition to the stone artifacts.

The importance of the Neosho focus lies in the fact that it has many characteristics in common with the Oneota culture found in Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, and Missouri and linked with the Chiwere Sioux in these states—with the Winnebago in Wisconsin, the Ioway and Oto in Iowa, the Oto in Nebraska and the Missouris in Missouri.

The archaeology of the closely related Dhegiha group consisting of the Osage, Kansa, Ponca, Quapaw and Omaha, on the other hand, is relatively unknown, and it can be regarded as a definite possibility that the Neosho Focus sites were left by a people of the Dhegiha-speaking division of the Sioux. Both the Kansa and the Osage had sufficiently close historical habitats to be regarded as possibilities.

Both the Dhegiha and Chiwere Sioux are regarded as rather late migrants to their historical habitat. All Oneota sites appear to fall in the historic or protohistoric periods and although Marquette in 1673 already placed the Osage and the Kansa in rather restricted areas north of Oklahoma it is probable that the Neosho focus can be dated about 1650.