Siting, Sighting, and Citing the Dead

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ABSTRACT
From the Middle Archaic through Mississippian periods of the prehistoric American Midwest (ca. 7000–700 B.P.), the specific location, form, and intensity of funerary activity varied through time, but always within a limited, yet evolving, range of alternatives. This material record can be understood as resulting from the interaction of traditional (i.e., meaningful) symbolic systems, the agency of the participants, and specific (i.e., historical) social, economic, and political contexts. In particular, we examine the shifting emphasis on mortuary ritual versus ancestor cult and how this is manifested in terms of the location and form of burial mounds and cemeteries.

In addressing the space and place of death in the prehistoric American Midwest, we ask questions about where the dead, and the activities surrounding their deaths, were situated; the ways in which their remains or their final resting places were (or were not) open to view; and how, when, and in what contexts the dead were referenced. In asking these questions, we are immediately faced with the issue of how much of this prehistoric past we can actually recover. As Carole Crumley (1999:269) reminds us, nearly fifty years ago Hawkes (1954) "admonish[ed] archaeologists that they should not expect to retrieve what today might be called 'mind.'" Nevertheless, as we enter a new century, "archaeological theory is dominated by the debate over not if, but how mind is recoverable" (Crumley 1999:270, emphasis in original). But we must not forget Hawkes as we attempt to recover mind, because that "how" was the very basis for his pessimism: some questions are more readily answered than others, and questions of mind are the most difficult of all.

Where the dead were ultimately placed, and where at least some of the activities following their deaths occurred, can be addressed in fairly straightforward ways. In the lower Illinois River Valley alone (Figure 1.1), hundreds of Middle and Late Woodland burial mounds have been surveyed and recorded (e.g., Charles 1992b). Dozens of mounds have been excavated and reported (e.g., Perino 1968, 1973), and hundreds of skeletons of the dead themselves have been analyzed (e.g., Buikstra 1976). Many bodies were "processed" in centrally located log crypts or other facilities and the partially or fully defleshed remains then moved to peripheral graves (Brown 1979), or even to other sites (Charles et al. 1988).

When a corpse, crypt, or mound was seen or acknowledged, by whom, and under what circumstances are more difficult questions and our interpretations are more provisional. The majority of interments in Middle and Late Archaic cemeteries in the Illinois Valley occurred shortly after death, whereas in upland areas away from the main valley the predominance of secondary burials indicates that populations in those regions curated bodies for longer periods of time and could have incorporated them into extended funerary ritual (Charles and Buikstra 1983). From differences in size and form of Ohio Hopewell charnel structures versus Illinois Hopewell burial crypts we infer differences in the numbers of people that could have viewed a corpse at any one time.
and in how principles of inclusion and exclusion could have been played out (Brown 1979). In either region the monumentality of the mounds would presumably have made them important features of the daily landscape. The orderliness of rows of graves in Mississippian cemeteries suggests that individual graves were marked and maintained (Goldstein 1980).

How, when, and under what circumstances the dead, individually or collectively, were referenced constitute the most opaque problems for an archaeol-
logy of death. These questions about what might be termed the meaning of the dead are the focus of this chapter. This study is a companion piece to an earlier one (Buikstra and Charles 1999) that appeared in a volume entitled Archaeologies of Landscape (Ashmore and Knapp 1999). In that work we primarily addressed aspects of form and location in the mortuary landscape of prehistoric west-central Illinois. In this chapter we will explore the social, economic, and political contexts within which those forms and locations were created, used, and modified.

The Meaning of the Dead

Underlying any endeavor to understand the meaning of the dead for prehistoric peoples is the issue of whether we can in fact recover any of the past. A strong objectivist position provides an answer in the affirmative; a strong constructivist/relativist position would deny the possibility. The approach we take here has been most effectively developed in archaeology by Wylie (e.g., 1992a, 1992b; see also 1993), who argues for a “militated objectivism.” This position entails a recognition that archaeological knowledge claims about the past, including “facts” and “evidence,” are constructed, embedded in contemporary politics, and theory-laden, and, at the same time, recognition that such knowledge is not completely determined by theory and politics, that is, that there are “evidential constraints” somewhat independent of the processes of knowledge construction. Identifying evidential constraints is not, however, a necessarily simple and straightforward endeavor and requires an active engagement with theory and data (Wylie 1993; see also Wylie 1992b:25–29). As a broad example, take the “isms” of archaeology: processualism and postprocessualism, of course, but also selectionism, behavioralism, feminism, Marxism, structuralism, and so on. Given the nature of the archaeological record, our “isms” constitute powerful extended metaphors—call them theories, models, interpretive constructs—which if used uncritically can easily slant, obscure, or conceal what should be constraining evidence. In truth, these various theoretical positions or explanatory frameworks tell us more about the culture of archaeology than they do about cultures of the past (Bell 1994; Charles 1992a; Kehoe 1998; Patterson 1995; Trigger 1989). Thus, for inspiration, legitimation, identity, solidarity, and, of course, hiring and promotion, processualists look to Science, selectionists invoke the concepts of Darwin, and postprocessualists tout the ideas of Continental philosophers. Choosing a metaphor through which to apprehend the past is not a difficult task; indeed, one’s graduate adviser is often more than willing to provide one. Evaluating the evidence in light of our theories and models is much more difficult and requires that we go beyond simplistic adherence to a single, monolithic “epistemic stance” (Wylie 1992b:30, 1993:25).

Establishing evidential constraints is, for lack of a better term, an issue of “method.” Van Dommelen (1999:280–81) mildly criticizes our earlier study (Buikstra and Charles 1999), with its focus on “sacred landscapes” (characterized primarily by burial mounds), arguing that all landscapes are permeated by the sacred and that archaeologists need to look at landscapes in their entirety. In particular, he is promoting an “inherent” approach to landscape, an approach in which it is understood that “people inhabiting and experiencing the landscape no longer stand outside it, exploiting it more or less efficiently; on the contrary, they are just as much a part of the landscape they live in as are the so-called ‘natural’ features” (van Dommelen 1999:278). What van Dommelen fails to appreciate is that our emphasis on “the most conspicuous, persistent elements of ancient Midcontinental built environments as a point of departure for subsequent study of the more ambiguous and incomplete elements of the archaeological record” (Buikstra and Charles 1999:223) was an explicit strategic step toward more inclusive studies of both the landscape and the prehistory of the region in general.1

In attempting an archaeology of mind the difficulties are much greater in prehistoric than in historic cases (again recalling Hawkes). This is manifest in the fact that although van Dommelen (1999:282–83) praises three studies in the same volume for exploring “how landscapes of everyday life were perceived and (re-)shaped by those experiences”—Barrett (1999) on Neolithic. Bronze Age, and Iron Age Britain, Kealhofer (1999) on colonial Virginia, and van de Guchte (1999) on the Inca empire of southern Peru—only the latter two “present fine examples of the ways in which an inherent perspective can contribute to a profound understanding of landscape.” Barrett, the prehistorian, is faulted for “focusing more on the monuments themselves than on the Iron Age landscape as a whole, [thus failing] to elaborate on their role in the settled agricultural landscapes of the Iron Age.” Only in the Virginia and Inca cases, however, are historic documents or ethnohistoric accounts available, and it is through these records that the connections advocated by van Dommelen are made.

In the absence of such documentation, it is necessary to establish “standards of evidence” for the inferences and interpretations we offer. We are not
promoting the limiting strictures of "scientism" (for the role of scientism and the pursuit of science in American archaeology see Bell 1994; Kehoe 1998; Van Gilder and Charles n.d.), but neither are we accepting the hyper-relativity of some postprocessualist approaches (e.g., Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b). We are suggesting a need for clarity and explicitness in the assumptions, methods, and theories behind the assertions made by archaeologists. Such practice is crucial for an archaeology of mind. For example, in Barrett's investigation into the place of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in Iron Age Britain he notes that while the mounds were built and modified in the earlier periods, they also endured to become Iron Age monuments. The difference was that during the Iron Age they received no further physical modification, but they did continue as a significant element in the Iron Age landscape and as such were presumably recognized and drawn into an understanding of that landscape. As such, the monuments were not modified by physical intervention but by the changing landscape context from whence they were viewed...[T]hese monuments remained a crucial and integrated component of the Iron Age landscape, and...their lack of further modification holds a key to understanding how the inhabitation of that landscape accommodated them. (Barrett 1999:258; emphasis added)

Barrett's entire case rests on the assumption that Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments were "presumably recognized" in the Iron Age. While he may be quite correct, that assumption is based on the requirements of his interpretive framework and is not tied to any evidence. To say that people in the past inhabited the landscape, that they defined and were defined by it, that they acted upon the world through landscape and were in turn acted upon, are general assertions that do not allow identification of those specific points of congruence between their perceptions and understandings and ours. It is reasonable to assume that the laborers constructing and modifying Stonehenge were aware of their activities, and we can share an awareness of their actions. Indeed, we can begin to share a moment in time. There were reasons that decisions to begin or alter a monument were made in particular instances, and we can explore the contexts of those decisions. The physical activities of making and modifying are our portals to the prehistoric past. Such unique or infrequent events as monument construction provide us with our clearest entries into a past as experienced by its participants. These events are readily identifiable and, equally important, they can be fixed in time (within archaeologically acceptable limits). Stonehenge in the Iron Age was a non-event. That is not to say that it was not a significant element on the landscape; it is to say that we cannot make a connection to Stonehenge in the Iron Age in the same way that we can in the Neolithic or Bronze Age when it was being actively constructed and remodeled.

There is a desire on the part of archaeologists pursuing phenomenological approaches to the past (e.g., Tilley 1994) to eschew objectivism, empiricism, and positivism (more "isms"!), including perhaps such "methodological" concerns as expressed here. We would reiterate, however, that we are not advocating a naïve scientism (Wylie 1992b). We are advocating that archaeologists explicitly confront the nature of the archaeological record and their assumptions, methods, and theoretical perspectives with a view to foregrounding evidential constraints. The points noted above, that an inherent approach to landscape works well in the presence of historical records and that "events" provide a way into prehistory, revolve around the nature of evidence. The reason for an emphasis on explicitness is that evidential constraints, like theory and politics, will be implicit in our understandings, and therefore unexamined, if they are not brought into the open. As a striking, and perhaps ironic, example, consider Bender's (1998) recent study of the appropriation and contestation of the Stonehenge landscape. The very structure of the book reflects the evidential constraints discussed above, as it jumps from an exploration of the construction, use, and meaning of Stonehenge during the Neolithic and Bronze Age to an examination of the significance of Stonehenge in Medieval through modern times. The intervening Iron and Roman ages, with no archaeological "events" and no documentary accounts, are invisible, yet Bender never offers an explicit accounting. Barrett (1999) attempts to enter this void, but, as argued above, is not convincing—because of the nature, or rather the lack, of the evidential constraints in his (re)construction.

This concern with evidence, intersubjectivity, or criteria of adequacy is situated within the much larger debate in archaeology between processual and postprocessual approaches, a broad discussion of which is beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Charles 1992a; Preucel 1991; VanPool and VanPool 1999). We have focused on Stonehenge and the later prehistory of Britain because of striking parallels both between monument construction there and in the prehistoric American Midwest and between the problems facing archaeologists working in the two regions. What follows is not what Barrett, Bender, or Tilley would have written—it is a different history. It is our attempt to push interpretation as far as the "evidence" will allow. We present this nar-
rative as a hypothesis to be tested against new data and new interpretive frameworks (Gero 1991; Gould 1986, 1989; Landau 1984, 1991; Terrell 1990). We present this narrative as a story to be hermeneutically cycled into an ever more coherent and understandable state (Hodder 1991; see also Wylie 1993). The points connected in the narrative are the archaeological "events" that allow us an entry into a particular past. We necessarily pass over the non-events. By focusing on the events, however, we are able to see more clearly agency "at work." We are able to understand more clearly the social and political transformation of the landscape.

Death in the Illinois Valley

A panorama of the Illinois River Valley (Figure 1.2) encompasses the three categories of places where the pre-maize Archaic and Woodland populations (ca. 7000–1000 B.P.) buried their dead. The earliest interments were in the midden areas of occupation sites situated in sheltered locations at the base of the bluffs looming 60 to 90 meters above the valley floor. By the Middle Archaic period, two more loci had become final resting places for the dead: cemeteries in knolls on the terminal ridges characteristic of the bluff edges and graves associated with seasonal/periodic occupations on elevated sand ridges on the valley floor. These three locations became the "traditional" burial places for the next 5,000 years, with fundamental reorganization of the space and place for the dead occurring only when maize-based Mississippian culture began to penetrate the region a millennium ago. Questions about these places for the dead can follow two lines. First, why were these particular kinds of sites chosen? And second, what accounts for the variation in timing and intensity of use of these types of places? The first question is about the meaning attached to these locales. The second is about the role of these sites in social, economic, and political contexts.

The initial place for interment of the dead seems to relate to nothing more than the very real necessity of disposing of a soon-to-be-rotting corpse. The dead at sites like Koster (e.g., Brown and Vierra 1983) were consigned to refuse areas along with the other items and substances no longer of use. Grave goods occasionally accompanied these burials, but there is no evidence of curation of the body or special preparation of the facility. Being placed below ground in seemingly unmarked graves, and not in formal cemeteries (sensu Goldstein 1980, 1981), these ancestors were removed from view and from reference.

By 6000 B.P., however, burial in the midden had taken on new meaning, as only the very old, the very young, and the infirm were interred there (Buikstra 1981). Young and middle-aged adults, adolescents, and older children were instead buried in the bluff-top knolls at sites like the Elizabeth and Gibson Klunk mound groups (Charles et al. 1988; Perino 1968). This pattern appears to emerge at a time of decreasing mobility and presumably, as we have argued elsewhere (Charles and Buikstra 1983), within a context of increasing territoriality. These
bluff-top cemeteries were potentially meaningful along at least two dimensions. Individuals interred in the cemetery represented the healthy, fully functioning members of the community—those who could fully contribute to the economic well being of the community. Those who could not—the very old, the very young, and those with crippling injuries or arthritis; in other words, those who had to be cared for—were excluded from the community cemetery. At the same time, the cemeteries represented a link between the ancestors and the land. Given the topography of the valley, one could survey one’s territory from the knoll, and, perhaps more important, from the valley one could see the knoll and its cemetery, which thereby placed the ancestors where they could be referenced in terms of one’s relation to the land.

A third place for the dead also emerged during the Middle Archaic. While the bluff-top cemeteries do seem to have been just that—cemeteries—it is not clear that the floodplain locations, such as the Bullseye site (Hassen and Farnsworth 1987), were primarily places for the dead. Rather, the diversity of artifact types and styles, the presence of debitage and isolated tools, and the curated nature of the (bundled) burials themselves suggest that these sites were periodically or seasonally visited by more than one residential group and were used for a variety of activities (Buikstra and Charles 1999; Buikstra and Seddon n.d.; Charles 1995).

Overall, the Archaic was a period of increasing sedentism, but the process took several thousand years and likely involved fluctuating levels of mobility (Brown and Vierra 1983). Floodplain sites served as gathering places for the dispersed households or lineages under regimes of high mobility, while bluff-top sites were used when populations became more sedentary. Those matters that required intercommunity interaction, at a time when households were frequently moving across the landscape, took place at the floodplain sites: exchange of mates, valuable, and information; performance of rituals; and status negotiations among individuals and lineages. Caches of artifacts were deposited both with burials and in isolation, suggesting that status was mediated at least in part through the ability to acquire and dispose of portable wealth. Note that mortuary ritual was not, however, a necessary component of this negotiation. Furthermore, treatment of the dead at these sites did not involve reference to ancestors, since, like the burials in the middens of occupation sites, there was apparently nothing that marked the graves and the burials were not set apart from other activity or disposal areas. The burial process was extended, given the evidence of curation, indicating the dead were present for a period of time before final interment, but there is no evidence that reference was subsequently made to their ancestral status.

The pattern we are describing (see also Buikstra and Charles 1999) is similar to the distinction Morris (1991) makes, following Gluckman (1937), between “mortuary ritual,” as rites of passage, and “ancestor cult” rituals, which provide access to the dead. The bluff-top burial locations were areas expressly set aside for the dead—true cemeteries in Goldstein’s (1980, 1981) sense. Cemeteries, whether monumental or not, served as spatial reference points related to the ancestors interred there. As such, these facilities were readily incorporated into ancestor cults. It does not appear that the ancestors themselves, in the form of their bones, were seen again, as is the case for the Merina, for example (Bloch 1971), but their place of rest was sufficient as a referent. Disposal of the dead in middens of living sites or at temporary gathering sites removed them from reference—there is neither a body nor a place at which to point. The body may remain accessible for a period of time prior to final disposal, as shown, for example, by the evidence of curation of burials in the floodplain sites, but this viewing is part of the mortuary ritual. There is no allowance for subsequent referencing as part of an ancestor cult.

Several dichotomies play out in terms of this distinction between mortuary ritual and ancestor cult. The latter serves to represent the status quo, the contemporary power arrangements, while the former is the arena in which those arrangements are renegotiated (Morris 1991). An intersecting axis differentiates ancestor/political cults from earth/fertility cults (Buikstra and Charles 1999). Within this framework, ancestor/political cults, located within or adjacent to communities, represent division and exclusivity, whereas earth/fertility cults, more peripherally located, refer to shared ideals and values and a sense of inclusiveness. The situation we encounter in the Illinois River Valley during the Archaic period involved an interplay of these two axes. The bluff-top cemeteries symbolized the inclusiveness of the economic entity of the community (but from which certain individuals could be excluded, symbolizing an insufficiency in their contribution to the economic enterprise), while at the same time they served as territorial displays excluding other like communities from the physical, geographical source of their economy. Conversely, the performance of burial rites at the floodplain sites occurred in the context of a range of activities that served to mark the importance of interaction among different communities (trade, mate exchange, etc.), while at the same time
the relative statuses of individuals, lineages, and/or communities were negotiated. Thus, the bluff-top cemeteries reflect integration of the community and horizontal (segmental) differentiation among communities at times when the roots of status and power emanated from control of fixed resources, whereas the floodplain sites reflect integration among communities and vertical (hierarchical) differentiation among individuals and communities at times when status and power resided in control of portable wealth. Essentially, different forms and levels of cooperative and competitive interactions were appropriate or necessary for different degrees of mobility/sedentism and different levels of regional population density.

These associations of integration and differentiation with particular types of mortuary locations, that is, (part of) the meaning attached to these sites, formed the baseline for the evolution of mortuary behavior in this region and they provide a key for our interpretation of these events and processes. These connections to death are not specific to the lower Illinois River Valley. Rather, this region is a well-documented example of what appears to be the general pattern over most of the Eastern Woodlands of North America. Thus, what we term Glacial Kame in the Great Lakes region, Poverty Point in Louisiana, and the Maritime Archaic in Newfoundland manifest aspects of this same spatial repertoire. Similarly, Adena in Ohio and Hopewell in its various guises throughout the Eastern Woodlands are later Woodland reworkings of this Archaic tradition.

In the lower Illinois Valley, evidence of mortuary practices from the several centuries of the Early Woodland period (ca. 2600–2000 B.P.) is confined to a few burials associated with sparsely scattered living sites situated along the river, of which the Peisker site is the best documented example (Charles et al. 1986; Perino 1966). This is what might be expected, however, given that there appears to have been very little occupation of the lower valley during this period (Charles et al. 1986; Farnsworth and Asch 1986). This situation mirrors the Early Archaic period, when only a very limited number of highly mobile groups inhabited the region. Both regular gatherings of dispersed households and the territoriality associated with increased sedentism, as these practices alternated during the Middle and Late Archaic, made sense when population densities were higher. When population levels dropped during the Early Woodland period (for as-yet unexplained reasons), the social, political, and economic contexts within which the elaborate mortuary ritual and ancestor cults functioned disappeared, as did the rituals themselves. The dead were once again placed in refuse areas.

This return of funerary ritual to an earlier form—burial of individuals in midden areas—emphasizes the political nature of mortuary practices for these populations. The location and form of the ritual comprise a communicative act. The meaning of such acts is lodged in traditional associations of space and form; in the specific, historical setting of a particular point in time; and in the active manipulation of the funerary medium by individuals or groups for their own ends. It is within this framework that we can understand the extreme elaboration of Middle Woodland/Hopewell funerary behavior.

Following the general abandonment of the lower Illinois Valley, the Middle Woodland period (ca. 2000–1700 B.P.) can be characterized as one of colonization. This phenomenon in the Illinois Valley was part of a more general process of demographic transformation leading to intensive occupation of the major river valleys throughout the American Midwest (Braun 1987). This residential redistribution was probably related to horticultural intensification, specifically the incorporation of starchy seeds such as sumpweed, goosefoot, and knotweed into the suite of domesticates, as well as the development of ceramics capable of withstanding the thermal stresses of long-term boiling needed to process these seeds and of the deep pit technology necessary to store them. Because of the prior abandonment of the lower Illinois Valley, the dynamics of the consolidation of people into the large river valleys are more starkly rendered here.

In short (detailed in Charles 1992b, 1995), this demographic process probably involved the migration into the valley of social units—households, lineages, entire residential communities (indeed, extended lineage households may well have been the residential communities). The groups, and the individuals comprising them, would have been leaving behind their place in a mesh of intercommunity and intracommunity kinship, political, economic, and ritual networks, and they would have been faced with the prospect of forming new communities or joining existing ones, of creating new links of both an inclusive and exclusive nature. As outlined above, since the Middle Archaic, populations in the Eastern Woodlands had used funerary ritual as a medium through which to negotiate just such intercommunity and intracommunity links of integration and differentiation. This Middle Woodland period of demographic reorganization is characterized by what has come to be called the Hopewell Interaction Sphere, a panregional phenomenon comprising two primary elements: exchange of exotic materials and, as might be expected, elaborate mortuary ritual.3
Significantly, Middle Woodland/Hopewell funerary activities occurred in the same locations we described for the Archaic: bluff-top cemeteries and multi-community gathering sites on sand ridges in the floodplain. Furthermore, the same associations seem to be present, although in even more complicated form. First of all, both locations were used simultaneously, rather than alternately as in the Archaic. The most obvious additions to the funerary repertoire in both locations are monumental burial mounds. At sites like Elizabeth and Gibson/Klunk, the earliest Middle Woodland mounds were constructed directly on top of Archaic cemeteries (Charles et al. 1986; Charles et al. 1988; Perino 1968). These mounds, however, represent a different funerary process from that which created the Archaic knoll cemeteries. “Mound” is, in fact, somewhat of a misnomer, in that the mound-form we presently observe reflects the contours of the final capping layer. The functioning facility was not a pile of dirt, but rather a log-walled and log-roofed crypt surrounded by a circular earthen access “ramp” (e.g., Buikstra 1984:fig. 9.2; Buikstra and Charles 1999:fig. 9.6; Charles 1992b:fig. 1). The primary process of corpse treatment involved a period of decomposition in the crypt, during which time the body could be viewed. Eventually, the remains were bundled for final deposition in a pit in or around the ramp. At the same time, especially in later mounds, individuals were buried singly or in groups in graves or small crypts tangentially oriented to the margin of the ramp. These peripheral burials have been interpreted as the remains of members of secondary lineages within the local community (Brown 1981; Charles 1992b). This would seem to hearken back to the bluff-top versus midden burial corporate symbolism characteristic of the Archaic, but instead of total exclusion from the cemetery, secondary status is symbolized through peripheral burial. It is of note that virtually everyone—including the young, old, and infirm who would have been excluded during the Archaic—was buried in the bluff-top mounds, with some significant exceptions. Those exceptions were the apparently very high status individuals whose final resting places were the floodplain gathering sites.

Mound structures were also added to the Middle Woodland floodplain sites. While these sites, such as Kamp and Mound House (Buikstra et al. 1998; Struever 1960), have generally been interpreted as important nodes in the Hopewell exchange network (e.g., Struever and Houart 1972), and the mounds themselves as high-status burial facilities (e.g., Buikstra 1976; Struever 1960), our ongoing excavations at the Mound House site indicate instead that the sites were more ritual and political in nature (Buikstra et al. 1998). Furthermore, these mounds, rather than being burial monuments per se, were sites of continual construction and modification, active components in the ritual and political activities. Some individuals were processed through crypts in the mounds, to be buried back in their home cemeteries, while fewer were permanently interred in crypts. Nevertheless, this mortuary activity was only a small portion of what went on at and around the mounds, just as was the case during the Archaic. While the potential monumentality of the mounds may have come to the fore after they were sealed by a capping layer of earth, during the long period of actual use none was any more a cemetery than is Westminster Abbey. They were not important facilities because of the dead interred there, they were important “buildings” in which important dead were interred.

The addition of mounds to the floodplain gathering sites did make a difference—they now provided a focal point for referencing ancestors. But which ancestors? It is probable that the individuals processed through or left in the crypts represent important members of powerful lineages (Buikstra 1976). The addition of mounds to the bluff-top cemeteries served, through their monumentality, to enhance the symbolism of the cemetery, thereby further emphasizing the corporateness of the community. The addition of mounds to the floodplain sites transferred the corporate symbolism to the multicommunity sites, thereby creating a notion of corporateness at a higher level—a community of communities. In the same way that dominant lineages controlled the bluff-top mound construction and ritual within their community, some lineages were now asserting their control across communities through mound building and ceremonial performances at the floodplain sites.

Within this interpretive framework the succeeding Late Woodland period (ca. 1700–1100 B.P.) initially appears enigmatic. Bluff-top mounds and related rituals became simplified. The floodplain gathering sites were largely abandoned and no funerary activity took place there. Long-distance exchange also disappeared. This “event” has generally been seen as the collapse or demise of the Hopewell Interaction Sphere (e.g., Griffin 1943; Prufer 1964; Tainter 1987). Prior to this time, intensification of mortuary practices had been associated with relatively high population levels. Late Woodland population densities, however, were markedly higher than in previous periods, to the extent that high mound densities and shrinking catchment areas indicate that the valley was “full” (Charles 1992b; Styles 1981). Furthermore,
following the demographic turmoil of the Middle Woodland period, permanence of settlement location led to a stabilization of kinship networks (Charles 1992b; Conner 1990). Kinship relations served as alternate conduits of communication and exchange linking various communities within the region—alternatives to the exchange and funerary modes of interaction that had characterized previous Archaic and Woodland populations. Given that dominant individuals and/or lineages had controlled those media, the reconfiguration of the social fabric of the Late Woodland period represents something of a political revolution (Charles 1992b, 1995).

Even more dramatically, we suggest, the transition from Middle to Late Woodland represents the point in time at which the growing importance of horticulture to the overall diet, coupled with the stabilization of kinship alliances, led to a gendered reorganization of the status and power relations related to the economy (Charles 1998a, 1998b, 2000). Up to this point, the economy was centered on the male lineages. The community was the lineage, or, at least by later Middle Woodland times, a dominant kin group with one or more subordinate lineages. Among the most important of these community- or lineage-based exchanges and funerary interrelations were those related to subsistence risk management. Local shortfalls in the economy could be ameliorated via the ritual and exchange ties among regional elite males. Likewise, access to raw materials and/or ritual or religious ceremonies would have been facilitated by these exchange relationships. By the end of the Middle Woodland period, however, the level of (female) horticultural production that had been achieved allowed the nuclear family a significant level of economic independence from the lineage. The stabilization of the kinship networks (female-based in a virilocal marriage pattern [Buikstra 1976]) would have bolstered this independence by giving the nuclear family an alternate means of access to economic and social resources. We observe, for example, this transformation of the basic economic unit from the lineage to the nuclear family in the shift from large, lineage-sized to small, nuclear family-sized houses. In parallel, intralineage relationships shift from inclusive, in a single house, to segmentally structured, as observed in the circular arrangement of the individual households within ring middens (Green 1987, 1993). At the same time, we also observe the disappearance of the male-dominated mound construction and exchange networks of Hopewell. The floodplain sites were little used, and the bluff-top cemeteries returned to nearly their Middle Archaic form—accretional cemeteries involving much less ritual and virtually no grave goods. Mortuary ritual became simply a community affair, with no evidence of the multiple community participation so prominent at Middle Woodland floodplain and bluff-top sites (Kerber 1986).

Conclusions

In conclusion, a number of points can be made. First, the place and space of death are important for understanding both the meaning and the long-term dynamics of mortuary practices. Much of Middle and Late Woodland funerary behavior makes sense only in terms of earlier Archaic practices. Second, changes in mortuary practices often relate to changing social, economic, political, and demographic conditions, as these practices are manipulated by the living. The very locations of graves during the Archaic, bluff top versus floodplain, alternated through time and were keyed to levels of mobility and territorial competition. Third, mortuary practices are only one medium through which people can negotiate social and political concerns (Charles 1996; Goldstein 1980, 1981), and the decreased archaeological visibility of one medium is as likely to indicate the substitution of one mode of communication for another as it is to signal a reduction in interaction. The simplification of Late versus Middle Woodland funerary activities represents a shift from exchange and funerary ties controlled by males to kinship ties among women in what had become a geographically stable virilocal marriage system.

Finally, strategies in archaeological practice must be differentiated from objectives. Human beings are idiosyncratic, and we must be careful how we connect with the past. Ignoring evidential constraints, given the power of our theoretical constructs, results in the projection of contemporary values into the past, silencing the people who created, inhabited, and changed their world. Silencing the people who lived the past. It is too easy to use their world to promote our own agendas. The "isms" behind the writing in this chapter were not explicitly stated, but they are probably rather apparent: an early processualist training, tempered (and being tempered) by postprocessual approaches, including a recent appreciation of the importance of incorporating gender. We have attempted, however, to create a narrative not driven by a theoretical preference, but framed around "events"—points in time at which we observe changes in mortuary practices that would have been the result of conscious decisions on the part of the practitioners. The events provide a form of evidential constraint. Whatever interpretations we then concoct to make sense of the Archaic and Woodland prehistory of the American Midwest, they
must articulate with the mortuary events. Clearly, our narrative goes beyond the evidence, is incomplete, and is open to revision.

To summarize, the places and spaces of death have meaning, but their significance and their meaning change as people actively manipulate the rituals and symbols surrounding death as they negotiate their lives through ever-changing social and political contexts. There was a past, and it was inhabited by people. They, too, should be heard in a multivocal rendering of what has come before.

Notes

1. Our earlier piece begins to address the sacred landscape of the Mississippian world, but a discussion of the social, economic, and political nature of that landscape is too extensive to include in this chapter: see Buikstra and Charles 1999.

2. The exchange of exotic materials is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is important to note that exchange, probably in several forms, is of at least equal significance for understanding the nature of Archaic and Woodland intercommunity and intracommunity interactions: see Brown 1985; Charles 1992b, 1995, 1998a, 1998b. 2000.

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