Command of the Winds: An Examination of Earth Mother and Great Serpent Iconography

Melinda Alaine Martin

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Command of the Winds:
An Examination of Earth Mother and Great Serpent Iconography

by

Melinda Alaine Martin

A Dissertation
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Abbreviations

GCR Greater Cahokia Region

MCR Middle Cumberland Region

CMV Central Mississippi Valley

nLMV northern Lower Mississippi Valley
Abstract

Mississippian cosmoscapes provide a perceived, yet concealed, existence of spiritual realms inhabited by other-than and more-than human-beings who interact, influence, and interfere with the tangible landscape through natural and material contexts. To conceptualize the world around them, Mississippian ritual practitioners focused on a tripartite cosmological organization: an Above World, Middle World, and Beneath World realms. Within each of these “worlds”, multiple other-than and more-than-human-beings possessed powers, which allowed them to influence the Middle World of humans and their lived experiences. A duality exists between Earth Mother (Above World), who commands vortexes or tornadoes, and the Great Serpent (Beneath World), who may have wielded power over vortexes or whirlpools. This dissertation investigates how Mississippian people expressed their knowledge of the cosmoscapes through an iconographic interpretation based on a stylistic examination of Mississippian ceramic effigies from the central and southeastern United States. Iconographic methods, which focus on locative, positional, and command symbols are used to identify motifs, elements, and themes associated with the Great Serpent and Earth Mother in controlling the sacred wind. This research also examines the transitional mythologies of Earth Mother, and the Great Serpent, in comparison to Palmer Drought Severity Index data from the research areas.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Mississippians relied on a tripartite cosmoscape to maintain balance in a world they often envisioned as being in a state of disharmony or unbalance. Internal stressors in social, political, and religious fields, accompanied by external stressors, such as climate change or inter-polity conflict, often exacerbated shifts in worldview. Such periods of chaos may be identified in the archaeological record through sudden transformations or transitions in cosmologies or ontologies, especially as reflected in iconography and ritual practice. Transformations may occur when stressors prompt restorations in balance and harmony.

I argue that one of these transformations, perhaps as an expression of resilience, may be identified through the transitions of various Earth Mother ontologies from the Greater Cahokia Region to the Big Five Petroglyph sites, the Middle Cumberland Region, and into the Central Mississippi Valley. Transformations involving Earth Mother sodalities, “may have resulted from decreased fertility due to climate change stresses” (Dye et al. 2022) and could serve as an indicator to how Mississippian societies responded to climate change resulting in long durational and severe drought occurrences. This research engages in iconographic interpretation, stylistic analysis, ethnohistorical research, and examinations of drought data to suggest the more-than-human-being Earth Mother and the other-than-human-being Great Serpent offer a compelling window into Mississippian adaptations and adjustments to ongoing climate change through vortex imagery.
Other-than and more-than-human-beings

Other-than-human-beings are generally considered inhabitants of other worlds, or cosmoscapes, beings who are the other or who possess different characteristics and powers that are unavailable to humans, at least without some effort of supplication or veneration. Humans, in general, share a tendency to explain the unexplainable and to assign meaning to those things beyond the current scope of understanding, including the creation or perception of supernatural beings. Irving Hallowell (1995:91), for example, explains this phenomenon through his description of object, which

“provides the ground for an intelligible interpretation of events in the behavioral environment on the basis of traditional assumptions regarding the nature and attributes of the objects involved and implicit or explicit dogmas regarding the ‘causes’ of events”.

He further argues that humans are provided cognitive orientation when there is order and reason (Hallowell 2002). However, chaos and a world out of balance throws off this cognitive orientation, which is why humans seek to explain the unexplainable, turning the unknown from chaos back into order. Putting this chaos into the hands of beings with the power to manipulate it back into a balanced cosmos is what makes the sacred and the other both important and meaningful.

Handing this power over to a group of “others” who do not have to play by the same rules as humans, offers a sense of power to the powerless, especially when these beings can be asked to grant favors to specific humans. In his discussion of object orientation, Hallowell (2002) states that humans and the supernatural are also included in this orientation between the self and the objects around it. However, this group of sacred beings are still not human, which Hallowell
(2002) points out, and thus lends importance to his term of *other than*, as something that transcends humans’ existence and, which requires an adjustment of Western perspectives to be able to gain insight into Indigenous beliefs and perceptions. The term *other than* suggests a lack of certain human traits such as empathy, compassion, love, and patience, and an otherworldliness that is, something intangible to humans. Hallowell (2002), in research on Ojibwa cultures, for example, notes that the term “grandfather” and “our grandfathers” were sometimes used to discuss spiritual beings. These terms in and of themselves exhibit connotations of humanness and kinship.

Multiple inhabitants of Mississippian cosmoscapes may be better perceived and termed as more-than-human-beings. Mississippian “deities” possess human physical and emotional characteristics yet are more than an existential human being in their locations within the tripartite cosmoscape and the powers they command. They, at their core, possess a humanity, an agency, which makes them seem familiar, relatable, and approachable. In his discussion of the Ojibwa, Hallowell states the use of the phrase “our grandfathers” is, “the relation between a human child and a human grandfather” and “is functionally patterned in the same way as the relation between human beings and grandfathers of an other-than-human-class” (Hallowell 2022:21).

In another example, Hallowell (2002) discusses the Ojibwa ontologies surrounding the *wendigo*, which are considered human, but not necessarily an *other*, as it has human characteristics, but is more than just a human and is referenced as a giant. Something other-than-human might contain no or minimal human characteristics and be a species of its own. This is not to be confused with the agency of inanimate objects and beings derived from natural
prototypes such as serpents, which are other-than-human, since they possess no human characteristics outside of individual agency and sentiency.

One example of a more-than-human-being is Earth Mother, who through her alias as grandmother, brings similarities to the conception of “our grandfathers” as supernatural beings in the Ojibwa (Anishinaabe) language (Central Algonquian). Hallowell (2002) states beings in Ojibwa myths, or sacred stories, behave like people whether they are animal or people, which provides support for his terminology of other-than-human-beings in describing supernatural beings. However, I would argue that a distinction between beings derived from natural prototypes and those from human prototypes should be separated into other than and more than categories to better examine their relationships with humans and the narratives that detail their origination. By utilizing these two paths of “other than” and “more than” to evaluate the relationship between Earth Mother and her more-than-human characteristics and abilities, and the Great Serpent who is other-than-human, I hope to focus on a more nuanced understanding of their similar yet different influences on the people of the Middle World.

**Earth Mother Command Powers**

Our understanding of Earth Mother’s more-than-human powers has typically centered on fertility and its associative power to create life from anew or to regenerate life in its varying forms (Sharp et al. 2011). The repeated reference to her feminine fertility powers can be seen in gendered institutional roles where women have been viewed in terms of their role in large-scale agriculture, in addition to smaller garden plots, gathering of plants in the wild, and the curation of surplus food items and seeds (Fritz 2019; Mueller and Fritz 2016; Mueller 2013; Scarry and Scarry 2005). Her relatability to the female role in life and agriculture may have been one of the reasons for her cultural continuity in traditions and narratives throughout Native American
societies in North America (Pybus 2009). Her motherly characteristics of always having a full pot of renewable food (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:65), her ability to produce life (Diaz-Granados 2004:143), possess knowledge of agriculture (Mueller and Fritz 2016), and express empathy for the plight of humans, allows for feelings of familiarity, which may have led to the widespread creation of effigies and iconographic symbols illustrating her importance in the lives of Mississippian peoples.

Indigenous narratives have also included her human-shared characteristics, such as giving her a husband, a being in the form of the Great Serpent (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018; Lankford 2004; Reilly 2004), and grandsons in the form of the more-than-human Twins (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). She is also, mother to Morning Star (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018) and possesses the physical characteristics of sacred imagery in the form of vulva motifs as seen in the cross-in-circle, which may also represent earth and the embodiment of Earth Mother’s body (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). She is tangible in the form of the landscape, crops, and children. Yet she is more-than-human in her ability to create, control, and influence not just the physical realm, but also the Upper and Beneath Worlds. I suggest she is one of the supreme forms of an axis mundi, a being with the power to connect the three realms not only metaphorically through creation, death, and reincarnation, but also through the physical manifestations of vortexes formed through her supreme command power of animation, or the creation of life.

In the translations and search of inferred meanings associated with these sacred beings and their push and pull of the Middle World through their cosmic realms the other-than or otherness of these beings has become more prominent than the more-than. The etic, or “outsiders” perspective, associated with the task of decoding Indigenous narratives, has led to the
disconnect associated with the human connection in the relationship between these beings and Mississippians living with, and sometimes for, these more-than and other-than-human beings. I would further argue that this etic or outsider view, through the lens of misogyny associated with numerous past scientific disciplines, has caused parts of the iconographic code, as mentioned by George Lankford (2011), as being a way of deeming cosmic affiliation, associated with Earth Mother to be overlooked and dismissed.

To varying Mississippians and their descendants, the creator may have been a woman and the iconographic code associated with her fragmentarily decoded. Through the use of iconographic motifs, symbols, and elements, along with ethnologies and stylistic analyses, the transitional role of Earth Mother is examined both spatially and temporally. This research focuses on the Greater Cahokia Region; on eastern Missouri caves, rock out-crops, and petroglyph sites; the Middle Cumberland Region; and the Central Mississippi Valley to suggest her role in creation, death, and reincarnation as a more-than-human-being.

The before mentioned association between indigenous women and fertility, agriculture, and renewal is expressed in ethnohistorical accounts, iconographic sacred symbols, and through female more-than-human-beings in religious cosmoscapes and ontologies associated with native groups in the Southeast, the Great Plains, and the Southwest (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004, 2018; Emerson 1985; Fritz 2019; Martin 2022; Mueller and Fritz 2016; Stauffer et al. 2022).

Symbols present in Mississippian rock art, in the form of petroglyphs and pictographs, form a ritualistic landscape in these sacred spaces, which are sometimes referred to as the womb of Earth Mother (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). Dark zones, within the depths of caves, were revered and illustrate the great lengths religious specialists went to keep these symbols from the view of non-specialists, suggesting their power was not available to the uninitiated.
Ceramics, created from clay, referenced physical manifestation of the body of Earth Mother (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018) and were frequently turned into “effigies”, in addition to being incised and engraved with iconographic motifs, elements, and adornments, which may illustrate varying command powers accompanying the Earth Mother narrative. Historical cloth adornments and regalia containing swirls, with accompanying creation stories surrounding a female figure, may demonstrate the powers associated with Earth Mother and their cultural continuity in traditions and rituals (Pybus 2009).

Creation stories related to Earth Mother and iconography associated with her may have maintained some form of continuity from the Early Mississippian periods in which a powerful female deity created the world through the manipulation of the Earth and Wakanda, or the breath of animation. Numerous ethnographies off the Arikara, Apache, Hidatsa, and Kiowa (Pybus 2009) contain narratives related to a powerful female being able to create life, to control winds, or to shape the earth; they suggest Earth Mother narratives may date to ancestral times and may have played a central role in various creation mythologies.

Archaeologists have examined the fertility role of Mississippian women through the presence of female religious sodalities, ceremonial architecture, and female flint-clay statuettes (Boles 2022, Emerson 1985; Mueller and Fritz 2016; Prentice 1986). However, the idea of an all-encompassing or powerful creation force in the form of a female more-than-human-being has been negated or relegated to the domesticated task of growing plants with ethnographies describing a female creator either ignored or dismissed.

Socioeconomic, political, and religious practices associated with women and female deities in the Mississippian cultures have become increasingly prevalent in the past few decades as a result of efforts of archaeologists, anthropologists, and folklorists endeavoring to understand
the importance of duality and balance through masculine and feminine beings in the Mississippian cosmo-}

scapes (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004, 2018; Emerson 1985; Fritz 2019, Martin 2022; Mueller and Fritz 2016; Prentice 1986; Pybus 2009; Reilly 2004). However, the feminine associative powers outside of fertility renewal ceremonies, such as the busk ceremony, to celebrate the renewal of maize agriculture are still lacking and are frequently overshadowed by masculine other and more-than-human beings. This research argues for a further examination of command powers associated with Earth Mother, especially outside the accepted range of fertility, renewal, and agriculture to suggest she possessed domain over other-than-human beings such as the Great Serpent and more-than-human-beings such as Corn Mother, He-who-wears-human-heads-as-earrings, and the Hero Twins. Earth Mother may have commanded Wakanda to create and re-create life through her ability to reincarnate souls through winds along with her ability to take lives through the copulation of these winds in the form of vortexes, earning her the nickname of Whirlwind Woman (Pybus 2009).

Ethnographic and folklore sources will also be used to examine the relationship between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent. When discussing Earth Mother’s iconographic themes and elements associated with her command symbols, it is almost impossible to analyze her whirlwind or vortex powers without examining the role the Great Serpent plays in the duality of life and death. As her consort, he is frequently entangled within Earth Mother mythologies; however, their relationship has not been examined outside of his role as her husband or consort. Their relationship is vital in Earth Mother’s ability as Whirlwind Woman in the sense that she requires the Great Serpent as her accomplice and minion in the Underworld, where she may not be able to go.
There is a duality, or a rule of cosmic balance, associated with Earth Mother’s ability to send souls to the Great Serpent and then to retrieve them in some fashion to reincarnate them. While the Great Serpent is the ruler of the Realm of the Dead or the Underworld (Lankford 2004, 2011; Reilly 2004, 2011), her abilities supersede or override his abilities. I conceive this dominance as illustrated in the Birger figurine where a female figure is hoeing the back of a dead serpent and converting its corpse into vegetative matter. It can also be seen in a hooded bottle female effigy from eastern Arkansas, which has been argued to illustrate serpents wrapped around the neck, demonstrating her emergence from a portal (Reilly 2004:135). It seems Earth Mother is wearing them as an accessory or regalia, denoting or demonstrating the Great Serpent’s role as her assistant, and not as a dominating figure, compared, for instance, to her being illustrated as an entanglement of their associated command powers focusing on the winds Wakanda. The Great Serpent is represented as an accomplice in the duality, or the other balanced half, between the two of them. While he is a key figure in his own narratives, he must become a secondary character when intertwined with Earth Mother narratives. Their roles are in a never-ending push and pull between life and death, and to evaluate Earth Mother’s position in this balance, his role will also need to be examined.

The Great Serpent has many names, possibly denoting his role in various Mississippian and early colonial polities. These names also denote spatial and temporal patterning such as Underwater Spirit, the Underwater Panther, Cat Serpent, Cat Monster, and Piasa (Dye 2018; Lankford 2004). The variation in these names may also simply reflect avocational and professional archaeological categorizing.
Earth Mother’s Identity

Earth Mother’s identity has also been associated with multiple aliases throughout time: Grandmother, Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies, and First Woman (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004, 2018; Reilly 2004). Corn Mother or Corn Maiden has also been suggested (Reilly 2004), as has Whirlwind Woman (Martin 2022; Pybus 2009). Her identity may date to the Woodland period, but it is in the Mississippian period where we see a large corpus of iconography associated with her, with the portrayals of her, her narratives, and her command symbols varying temporally and in spatial contexts. It is also important to note her main theme, which seems to have maintained cultural continuity through changes concerning what roles were emphasized through time and within various regional polities, though this is not to imply static ritual state. The association between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent may be expressed more or less depending on the region and may suggest increases or decreases in fatalities associated with stressors such as climate, famine, or war.

Earth Mother’s identity in Early Mississippian cultures has been examined through female effigies in the form of Missouri Flint Clay statuettes in the Greater Cahokia region (Emerson 1985; Fritz 2019; Lankford 2011; Prentice 1985; Reilly 2004). For example, Thomas Emerson (1985) has argued that these Missouri Flint Clay female statues and ceremonial architecture in the Cahokia region suggests the presence of a fertility cult. While the beginning of Earth Mother is much older than the boom of Cahokia, she was a prevalent being in the Mississippian cosmoscapes being perpetuated at Cahokia and held different roles and command powers than those associated with her after the Cahokian diaspora in the thirteenth century.
In the tripartite cosmoscapes associated with Mississippian cultures, such as those at Cahokia, the Above World, Middle World, and Beneath World contain other-than and more-than-human-beings who must be venerated and supplicated to maintain cosmic balance in the world. There is no mention of a sacred being who can influence all three of these worlds, though Lankford (2004) mentions the Great Serpent’s ability to appear in the night sky when the Beneath World and Above World reverse during specific times of the year. However, this is not the same as the Great Serpent influencing the Above World on his own. Instead, the Great Serpent is tied to the Beneath World and the Middle World where he can control the Realm of the Dead and influence the human world.

The Hero Twins are mostly associated with the Above World in their shapeshifting abilities associated with thunderers, and the production of lightning and thunder. One Hero Twin, the wild one, does have an association with the Beneath World based on a narrative that he was discarded in the water and raised by water spirits (Dye 2021).

However, Earth Mother has been associated with the Middle World in the form of agriculture, her house is said to sit at the confluence of large bodies of water, she has ties to the Above World as a lunar deity, and in the Beneath World through her association with the Great Serpent (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018; Lankford 2011; Reilly 2004). If we take this a step further and discuss her ability to transform into or to control winds creating a tornado, then she would have the ability to connect the three realms at the same time; something no other being or element can accomplish apart from an axis mundi.

This research concerning Earth Mother’s role in the Mississippian cosmoscapes focuses on a temporal chronological and spatial analysis of the Greater Cahokia Region, the Missouri Big Five Petroglyph sites, the Middle Cumberland Region, and the Central Mississippi
Valley. These four focus areas will be examined through a compilation of background literature associated with Earth Mother, and a discussion on the methodology used for the research. I also examine Earth Mother’s presence and role in the Greater Cahokia Region through Missouri Flint Clay statuettes, Earth Mother sacred imagery in Missouri cave art, Earth Mother’s role as the “Woman in the Shawl” in the Middle Cumberland Region, a resurgence of shared iconography on Earth Mother and Cat Serpent effigies in the Northern Lower Mississippi Valley, a discussion concerning the research results, and then a final conclusion summarizing the intended purpose of this research concerning Earth Mother’s roles in Mississippian ontologies. The following summarizes the dissertation’s organization.

**Chapter Organization**

Chapter 1, presents Hallowell’s (2002) Ojibwa linguistic research in which he views living persons in sacred stories, known as “our grandfathers”, as other-than-human-beings. It initiates the argument for building upon Hallowell’s work to separate supernatural beings into two categories; other-than-human beings with derivatives from natural prototypes not exhibiting human characteristics outside of agency, and sentient, more-than-human beings, which possess human physical characteristics yet exhibit more than human abilities. The chapter outlines the purpose of the research in examining the transition of the roles associated with Earth Mother and the Great Serpent through the Mississippian period (AD 1000-1650) and why this interpretation is important to further our knowledge of Mississippian mythological narratives and iconographic analyses.

The foundational background literature is summarized in chapter 2, which leads to my hypotheses concerning Earth Mother and her ability to control the winds and create whirlwinds. Research such as Emerson’s (1985) examination of possible religious sodalities, along with the
sacred microcosms of caves (Diaz-Granados 2012; Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004, 2018) with Earth Mother iconography, support my ideas concerning Earth Mother and the built and natural landscape. This correlation leads to the evaluation of the environmental role Earth Mother may have maintained in the physical and spiritual worlds.

Numerous scholars have taken on the task of examining the iconography related to the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes from the Greater Cahokia region, Arkansas, and Missouri (Boles 2022; Emerson 1982, 1984; Fritz 2019; Lankford 2011; Mueller and Fritz 2016; Prentice 1985; Reilly 2004; and Sharp 2011). Gayle Fritz (2019) was instrumental in developing a hypothesis differentiating Corn Mother versus Earth Mother motifs and suggesting the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes relate more to Earth Mother narratives than Corn Mother. Lankford (2011) also examines the relationship between Corn Mother and Earth Mother, stating they are two distinct individuals whose ethnohistorical comparisons became intertwined throughout time. Pybus (2009), further suggests Earth Mother predates Corn Mother and should be identified as two separate supernatural beings, suggesting imagery from these two more-than-human-beings should be identified as separate. Prentice (1985) was instrumental in labeling the Birger figurine as a portrayal of Earth Mother and examining her relationship with the Great Serpent, which piqued my interest in understanding the entanglement of mythologies between these two other-than-human-beings. Steve Boles (2022) also examined multiple Missouri Flint Clay and limestone along with sandstone figurines occurring not only in the Greater Cahokia Region (GCR), but also in other regions such as the states of Arkansas and Oklahoma, though he notes they were probably constructed in the GCR. Emerson (1982) discusses the possibility of a feminine cult in the GCR based on the Missouri Flint Clay figurines and what he describes as feminine focused ceremonial architecture. Martin (2022) bridges these arguments with ideas
from the research of Pybus (2009), suggesting that a female figure described in the ethnographic record, known as Whirlwind woman, may be an alias for Earth Mother, which suggests such imagery might indicate some degree of cultural continuity.

James Duncan and Carol Diaz-Granados (2018) reference multiple examples of sacred iconography associated with Earth Mother in overhangs and caves and note parallels with the same motifs and elements on ceramics. They suggest certain swirled, vulva, cross-in-circle, and concentric circle motifs reference Earth Mother. This research suggests these varying symbols express the powers of Earth Mother in her myriad roles through positional symbols as discussed by Victor Turner (1967), and command symbols, which portray the power she wields in a particular theme or scene (Martin 2022). Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018), Lankford (2011), and Pybus (2009), all present ethnohistorical accounts associated with the role of Earth Mother, suggesting possible cultural continuity of Earth Mother themes, which may be viewed through upstreaming or the methodology of going back in time to establish connections. Pybus (2009) discusses multiple creation stories associated with a Whirlwind figure, who she suggests may be the First Woman, or Earth Mother.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods and theory associated with this research, such as assembling a corpus related to Earth Mother and the Great Serpent ceramic effigies along with imagery associated with their locatives and command motifs. To begin identifying varying styles and iconographic patterning, a ceramic corpus has been assembled based on photographs from previous literature and other researcher’s photographic collections. Once this corpus was established, a stylistic analysis was performed to identify regional variabilities and the presence of the thematic styles associated with Earth Mother or the Great Serpent in differing regional contexts, allowing the identification of religious sodality movements.
Following stylistic identifications, an iconographic analysis of motif, symbol, and element patterning is discussed, which examines repeated themes, suggesting an expression of similar ontologies associated with these other and more-than-human-beings across the Mississippian cultures. To examine the relationship between the iconography terminology such as locative symbols, dominant symbols, and positional symbols were used (Turner 1967), along with the addition of the term command symbol (Martin 2022). The research into varying symbolic roles allowed for the identification and explanation of the specific power being presented on a select number of ceramic effigies associated with Earth Mother and the Great Serpent. Command symbols assist in suggesting a distinct and exclusive power implied through iconographic motifs in a restricted temporal and spatial frame, suggesting an influencing event prompting changes in the roles for which these two beings were needed.

Iconographic and stylistic perspectives from George Lankford (2011), James Knight (2013), and Erwin Panofsky (1927) are presented to establish guidelines employed for the iconographic and stylistic analyses of the ceramic and sacred imagery corpus. Object and cognitive orientation (Hallowell 2002) are also discussed to examine terminology such as other-than-human-beings and more-than-human-beings. The theoretical perspective of agency will be examined in response to supernatural beings and associated objects either through ceramics, rock art imagery, or dominant symbols.

In Chapter 4, the possible early roles of Earth Mother in the Mississippian cosmoscape are examined in association with the Greater Cahokia Region, circa AD 1000-1250. Emerson (1982) argues for a fertility cult in the region during this time, possibly centered around the Earth Mother and her association with fertility, renewal, and agriculture. He suggests the assemblage of multiple Missouri Flint Clay female figurines from the American Bottom underscores the
importance of the Earth Mother during this time along with religious structures possibly related to her and her powers. Female Missouri Flint Clay figurines, sometimes referred to as the corn goddesses or corn maiden (Reilly 2004), frequently depict a female figurine with agricultural themes, where the female is the central and commanding figure. Some of the figurines illustrate a female figure with a serpent and associated agricultural themes. The tight centralization of most of these figures identified in the Greater Cahokia Region, with some outliers such as the Spiro site, northeastern Arkansas, and southeastern Missouri, suggest a regional ontology associated with them. Some of these female figurines, such as those discovered from the BBB Motor and Sponneman sites, possess characteristics of having been ritually “killed” through pre-interment breakage and burning (Boles 2022; Colvin 2012; Emerson 1984). This research proposes these Missouri Flint Clay figures served as an embodiment of Earth Mother in the Early and into the Middle Mississippian periods, but especially the Stirling phase (A.D. 1100-A.D. 1200) in the Greater Cahokia Region. The context and placement of these figurines, such as residential structures, ceremonial, pits, or burials will also be evaluated and will be a common theme throughout the three regions discussed here.

Chapter 5 examines cave art from the Big Five Petroglyph sites (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). This region, and its inclusion in the significance of Earth Mother spatial and temporal patterning, is pertinent because of its proximity to the Greater Cahokia Region and the Cahokia diaspora and post-diaspora events (Duncan and Granados-Diaz 2018:44). Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) suggest the sacred imagery depicted within these five petroglyph sites may have emerged directly from Cahokia and after the period associated with the female statuettes, which suggests a representative of an early Earth Mother. Sacred imagery, such as that which Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) refer to as vulva motifs, serpent imagery, cross in
circle motifs, concentric circles, and swirled imagery, represents Earth Mother as identified in cave art, compared to sacred imagery depicted on Earth Mother and Cat Serpent effigies. This region is important in examining the spread of Earth Mother ontologies from Cahokia into the Middle Cumberland Region and the northern Lower Mississippi Valley. Through this cave art the transitioning of Earth Mother from a more-than-human-being focused on agriculture, to a role more centered on winds, animation, and reincarnation, may be established.

In Chapter 6, the role of Earth Mother will be presented through what Robert Sharp and colleagues (2011) call “Woman in the Shawl” in the Middle Cumberland Region. While the role of Earth Mother in the GCR, focused on agricultural iconography through vegetative and farming tool imagery on the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes, the hump-back and straight-back hooded effigy bottles of the MCR seem to illustrate a transition in Earth Mother ontologies associated temporally after the disbursement of the Cahokia region and spatially centered in the CMV, with some outliers occurring further into the Southeast. While female effigies in the form of hump-backs and hooded female effigy bottles also occur in the CMV, such as the focus area of this study in northeastern Arkansas and southeastern Missouri, I am unaware of any Woman in the Shawl representations associated with the negative painting techniques. Sharp and colleagues (2011) note how the regions of this focus, northeastern Arkansas, southeastern Missouri, and central Tennessee, contain a large occurrence of female hump-back effigies, which is not found in the greater Cahokia area, nor are they found prior to around A.D. 1150.

They (Sharp et al. 2011) also suggest the role of these female effigies is associated with children and their death; most of these vessels occur in sub-adult graves. This may suggest a shift from Earth Mother’s command power, associated with agricultural images, to a focus on reincarnation, specifically the reincarnation of children.
The sacred imagery associated with the hump-back female effigies and the “Woman In the Shawl” or the Nashville Negative Painted motifs will also be examined to note any patterning associated with the previous Earth Mother imagery from the GCR, post-diaspora Cahokia imagery illustrated in petroglyphs associated with the big five cave art sites in Missouri, and continuity or shifts in Earth Mother imagery in the MCR.

Chapter 7 focuses on the watery realms of the Central Mississippi Valley. Specifically northeastern Arkansas and southeastern Missouri, circa A.D. 1400-1650. This area experienced another change in Earth Mother, though not as dramatic as the shift from the GCR to the MCR. The female figurines, illustrating Earth Mother, demonstrate iconography associated with swirls, possibly identifying the four winds, or a vortex. We also see the appearance of Cat Serpent effigies, with a large occurrence in southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas. Cat Serpent vessels, in the CMV, seem to contain similar iconography to some of the Earth Mother effigies in the form of swirls, and lines emitting from the mouth. While some of these elements and themes occur on other vessels from earlier temporal and differing spatial contexts, such as the GCR, this seems to be the beginning of them occurring on the Great Serpent portrayals though Cat Serpents and on female effigies. Suggesting the role of Earth Mother may have transitioned again or become more prominent in this region. Through the command symbols and positional symbols associated with these two distinct ceramics, Mississippian artisans may be illustrating the Earth Mother and the Great Serpent in their duality role, as seen in the GCR. The difference is that instead of demonstrating this duality through the death and renewal of agriculture, it is now being illustrated through the animation of life and the removal of this animation through death based on the breath of Wakanda (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018), both controlled by Earth Mother and the Great Serpent through vortexes.
In Chapter 8, the duality between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent is examined. This examination is based on Earth Mother and the Great Serpent imagery on Missouri Flint Clay female statuettes in the GCR, cave art in the Missouri Big Five Petroglyph sites, hatched motifs on negative painted female effigies, and shared sacred imagery in the form of swirls and cross in circle motifs in the northern lower section of the CMV. In this the findings of this research are presented, such as interpretations of the stylistic analysis centering on Earth Mother and the Great Serpent effigies, statuettes, and petroglyphs and pictographs in cave art. This inference suggests Earth Mother and the Great Serpent command powers associated with the animation of life and also with death through wind forces such as vortexes occurring as tornadoes and whirlpools.

Temporal and spatial patterning is suggested based on the stylistic analysis and the iconographic interpretation of various elements, motifs, and symbols presented in previous literature as relating to the Great Serpent and Earth Mother along with my argument for vortex and wind motifs. Connections between ethnographic narratives and Mississippian iconography will be suggested in this chapter with referred evidence to argue the hypothesis that Earth Mother maintained more roles than agriculture and fertility-focused, and further argue her relationship to vortexes. Finally, statements are presented suggesting possible reasonings behind the transitional roles of Earth Mother and the Great Serpent related to climate change and variables concerning the four regional areas examined in this research.

Chapter 9 concludes with the identification of the transitional ontologies surrounding Earth Mother, her relationship with the Great Serpent, her association with vortexes, and the influence of climate change. Ethnographies presented may demonstrate cultural continuity related to Earth Mother ontologies along with the importance of iconographic and stylistic
analyses. Hallowell’s (2002) work concerning other-than-human-beings with the suggestion of a new category of more-than-human-beings is concluded from the first chapter. Along with an argument concerning the transition or transformation of Earth Mother ontologies, through environmental stressors in the form of droughts, exacerbated by social and political factors. Though this research is not the first to examine droughts stressors or Earth Mother motifs and effigies, the suggestion of a transition, temporally and spatially, of Earth Mother’s role opens a new avenue to examine how resiliency of past societies may be examined in the archaeological record. Through a stylistic analyses and iconographic interpretation, accompanied by drought indexes, ethnographies, and past research, inferences are made that Earth Mother shifted her command powers, based on her agency, which allowed religious sodalities to control the esoteric knowledge associated with her.
Chapter 2

Background

The Mississippian tripartite cosmocapes consist of multiple more-than and other-than-human-beings, which are mostly invisible to the inhabitants in the Middle World. These beings may be brought forth through activities such as ceremonies and vision quests, during significant events, mythological narratives, and sacred imagery. Mythological narratives tell of these beings lurking beyond the veil between the Mississippian worlds, such as behind rock walls and beneath water (Loubser et al. 2018). These beings are powerful and sometimes dangerous, ranging from benevolent to malicious depending on the command power being used. Though these beings may possess human-like characteristics, making them familiar to humans, they are more-than-human and have agency to influence the lives of humans residing on the physical plane and the souls of humans in the Beneath World and along the Path of Souls. This research will examine the agency surrounding the narrative mythologies of Earth Mother and the Great Serpent through their sacred imagery and associated objects to better understand their role(s) in Mississippian ontologies.

Earth Mother and the Great Serpent both maintain narratives separate from each other with the Great Serpent exerting power over the Realm of the Dead and the other-than-human-beings that reside in the Beneath World’s water realm. The Great Serpent has many names, such as the Horned Serpent, Underwater Panther, Cat Serpent, and Piasa. The multitude of names may result from regional variations of the same being or possibly separate beings who have been categorized by a generalized term of shared, serpent-like characteristics. Further research will be needed to establish if this is a singular being with multiple roles or multiple denizens of the Beneath World under the command of one being.
Earth Mother is also associated with her own individual roles in the cosmoscapes and is understood to play an important role in agriculture and the renewal of the Earth. She has multiple aliases: First Woman, Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies, Earth Mother, Grandmother, Corn Mother, Cloud Woman, and Whirlwind Woman (Colvin 2012; Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018; Reilly 2004). These names are used interchangeably, like those of the Great Serpent, and pose the question of regional variations of the same being or different beings with different roles separate from Earth Mother. This research argues for the separation of characters for Earth Mother and Corn Mother, but for the consolidation of First Woman, Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies, Cloud Woman, Whirlwind Woman, and Grandmother.

This chapter addresses the backgrounds of both the Great Serpent and Earth Mother to hypothesize their functions in binary, yet parallel roles centered around animation, death, and reincarnation. These roles will be examined within four boundaries, first focusing on the GCR, the Big Five Petroglyph sites in the southeast quadrant of Missouri (though cave art in Arkansas and Tennessee will also be discussed), the MCR, and finally, the northern section of the Lower Mississippi Valley.

Environment

Greater Cahokia Region (GCR)

The beginning discussion surrounding Earth Mother and the Great Serpent, for this research, starts with the Missouri Flint Clay figures from the GCR, which is defined as the area in and around Cahokia and East St. Louis precincts (Boles 2022:49; Hedman et al. 2022).
While some researchers delineated these objects as to where they were found, this research will categorize multiple of these statuettes, through a stylistic analysis, of originating in the GCR and bear more weigh on their origination than their migrated location. Whether that migration be physically or through the movement of esoteric knowledge surrounding how and when to create them.
While sacred imagery involving the Great Serpent and Earth Mother exists outside of the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes in the GCR, my focus is on the corpus of these female statuettes, their portrayal of Earth Mother in a particular role, and the ritualized killing or dissipation of the powers and ontologies associated with them. Earth Mother as a generalized term includes multiple sacred relationships with the cosmoscapes and the people of the Middle World. Not every image or mythical narrative associated with Earth Mother will support this hypothesis for her, due to her agency in being able to shift into specific roles as needed both spatially and temporally, though with the ability to maintain previous characteristics and command powers. For example, in Christian mythology the more-than-human-being Jesus is associated with a role of forgiveness, healing, resurrection, and rebirth depending on the contexts in which he is called on and the imagery depicted. Another example might include the March of Progress in early hominines in which the image was unintentionally interpreted as having a perspective rooted in the theory of orthogenesis, which suggests evolution is progressive in a linear sequence, in which two things cannot exist at once if one is to merge into the other for progression (Gould 1989). However, “progression” is not linear and multiple objects of a similar kind can exist at once, which is why Earth Mother imagery is so varied in iconography and style, not only in differing temporal and spatial states, but also in the same regions and at the same time.

The Missouri Flint Clay female statuettes originated either physically, as intellectual property, or as esoteric knowledge, in the GCR. The figures illustrate the role of Earth Mother in the renewal of agriculture through its creation in seed form, death through harvesting, and renewal or reincarnation in the next season. These figurines include Birger, Keller, Sponemann, Willoughby, West, and Exchange, which Boles (2022:49) defines as occurring in the GCR. On
the other hand, Schild, Westbrook, New Madrid, Bostrom, McBeth, and woman with mortar are from outside the GCR.

Of the Earth Mother imagery, in the Mississippian world, these female Missouri flint Clay statuettes are the only current knowledge of Earth Mother directly related to sacred imagery associated with vegetation. Due to the strong link between Mississippian cultures and maize agriculture imagery, the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes, such as the Westbrook figurine, have been suggested to be related to maize and its importance. However, Fritz (2019) argues that even though maize was becoming a popular dietary staple at this time, the Earth Mother theme may predate the influx of maize agriculture in the lives of Mississipians. This suggests the vegetative imagery on these figures may illustrate non-maize plants, an idea that will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

These figurines may also illustrate the first examples of Earth Mother and the Great Serpent together on a three-dimensional artifact. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) argue that some cave art from the Big 5 (see chapter 5) may include motifs from the Cahokian fluorescence, making imagery portraying Earth Mother and the Great Serpent symbols, in association with one another, an earlier occurrence on this media. These are the first examples of three-dimensional portrayals of Earth Mother as a female figure and the Great Serpent as a serpent directly associated with one another on one object. Just as Earth Mother maintains varying roles throughout the Mississippian world, so does the Great Serpent and his association with Earth Mother as another of those roles, meaning he is associated outside of this role with varying imagery at the same time as his appearance with Earth Mother on these female statuettes. Again, not a linear progression of ontologies associated with him through time, but a variation in these ontologies related to particular contexts either social, political or environmental in nature.
In the Early Mississippian (Stirling phase 1050A.D.-1150A.D.) of the GCR, women were tasked with culturally gendered institutional roles associated with the growing of vegetation through processes such as breeding, seed collection, maintenance, harvesting, distribution, and storage of surplus (Mueller and Fritz 2016). With this being such a large role in the lives of Mississippian women, it is expected that that imagery associated with vegetation and a spiritual force involved in the rituals associated with it may occur (Mueller and Fritz 2016). This intersection of social, economic, religious, and political spheres associated with the fertility of vegetation emerged, may have been adapted from earlier Woodland cultures, in the form of Earth Mother mythologies as a more-than-human-being who has command over the ritualized Mississippian landscape associated with vegetation. Bowers (1992) notes that in Siouan mythologies a being known as grandmother is in charge of all vegetation, which fits one of the aliases associated with Earth Mother and the use of vegetation imagery on statuettes illustrating her.

In discussing these female figurines, Reilly (2004:134) states that two of these statuettes portray the wife of Morning Star, and also the Westbrook Figurine, “represents the earth and lunar deity as her aspect of the Corn Mother, the provider of plants.” Though it has been argued that plant-like elements on these statuettes are non-maize vegetation (Fritz 2019, Mueller and Fritz 2016).

A second figurine discussed is the Birger figurine whose theme focuses on “Otherworld powers rather than vegetative ones” (Reilly 2004:134). Though Reilly states the overall focus of the Birger figurine is the Otherworld, referencing the presence of the Beneath World ruler, the Great Serpent, agricultural tools, and vegetative non-maize imagery is still prominent. While the relevance of these figurines to Cahokia and the evidence supporting maize in the archaeological
record does suggest maize may have become important to the Cahokians, the use of the eastern agricultural complex during, pre-Cahokian and Cahokian nucleation and fluorescence, seems to have been overlooked as a predominant agricultural and small garden subsistence practice (Fritz 2019; Mueller and Fritz 2016).

The nucleation of the GCR began in the Lohman Phase (A.D. 1050-1100). Benson and colleagues (2009) attribute this nucleation to a 50-year pluvial period, a time of ideal conditions for agriculture. This period directly predates the Stirling Phase where we see the creation of female figures made of Missouri Flint Clay. This could suggest a relationship between the explosion of agriculture in this pluvial period to ontologies focused on an agriculture being who may have been responsible for climate and agricultural surplus. Once climate shifted and droughts became longer in duration and lasted multiple generations, the role of these statuettes may have ended or shifted. This ritual killing of these female statuettes may be the response to this transition. The closing of the Spiro Mortuary with a female figure statuette in the center of a microcosm (Brown 2021) may reenforce the hypothesis that this role shifted to a focus on reincarnation, especially in children in the MCR, due to the amount of death occurring from a reduction in maize crops (Kelso 2017).

During the Cahokian diaspora these roles were left behind, though the fundamental ontologies associated with Earth Mother and the Great Serpent remain and were carried with the migrants either back to their homelands or to new regions. This can be seen in the occurrence of multiple Earth Mother and Great Serpent imagery detailed at the Big Five Petroglyph sites in Missouri, in which Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) suggest vulva, cross-in-circle, swirls, and concentric circles may act as a form of shorthand to illustrate Earth Mother.
The Big Five Petroglyph Sites

The Big Five Petroglyph sites, located in the southeastern quadrant of Missouri, (Figure 2), south of the Missouri River and west of the Mississippi River, are Madden Creek, Washington State Park A and B, Three Hills Creek, and the Wallen Creek sites.

Figure 2. Map of the Big Five Petroglyph sites ((Map Courtesy of Naim Hredoy).

Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) describe these sites as a cluster of petroglyph sites associated with the Big River located directly to the east. They suggest the majority of the Big Five are related to the Cahokia diaspora (A.D. 1200-1300), or the period directly after the
Cahokian florescence of A.D. 1050-1200. Though they also suggest there is some evidence of possible rock art imagery dating to A.D. 1000-1200.

Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018), in an analysis of the iconography present at the Big Five, suggest the sites are aligned on a north/south axis, possibly reflecting a Dhegihan cosmoscape. The sites’ close association with a large waterway such as the Big River is not only linked as an axis aligning the sites but are also symbolic of the importance of moving water. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) argue for a large corpus of Earth Mother and the Great Serpent imagery within the Big Five’s with both beings associated with water in the form of the Beneath World.

This axis is further divided into a northern and southern quadrant where the southern sites (Three Hills and Wallen Creek sites) may contain feminine symbolism (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:54). The northern sites, related to the Big Five, seem to incorporate more Above World imagery, such as those associated with Morning Star, suggesting the area acts as a microcosm.

The placement of these Big Five sites seems to be intentional along the Big River, with Mississippians identifying this location, with its karst topography and water sources, as an already existing sacred landscape, which they chose to enhance through symbolic imagery. The location of these Big Five sites is also significant due to the region being, “the closet corridors to the greater Cahokia area accessing the Ozarks” (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:56), suggesting some populations of Cahokians, upon leaving the GCR, may have settled here, bringing their ontologies, such as those surrounding Earth Mother and the Great Serpent with them into this region and into the MCR.
Imagery associated with the Big Five sites such as vulva, serpent, swirls, and concentric circles may imply a theme related to Earth Mother and the Great Serpent, which became a regional variation associated with preexisting mythologies related to this other-than and more-than-human-being in the GCR. These new themes of the role of Earth Mother and the Great Serpent, with command powers associated with vortexes, may have emerged out of individual roles and previous ontologies associated with these two beings. This may be evident in the cultural continuity of specific characteristics associated with motifs and elements related to these two supernaturals and the creation and abandonment of others. Further, we may see this new ontology migrate into the MCR and be expanded upon to fit environmental, social, and political climates encountered in that region.

**Middle Cumberland Region (MCR)**

The Middle Cumberland (aka, Middle Cumberland River Valley) is located in north central Tennessee (Moore et al. 2006:90). This region includes the Inner and Outer Basin, which is encompassed by the Highland Rim regions (Figure 3). It contains the drainage area between the Caney Fork River and the Cumberland River in its eastern region, and the Red and Cumberland River to the west (Moore et al 2014:26; Smith 1992).
Due to the elevation differences between the MCR and the Cumberland Plateau, to the east, a rain shadow effect occurred, which increased the rain value in the Tennessee River Valley, but reduced it in the MCR. This effect may have assisted in furthering environmental stressors related to successive droughts the area experienced (Kelso 2017:418). Archaeologists and paleoclimatologists (Benson et al. 2009; Cook et al. 2007) state that an outmigration of the MCR occurred in the late fifteenth century, possibly related to the persistent and long duration drought conditions. This period of outmigration has been termed the “Vacant Quarter” (Williams 1990). According to Kelso, violence increased during this time in the MCR along with, “demographic and cultural change” (2017:420). Kelso (2017) has suggested, along with the
increase in violence, that the Mississippians, especially subadults, of the Cumberland Region may have experienced health issues stemming from the droughts.

Robert Sharp and colleagues (2011) have completed extensive research on female effigy figures in the MCR. Their analysis includes a corpus of hump-back and straight-back female effigies, mostly from burials. Most notably, they assembled a corpus of female effigies with a negative painted pattern, which they have termed as a possible shawl or cloak (Sharp et al. 2011). They suggest the patterned cloak creates a strong “identity marker for this personage” (Sharp et al. 2011:181). They further note that these female figurines may illustrate, “the Siouan Earth Mother” (Sharp et al. 2011:196). Their conclusion is based on an interpretation of the cloak’s iconography, which is described as containing cross-hatching, large and small ovals, and shoulder concentric circles or spirals. Not only is this significant concerning the presented theme, but researchers have also concluded that most of these female figurines, hump-back, straight-back, and negative painted have been recovered from stone box graves containing subadults (Sharp et al. 2011). They argue for a possible relationship between this female figure and the reincarnation of children (Sharp et al. 2011).

Kelso (2017) has suggested subadults in the MCR may have suffered physical stressors from various factors such as climate. To evaluate this hypothesis, Kelso (2017) studies around fifty subadult skeletons from the Averbuch site, which has also contained female negative painted ceramic effigies, in the MCR. She concludes the subadults in the MCR had higher occurrences of pathologies and were shorter than those examined from East Tennessee sites (Kelso 2017:425). She also determined, “the population was suffering from a high frequency of infectious diseases and malnutrition” (Kelso: 2017:427). Hugh Berryman (1984) has also examined burial data from the Averbuch site and presents data relating to mortality rates for
children, and adult and male adults (see Appendix A). Berryman (1984:157) states, “Enamel hypoplasia in adult mandibular canines (the crown of which forms between birth and 4.5 years of age) occurs in 93 percent of the males and 99 percent of the females”. Berryman (1984:158) further states, “This high occurrence reflects considerable stress experienced by Averbuch inhabitants during their first few years of life”. Enamel hypoplasia is a defect of the teeth which can occur from, “environmental insults affecting growth and development (Berryman 1984:120). In Chapter 6, I further investigate a possible association between Earth Mother and her role in Mississippian ontologies relating to reincarnation for the souls of children.

Central Mississippi Valley (CMV)

Dan Morse notes that the CMV is defined as, “the area between the mouth of the Ohio and Arkansas rivers” (2009: xi). This research will focus on extreme southeastern Missouri and northeastern Arkansas regions of the CMV (figure 4). This is opposed to the Lower Mississippi Valley, defined as, “present-day southern Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama, southeastern Oklahoma and eastern Texas over toward central Alabama, and all of the modern states of Louisiana and Mississippi” (Kaufam 2019:3).
In the Mississippian era this area was encompassed by drainages of the Mississippi River, oxbow lakes, and inundated swamp land. Most sites are located on natural levees and other areas of raised land. Water inundated landscapes may have been seen as a microcosm to the Beneath World where transcendental beings such as the Great Serpent and other water spirits dwelled. This focus on water-related imagery may be seen in the ceramic effigies associated with the Underwater Panther (aka Cat Serpents) and other serpent iconography. Water spirit imagery in
the CMV become widespread circa A.D. 1250 and extended into the mid-seventeenth century (Dye 2018:34).

Cat Serpent effigies in the form of ceramic bowls may be linked to the northeast Arkansas and southeast Missouri regions (within the areas identified as the northern Lower Mississippi Valley by David Dye, personal communication), suggesting a tight control on the ontologies associated with this other-than-human-being. These vessels date from approximately A.D. 1550 to 1650 (Dye 2018:51) making them later than the serpent imagery occurring in the MCR, suggesting a possible transition in the worldviews surrounding this being or an increase in the frequency of need. Dye (2018:53) suggests these vessels contain sacred imagery related to the “consistent use of four lines that descend from the mouth, trail down the neck, and form a volute or vortex on the water spirit’s body, defining the movement of life forces in the cycle of rebirth”. The CMV also contains a large assemblage of Earth Mother hooded bottle effigies, maintaining the importance of Earth Mother in the Mississippian cosmoscapes and her entanglement to the Great Serpent. This may suggest, “a collage or conjunction of cultic institutions” (Dye 2018:34). Though imagery, which seems to be unique to the region, occurs on a small percentage of these Earth Mother ceramics.

The Earth Mother imagery of the northern Lower Mississippi Valley demonstrates cultural continuity in fundamental characteristics, which were seen in the GCR and the MCR. One of these continued themes is the relationship between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent. A figure displaying continued themes and possibly new ones is a hooded female effigy bottle from eastern Arkansas (Reilly 2004:135, Figure 19a-b). This figure shows a female figure, in a seated position with legs tucked underneath the body, lines emitting from the sides and bottom of the mouth, ridges along the back, diamond shapes on the back, and “a necklace of intertwined
ogee like serpents” (Reilly 2004:135) around the neck area. All key previous elements such as a female effigy and an associated serpent are included, demonstrating a pattern seen in some of the female figurines in the GCR, cave art imagery of Earth Mother and Great Serpent themes in the southeast quadrant Missouri cave system, and serpent imagery on a possible cloak detailed on a female effigy in the MCR.

The theme of a cloak and its associated motifs may demonstrate a new variant in the Mississippian ontologies surrounding Earth Mother in the MCR. The presentation of the diamonds on the back of this figure, in northeastern Arkansas, and on ceramics from southeast Missouri may illustrate another regional shift in the mythological narratives surrounding her.

These regional shifts may be demonstrated through an iconographic and stylistic interpretation of Earth Mother and Great Serpent imagery through methodology associated with an assembled corpus and the assistance of ethnographic narratives to identify the agency associated with these two more-than and other-than-human-beings.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The methodology required to examine, analyze, and construct working hypotheses related to inferred meanings of Mississippian symbolic imagery consists of a holistic approach through the varying lenses of stylistic analysis, iconographic interpretations, ethnohistoric accounts, archaeological data, spatial and temporal patterning, and paleoclimate renderings and reconstructions.

In pursuing the interpretation of past symbolic imagery through an empirical methodology, the first step is to establish a research question. This research problem presents itself in the form of a gap in observable behaviors associated with weather phenomena in ancient and preliterate societies. Modern scientific research has established specific human behaviors related to environmental stressors such as hazards and disasters occurring from acute weather phenomena in the form of flooding, short term droughts, severe thunderstorms, and tornadoes. Ethnographic records have demonstrated historical weather data through tornado frequencies and occurrences along with human responses in the form of adaptations, transformations, and resiliency. Ethnohistoric accounts associated with Native American mythologies present creation stories related to tornadoes, rituals and protections against tornadoes, and anthropomorphic characteristics of tornadoes (Pybus 2009).

Through Native American mythologies archaeologists have been able to utilize the method of upstreaming to form parallels between historical cultural hero’s and symbolic imagery associated with them to infer a cultural continuity tied to specific Mississippian motifs and elements. Through this upstreaming, archaeologists have inferred a relationship between motifs,
elements, and symbols associated with weather-related other-than-human-beings, such as Storms-as-he-walks (Boles 2011), the Hero Twins, and Lightning and Thunder Boy (Burnette et al. 2020). This problem, a gap in representation of tornado imagery in Mississippian archaeological literature, led to the scientific investigation of discerning whether tornado symbolic imagery, and to take it a step further, a tornado other-than-human-being, may be identified through an iconographic interpretation of specific motifs and elements described as tornado imagery in ethnohistoric accounts.

**Iconographic Interpretations**

While an iconographic interpretation of inferred tornado symbolic imagery is a step in the methodology related to this research an iconographic analysis, within itself, is not a justifiable means to equate for the complex entanglements associated with inferring meaning to an item of antiquity without any supporting documents in the form of a written language (Knight 2013). A multi-perspective approach would need to be undertaken to obtain sufficient data to postulate an inference.

The beginning steps of the scientific method, once a question, a topic of research, and a hypothesis have been established, is to form a way to test one’s hypothesis through a corpus of data. My test consists of establishing a corpus of Mississippian ceramics related to Earth Mother and the Great Serpent to establish a connection related to the two beings when weather powers are being illustrated. To form this assemblage, clear boundaries were set as to what characteristics constitute an Earth Mother effigy and a Cat Serpent effigy. The established parameters for Earth Mother effigies consist of a ceramic effigy in what has been termed as a female power position (Sharp et al. 2011), where the figure has both legs tucked underneath the body, visible female breasts, a hair bun or braid, clothing such as a short skirt or a shawl,
exposed collar bones, hands on the knees, an infant present, raised applications along the back or spine, and or the presence of agricultural tools or agricultural plants. Not all characteristics needed to be present to be categorized as an Earth Mother effigy, but at least one attribute or parameter needed to be met per ceramic vessel.

The specifications for a categorization of Cat Serpent effigies consists of a tail applique such as a curled tail or a straight tail, “whiskers” on the head of the effigy, exposed teeth or a shape of a mouth, bi- or tri-forked eye surrounds, horns or plumes on the head, swirled or flowing patterns on the sides of the vessel, single or forked exposed tongue, cross-hatching, cross-in-circle or swirled cross-in-circle motif on the vessel with other elements listed present, and round “blank” eyes. As with the Earth Mother parameters, multiple characteristics are not required to be present to establish the effigy as a Cat Serpent, besides an accompaniment of the cross-in-circle or swirled cross-in-circle motif with another qualifying element.

The corpus of these two more-than and other-than-human-beings was established through previously published archaeological literature, museum collections, private collections, and photographs. The corpus is divided into the four main study areas consisting of the GCR, the Big Five Petroglyph Sites, the MCR, and the CMV (table 1). Table 1 (below) reflects the artifacts inferred as containing imagery associated with vegetation, containers, and a female figure on Missouri Flint Clay statuettes in the GCR (n=6) and outliers outside of the GCR (n=6). Vulva (n=36) and serpent imagery (n=24) at the Big Five Petroglyph sites are listed as noted by Diaz-Granados and Duncan (2018). Negative painted female hooded effigy bottles are shown from the MCR (n=25). Finally, artifacts with vortex imagery and or imagery associated with the sacred breath are noted from the CMV through the Great Serpent (n=18), and Earth Mother (n=6) ceramics. This allows for a sample size of approximately 121 with the associated imagery,
though numerous ceramics and cave art associated with the Great Serpent and Earth Mother were reviewed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earth Mother/Great Serpent Research Corpus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missouri Flint Clay Female Statuettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the GCR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside of the GCR</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Big Five Petroglyph Sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vulva Motifs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serpent Motifs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Cumberland Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Negative Painted Effigies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Mississippi Valley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Serpent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earth Mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

Iconographic interpretations of Mississippian symbolic imagery have had a varied and sometimes argumentative past concerning how to approach inferring meanings with Indigenous objects. Vernon Knight (2013), in his study of iconographic methodology, suggests that beginners in iconographic analyses are frequently torn between the terminology used in art history to describe iconographic analysis and those used in archaeology. This lack of definitive definitions for iconography and the borrowing of vocabulary from art history make an established methodology for iconography difficult to pursue. Knight (2013) establishes guidelines for archaeologists pursuing iconographic analyses of symbolic imagery. He suggests that unlike iconographic analysis in art history, in archaeology iconography is not a form of art.
Franz Boas (1928) in discussing Plains Native American imagery, states that iconography is a representation instead of a depiction of artwork. Knight (2013) describes iconography as the study of visual imagery and its referents. In iconography, archaeologists look at elements and motifs to identify themes and to better understand the Mississippian cosmoscape. Prior to Knight’s work, Panofsky (1927) established rules for employing iconographic methodology to archaeological contexts. According to Matthew Colvin (2012:7), in his interpretation of the Panofsky (1927) method, “The first level of interpretation relies on identifying primary subject matter”. He goes on to state that this matter is the basic forms, colors, and the natural objects that are obvious to the one viewing the imagery. Colvin (2012) further notes that the viewer is not required to have any knowledge of the cultural identity or the inter thought processes the artist had when creating the object or the imagery.

The second level of interpretation examines “conventional subject matter and symbolism” (Colvin 2012:7). Colvin (2012) suggests at this stage one is looking to identify motifs and symbols that have a meaning within the relevant culture. However, I would argue that all motifs and symbols hold meaning within a culture, if not, then the artist would not have created them. He (Colvin 2012) goes on to state that the final step is to get the meaning behind the artwork. Colvin (2012:8) states that Panofsky (1927) calls this iconology, since it is involving the interpretation of, “symbolism and specific motifs.” He observes this last step as being difficult because one must take into consideration the artist’s perspective. However, Colvin (2012) argues that we will never be able to grasp the inner processes of an artist who created an object in antiquity and before written records.

Colvin (2012) describes his approach to the study of the Missouri Flint Clay female statutes as focusing on emergence, and defines this emergence as the sacred, “arising from the perceived
natural order due to specific circumstances and requirements” (Colvin 2012:20). While this is an interesting perspective, I argue that while the imagery discussed is part of the sacra of the Mississippians, Earth Mother did not appear due to a specific circumstance or under certain requirements, instead her creation was through a compilation of needs, which flow or shift, based on the powers presented at specific social, political, and environmental conditions.

**Stylistic Analysis**

Along with the documentation of iconography on these effigies, a stylistic analysis was also completed and consisted of spatial patterning of identifiable regional and horizon markers such as form, color, size, shape, and composition. Not only will the style of the objects be evaluated, but the style of the iconographic symbols will be noted as well. The variants in style illustrate the guidelines that are accepted, during a particular region and time, regarding what the artifacts and the imagery are to look like. Varieties in these styles suggest variances in how Mississippian artists viewed the cosmoscape. This means that my interpretation of referents will also be regionally based. Though some themes do crosscut multiple regions and time, others do not, which is why the identification of style can be so important. My stylistic approach follows that of Dye (2018), in which he identifies six main groups of early contact period water spirits based on the work of William Holmes (1886, 1903), in which Holmes focused on a whole vessel approach to separate spatial styles.

This ability to discern regional styles will assist in establishing the movement of the ontologies associated with Earth Mother through religious sodalities and the possible gatekeeping of select esoteric knowledge associated with her specific roles in varying locales such as the GCR, the MCR, and the CMV.
This stylistic interpretation will present clusters of regional interpretations and transformations associated with Earth Mother which will illustrate transformations possibly associated with stressors related to climate variations such as prolonged droughts, pluvial environments, and increased frequencies in tornado occurrences due to southern oscillations and jet streams. The differing roles of the Great Serpent based on regional interpretations and varying environmental landscapes through stylistic and iconographic interpretations and shared motifs and elements with Earth Mother effigies will present evidence of a shift in Earth Mother ontologies based on the spatial climate.

Ethnohistorical accounts will also be utilized to establish the presence of Earth Mother and Cat Serpent other-than-human-beings in weather related mythologies. Ethnohistorical accounts will further show evidence of variances in the associated mythologies based on spatial context, suggesting the ontologies associated with these beings transitioned temporally and varied within spatial boundaries through differing needs and socio-political climates. Upstreaming will be used to establish cultural continuity since Mississippians only left behind symbolic motifs and elements to tell their cultural stories and experiences.

**Archaeological data**

Archaeological data in the form of interment context will be presented when available. This data will be vital in examining the argument that most Earth Mother effigies in the MCR are buried with sub-adults (Sharp et al. 2011). Archaeologists have noted that Earth Mother’s relationship with children stems from her ability to reincarnate souls and the evidence for this may be found in burial data (Fritz and Mueller 2016; Sharp et al. 2011).
To fully evaluate this position concerning Earth Mother and subadults, all archaeological context data will be documented and analyzed to identify if a correlation between subadult burials and Earth Mother effigies can be determined. Unfortunately, due to a large percentage of my corpus from the CMV occurring from non-professional excavations, burial data is not as available in the CMV as in the MCR, which limits the availability of inferred parallels.

Archaeological data will be further used to evaluate possible ritualistic affiliations of these effigies with ceremonial architecture. Emerson (1982) has presented evidence for what he had termed a fertility cult in the GCR based on the presence of Missouri Flint Clay female figurines and architecture associated with fertility ceremonies. The data associated with these claims will be examined to determine if a relationship exists between specific architecture and Earth Mother effigies.

Spatial and temporal data will also be constructed and examined for multiple purposes related to Earth Mother and Cat Serpent effigies. For one, the occurrences of these effigies may be centralized to three distinct regions; the GCR, the MCR, and the CMV, which will be analyzed to establish if these effigies occur in outlying regions due to a movement of religious sodalities.

A spatial analysis will determine if the ontologies of these other-than-human-beings moved around the landscape as large migrations occurred or if there are distinct boundaries and buffer zones around various styles and symbolic imagery on the effigies. Temporal data will be used to establish the timelines associated with particular styles and iconography to assist the spatial analysis in establishing possible horizon and regional markers or if there is an intermingling of different styles and iconography in the three regions included in this research.
Migration data will be constructed through the stylistic analysis of Earth Mother and Cat Serpent effigies to establish if large groups of people were moving with these cultural ideas or if just the ideas were moving, possibly through the establishment of religious sodalities in new territories. This data will also be used to evaluate if stylistic and iconographic changes occurred independently within established regions or if aspects were brought in from varying locations and if established, what locations.

Finally, paleoclimate renderings and reconstructions in the form of Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) data will be examined in order to identify any major shifts in the climate which may have led to outmigration from certain locations into other areas and to facilitate a transition in ontologies associated with Earth Mother and Cat Serpent themes. The PDSI, which analyzes soil moisture levels, will be used to establish the duration and level of droughts occurring in the GCR, MCR, and the CMV temporally and specific spatial scales. Other climate data such as tornado frequencies and occurrences from noaa.gov and weather.com will be provided to establish patterning of tornado occurrences spatially.
Chapter 4
Shattered Ontologies of Earth Mother in the Greater Cahokia Region

Nucleation

Around A.D. 1050, the American Bottom experienced a boom or a nucleation of populations especially in the GCR resulting in what would become the largest city north of Mexico prior to European colonization, Cahokia. One contributing factor to this nucleation is a 50-year pluvial period lasting until about A.D. 1100 (see figure 5) and creating an ideal climate for sustaining large populations (Benson et al. 2009). However, if we examine PDSI data from this time we see that the American Bottom was not the only area experiencing wet conditions, with most of the northern Lower Mississippi Valley and the MCR also experiencing these ideal conditions. This suggests the boom of Cahokia may have had further external and internal factors associated with its fluorescence than an ideal climate. One of these factors may have been environmental in the form of a large expanse of well-drained soil in addition to swamps and lakes providing aquatic subsistence options through the CMV. Locations such as southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas in the nLCMV also provided a similar aquatic environment. While limited research has occurred in the eastern Arkansas area, related to the Cherry Valley Phase A.D. 1000, the area of eastern Arkansas and southeastern Missouri was not as nucleated with such a substantial population as that of the GCR, with large Mississippian polities only emerging in the Middle Mississippian period and expanding in population during the Late Mississippian period.
Figure 5. PDSI data map of the American Bottom and northern Lower Central Mississippi Valley. North American Drought Analysis [http://drought.memphis.edu/NADA/](http://drought.memphis.edu/NADA/).

Another key relationship between Cahokia and the Cherry Valley phase is evidence of interactions through Mississippian beaker ceramics and Cahokian style pottery, such as Ramey Incised sherds located at the Cherry Valley site. This raises the question as to why one area boomed into a large polity, while the other remained on a smaller scale and, with influence over a smaller region. One suggestion could be the formation of the Richland Complex to the east/southeast of Cahokia (Figure 6). This agricultural reorganization and nucleation, during this wet period may have been the difference between the GCR and the eastern Arkansas Cherry
Valley phase. With the ability to support large populations, polities such as Cahokia, East St. Louis, and the Emerald Acropolis emerged with the luxury of focusing on the formation of religious sodalities, the resources to send these religious sodalities out to establish more religious sodalities throughout the Mississippian world, and the ability to designate ritual specialists to create iconography related to a tightly controlled tripartite cosmoscape. According to Benson and colleagues (2009:472), “a populous Richland farming complex may have been an integral aspect of the early Mississippian reorganization of agricultural production in the region”. Benson and colleagues (2009:474) further state, “for Cahokia to grow, agricultural intensification of extensification must have occurred” and that “various affiliated farming populations, might have provided the impetus”. To further sum up the importance of the Richland Farming Complex on the nucleation and sustainment of the GCR Benson and associates (2009:474) suggest, “The Richland farming complex represents the most likely engine that drove Cahokia’s agricultural reorganization of its countryside”.

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Figure 6. Map of major polities in the GCR in relation to the Richland farming complex (Map Courtesy of Naim Hredy).
Birger Figurine

One mythical narrative, which was perpetuated from the GCR was the use of Missouri Flint Clay to craft female figurines, possibly in reflection of an earlier Woodland and possibly Hopewellian concept of an Earth Mother, or a creator to all life on Earth. These figures were frequently depicted with agricultural imagery, possibly in an understanding that the local region had established its prominence due to large-scale agricultural production occurring at the Richland Farming Complex. One of these Missouri Flint Clay figurines, known as the Birger figurine, was discovered at the BBB Motor site in a shallow pit (Emerson 1984). This figure is stated to represent Earth Mother (Prentice 1985), and may demonstrate the Mississippian ontology in the GCR during the Lohman and Stirling phases. The theme, displayed by the ritual specialist who created it, ensured agriculture would be illustrated such as the use of a possible Mill Creek hoe in the hand of the figure.

Benson and colleagues (2009:471) note, “around Cahokia during the Lohman phase, the density of hoe-blade resharpening flakes in excavated domestic refuse indicates that the rate at which the tools were used and resharpened increased with distance from Cahokia at the same time that other items decreased”. This addition of a Mill Creek hoe in the hand of Earth Mother may relate the importance of the Richland Farming Complex to the existence of new ontologies associated with Earth Mother and her entanglement with agriculture. However, the imagery associated with the Birger figurine goes much deeper than illustrating the importance of agriculture to the area.

The female figure seems to be the centralizing theme in the image, with the viewers eyes assessing her before any of the other motifs. Though part of her face and back of her head are missing from a paddlewheel cut, her face is still striking in the detail the creator made sure to
portray. The most notable feature, in my opinion, on her face is her mouth, which seems to be set in a grimace with her teeth clenched together and her bottom lip slightly protruded, as if she is determined in her task, or perhaps angry. She is shown kneeling with her right hand holding a hoe, which is slightly embedded in the body of a serpent. Her left hand, which has been described as resting on the serpent, seems to demonstrate a different meaning, one which the creator made sure to illustrate in the detail of the placement of the fingers. Her four fingers are located on the side of the serpent’s neck, just behind his head. The thumb, however, is shown on top of the neck as if she is holding the large creature down. Her left knee also seems to be on the top side of the serpent and assisting in keeping the creature from moving. On her body near the neckline and collarbone area is a strap of some sort, connected to a large pack that is on her back. Some form of long rectangular items stick out of the top of the pack, while vines of what Fritz (2019) describes as a variety of squash grow up and over it. The woman wears a skirt around her lower waist and legs, which is a common characteristic in the Missouri Flint Clay figurines, and the heels of her feet are not connected with the ground, but instead seem to also be slightly on the serpent.

The serpent, which is thought to represent the Great Serpent due to its feline characteristics, is shown wrapped around the edge of the circular platform beneath the two figures. His face contains two large round eyes, void of any pupils. He has two nostrils and a mouth full of feline-like teeth. The upper and lower teeth are set just slightly apart, as if muscle control has been lost and rigor mortis has set in. He contains no iconography on his body until we get to the end of his body which splits in two. One section turns into a vine, while the second section is bulbous on the end, probably representing a squash plant.
The artist’s intent may be to illustrate a display of dominance over the serpent or perhaps dominance over death, of which the Great Serpent rules over in the Beneath World. In a sense it seems to say, that though death may come, new life will always emerge. Possibly hinting at Earth Mother ability to reincarnate. This especially comes into play when we investigate the rear view of the statuette. In detailing the opposing side of the statuette, Fritz (2019) states that she has a strap above her breast which is connected to a bag or a basket on her back. She goes on to say, “The snake’s body bifurcates under the figure’s right arm and turns into two squash vines, one of which continues to follow the outer perimeter of the base, whereas the other climbs up the woman’s back to her left shoulder” (Fritz 2019:74). According to Lankford (2004), Diaz-Granados (2018), and Reilly (2004), the viewer is frequently provided with identifiers on the Great Serpent to illustrate which world he is residing in. Horns are the Middle World, wings the Above World, and the swirled cross in circle motif is the Beneath World. However, on the Birger figurine we are not provided with any of these. We could infer that this display is taking place in the middle world, since we are provided the circular base, and with middle world vegetation on the female being.

The main reason we are not given these identifiers may be because the Great Serpent is dead. The Earth Mother, in establishing her dominance in the three worlds, has killed him, and in this motif, he is being reincarnated or renewed in the vegetative vines. Her hand, which is placed on the serpent’s head or neck, is actually holding him down, with four fingers to one side of his neck and the thumb placed on top of his head. The kneeling position, normally attributed to a power stance of men, may demonstrated the power of Earth Mother, or possibly used as another restraint on the body of the serpent. Reilly (2004) also suggests that the female figure is emerging from the bifurcated tail of the serpent, with him being a portal. I would disagree and
say that the heels of her feet are shown on top of his bifurcated tail and not from the center of the serpent’s body. She is in control of the display, with the snake as a submissive actor, unable or unwilling to stop his fate. The association with the two beings in the Birger figurine is depicting more than an agriculture mythic narrative; instead, it is showing the dominance of the Earth Mother as the creature of all beings, the relationship between the two in an intimate fashion, and an association of water with the Great Serpent being from the watery realm and possibly the Earth Mother as being able to provide rain from the sky for agricultural growth, through vortex imagery seen in the late Mississippian period in the CMV. According to Fritz (2019) the vegetative matter, which may be growing from the serpents decaying body splits into two vines, with one vine crawling up the woman’s back and gaining maturity into squash as it goes, while the other vine follows the perimeter of the base. These same flat type of squash may also be identified as hands on a female hooded effigy bottle from the CMV, which will be discussed further in Chapter 7, and may suggest some cultural continuity in Earth Mother mythological narratives.

Other Missouri Flint Clay figurines display similar imagery, such as the West figurine, from the Sponneman site, which illustrates two serpents positioned on and about a female character with “One of the segments show[ing] the figurine holding the head of a serpent with her arm” (Jackson et al. 1994:292). Colvin (2012:245) states, “It would appear the female is either restricting the serpent or controlling its movement”. This restriction is like the control demonstrated by Earth Mother over the serpent in the Birger figurine. Other female figurines contain imagery related to vegetation, and possible bundles with all of these figures showing signs of being ritually killed or burnt prior to interment. Burnette and colleagues (2020:229) state, “When Cahokia began to decline in the thirteenth century, the figurines were either
destroyed or decommissioned along with the temples in which they resided”. This leads to the question of why these figurines displaying a specific more-than-human-being in the Mississippian cosmoscapes was not only ritually killed but buried and sometimes burned. While the GCR enjoyed the fluorescence of the local area, due in part to an ideal climate and a surplus of food produced from the Richard Farming Complex, the cause of their success and nucleation may have also become their downfall.

Droughts

By the late Stirling phase (A.D. 1150-1200), the Richland Farming Complex had experienced almost complete abandonment (Pauketat 2003). During this period the region experienced severe and prolonged drought conditions (figure 7). This drought may be evident in a drop in the local water table, causing farmers to shift their farming from the uplands into the Mississippi River floodplain (Benson et al. 2009).

By the end of the Stirling phase, construction had stopped on Monks Mound. This is also the time during which the Birger figurine, along with other Missouri Flint Clay female figurines were ritually killed and deposited (Emerson 1984; Pauketat 2004; Reed et al. 1968). After the 50-year wet period from A.D. 1050-1100, leading to the nucleation of the GCR, “two multi-decadal droughts” occurred (Benson et al. 2009:474). These droughts may have assisted in further fragmenting regional societies, leading to an outmigration into areas such as the MCR.
Figure 7. PDSI data map illustrating drought conditions in the American Bottom and northern Lower Central Mississippi Valley. North American Drought Analysis
http://drought.memphis.edu/NADA/
Other Missouri Flint Clay Figures

The influence of Cahokian ontologies into other regions such as the MCR and the CMV is more prevalent than those of other areas such as the Cherry Valley phase in eastern Arkansas, which never reached the nucleation levels of the similar early Lohman phase in the American Bottom. One designation of this influence is through a stylistic analysis of the Missouri Flint Clay figurines to identify these figurines in regions defined as outliers, such as the Westbrook figurine from Desha County, Arkansas, the New Madrid female from New Madrid County, Missouri, the McBeth figurine from Pickaway county, Ohio, and the Spiro figurine from LeFlore County, Oklahoma (Boles 2022; Brown 2021).

Boles (2022) has identified six Missouri Flint Clay figurines from the GCR and six from outside of the GCR. He states that two of the six occurring from outside of the GCR are made up of limestone and sandstone instead of Missouri Flint Clay. However, the theme associated with the Missouri Flint Clay figurines mimics those on the other two materials. The six figurines from the GCR demonstrate a tight centralization associated with the esoteric knowledge associated with these figurines, which were probably controlled by a religious sodality. The identification of six of these figures outside the GCR and four from other states may suggest the decision to establish religious sodalities, focusing on this Earth Mother ontology, in other areas possibly for establishing a networking relationship between Cahokia and these other regions. The identification of these figures outside of the GCR may not be the result of the later outmigration of the region. I believe sodalities, associated with these figurines, were established during the Cahokian fluorescence instead of its diaspora.
One of these outliers, named the McBeth figurine, is defined as a limestone pipe from Pickaway County, Ohio (Boles 2022). This figurine was broken, like the other female figures, and contain similar imagery in the form of the figure on a circular disk, a skirt above the knees, straps and pouches on the body, and vegetative imagery. It is not clear if the figurine was turned into a pipe at Cahokia or after, however Boles (2022:51) thinks the figurine, “was of Cahokian manufacture.”

The Westbrook figurine was recovered from Desha County, Arkansas. This figurine also sits on a circular disk, has a basket with her, and vegetative imagery and had been ritually killed, possibly by a piece of galena associated with the burial context (Boles 2022).

The Schild figurine from Illinois, depicts a female figure with a serpent draped over her shoulder, a basket or container behind her, a knee length skirt, and she is sitting on a circular disk. Her right hand has either turned into a flat squash or is inside a form of pouch, the use of a flat object on a female effigy is similar to a hooded effigy bottle from eastern Arkansas in which the hands of the female figure resembled flat squashes such as on the back of the Birger figurine. This figurine also has shown signs of breakage, suggesting a ritual killing. The Bostrom figurine is from Madison County, Illinois, and is also in the form of a pipe. The figure is kneeling and described as holding, “a smaller human figure in its outstretched arms” (Boles 2022:56). Emerson (2003:146) suggests the figure may be associated with souls, possibly reincarnation, which he bases on the smaller human figure being held. This figure also contains a pouch. Though this vessel represents the Earth Mother theme and similar imagery with the other Cahokia-style female figurines, due to its horizontal pose of the figure and lack of vegetative or serpent imagery its stylistic associations do not match with the other figurines.
The New Madrid figure, located in New Madrid County, Missouri has been discovered in multiple pieces throughout the years (Boles 2022). This vessel has a knee length skirt, lidded baskets, pouches, and resides on a circular disk, similar to the other figurines. Unfortunately, due to its broken state a lot of the figure, which may provide more clues to its association to the other figures, has not been located.

The final outlier discussed in this research is the Spiro figurine. This figurine is mentioned last due to its importance in the association of a ritual decommissioning, something that has been evident in all the Missouri Flint Clay female statuettes including the ones made from sandstone and limestone.

The Spiro site, located in eastern Oklahoma, experienced an extreme multidecadal drought from A.D.1378-A.D.1401, which may have been one of the deciding factors to close the Great Mortuary (Burnette et al. 2020:82). After the closure of the Great Mortuary, a ritual space known as the Spirit Lodge was constructed. Inside this area was a single individual, surrounded by sacred objects, possibly representing a microcosm. In the center of this microcosm was a female figure, similar in theme to the Missouri Flint Clay figurines but created from sandstone. Her centralized position seems to represent her as a central focus in the Mississippian cosmoscapes. Once the burial and its associated diorama of sacred objects were placed in the Lodge, the Lodge was then capped with clay, sealing off the items inside and possibly acting as another form of ritual killing, or decommissioning, muting the powers of the sacred objects buried within.

Like Cahokia, Spiro underwent a transformation in their ontologies, which can be seen in the closing of the Spirit Lodge and its associated sacred objects. The fact that a female effigy figure was in the center of the diorama, may allude to the significance of this more-than-
human-being in the Mississippian cosmoscapes before multi-decadal droughts acted as one form of stressor forcing Mississippians into political and social transformations, eventually resulting in a migration out of the area.

Spiro is another example of identifiers within the archaeological record, such as signs of the ritual killing of sacred items, where an abandoning of specific ontologies may be recognized. When evidence is accompanied by a stylistic interpretation, such as with the Missouri Flint Clay figurines, we can begin to discern when these regional themes are relocated to other areas, such as the outlying figures located outside the GCR, but still maintaining key stylistic attributes to the Cahokian made figures.

Due to the severe and prolonged droughts occurring in these regions, an outmigration occurred into the east and south resulting in already established ontologies merging with new ones brought by the migrants. The mythological narratives associating Earth Mother with the renewal of vegetation may not have been as prominent since agriculture was currently suffering from climate changes. This led to Mississippians maintaining the importance of Earth Mother and her key fundamental characteristics but altering the command powers that she now possessed. This shift may be seen in the lack of vegetative imagery associated with Earth Mother going forward and instead a new focus on her ability to reincarnate, something that may have now become a vital need.

Smaller groups of Mississippian migrants, coming from the American Bottom and possibly the Spiro area may have also decided that their world needed a reset to restore what had become a chaotic world. This reset might be visible at the Big Five Petroglyph sites where Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) identify cave art associated with creation stories such as Earth Mother birthing prominent more-than-human-beings who would become vital to the
Mississippian cosmoscapes and mythological narratives. Intercourse scenes involving Earth
Mother and serpent-like creatures are also frequent in the caves, possibly reestablishing the
importance of this relationship (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). This rebalancing of the
cosmos may have been another form of transformational resilience in which the Mississippians
are adjusting and resetting their worldviews to try and combat an environmental stressor they did
not know how to control. Thanks to the work of Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) at the Big
Five Petroglyph sites, further evidence for this transformation, during a pivotal time of the
Mississippian worlds, may be examined.
Chapter 5

Viewing Earth Mother Through Her Many Veils

Barbara Bender (1993) suggests landscapes are created through the experiences of those modifying them, which makes them valuable as a window or a veil into shared societal identities such as important mythological narratives and the socio-political influences of specific religious sodalities in certain regions through time. This perspective allows for the possible identification of regional religious sodalities, through sacred imagery depicted in cave and rock art. These differing dominant themes are perhaps referenced by sodalities focusing on other-than or more-than-human-beings and delineating various communication points for specific beings and specific powers within the landscape.

Landscape approaches to examining the cultural systems around static, or immovable, places such as cave, rock, and tree art allow for a “fixed and immutable” snapshot temporally and spatially of the local ontologies (Sabo and Simek 2018:1). This type of in-situ contextual analysis is not available to moveable sacred objects such as ceramics and ritual lithic artifacts, circulated or heir-loomed which can be from a different spatial or temporal framework and transferred through the movement of religious sodalities. George Sabo and Jan Simek (2018:1) argue for a universal view of landscapes such as caves, which possess “strong ties to the sacred”. Other sacred landscapes such as images in forested areas also maintain a strong tie to the sacred.

This perspective allows for the inference that elements and symbols encoded in these landscapes portray the sacred, such as dawn time activities, tripartite cosmoscapes, and other-than and more-than-human-beings who inhabit the cosmos along with their associated command
powers. These sacred landscapes were, “made and used” (Sabo and Simek 2018:5), where rituals associated with sacred imagery were performed and other-than and more-than-human-beings may have received messages and observed the realm of humans through the thin veil that exists between the multiple Mississippian worlds or cosmoscapes. These landscapes were places in which sacred events took place, communication with supernatural beings could be established, shamans could interact with the powerful, and the deceased could enter or return from their next journey.

This alteration, enhancement, or manipulation of cave and forested landscapes in the form of petroglyphs, pictographs, and dendroglyphs has become a focus for understanding Mississippian sacred landscapes in the past few decades (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018; Loubser et al. 2018; Sabo and Simek 2018). Where cave and rock art, were once viewed as graffiti, it is now referenced as a vital piece in understanding how varying Mississippian cultures used their landscapes as tangible microcosms and how they communicated with other-than and more-than-human-beings residing in these cosmoescapes. This chapter investigates the transformation of the landscape into a gendered microcosm focusing on feminine-related motifs from cave art and rock art in the Mississippian world with a strong focus on vulva motifs. A lesser emphasis on, though just as important, an evaluation of further feminine imagery in the form of concentric circles, cross-in-circle and swirled-cross-in-circle-motifs, and spirals will also be examined. Other in-situ sacred imagery such as those occurring through dendroglyphs, or images occurring on trees, will be evaluated to express a similar role between dendroglyphs, pictographs, and petroglyphs in transforming possibly already sacred landscapes into microcosms allowing symbols to operate as a locative, an illustration of command powers, and an identifier of other-than and more-than-human beings. Finally, Southwest imagery possibly
associated with the ability to snare life forces will be presented to argue for the potential occurrence of similar ontologies associated with imagery illustrating the Mississippian cosmoscapes.

**Petroglyphs and Pictographs**

Petroglyphs, or carvings in stone, and pictographs or paintings on stone, collectively termed rock art, represent a widespread phenomenon not only in the United States but internationally as well. In the Mississippian cosmoscapes, cave depictions and rock art assist archaeologists in connecting sacred imagery in the landscape to esoteric knowledge portrayed on ritualistic objects. This in-situ representation of esoteric knowledge presents in discernible patterning allowing for a tighter temporal and spatial framework than sacred imagery on moveable objects such as ceramics, shell, lithics, and textiles. Just as themes are illustrated on these various other media, the ability to recognize reoccurring themes concerning the Mississippian cosmoscapes, not only spatially in the landscape, but also as divisions of scenes and other-than and more-than human beings inside caves and on rock art assists in identifying transitions in ontologies and the movement of religious sodalities. One example of a theme patterning; within a regional sacred landscape, can be seen in the Big Five petroglyph sites in Missouri, which represent a network of sacred landscapes that provide the ability to view how people connected to the landscape around them and how they manipulated their environments to create or transform invisible cosmoscapes into tangible microcosms (Lankford 2004).

The Big Five Petroglyph sites include Maddin Creek, Washington State Park A and B, Three Hills Creek, and Wallen Creek (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). The time periods associated with the Big Five include a range from, emergent Cahokia florescent, and post Cahokian diaspora (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:32), though Duncan and Diaz-Granados
suggest a majority of the rock art at the Big Five date to just after the Cahokian diaspora, i.e.,
early fourteenth century. The Big Five may have seen the outmigration of Mississippians from
the GCR where a shift in ontologies associated with a powerful more-than-human-being known
as Earth Mother may have been or already transitioned. This transition may be expressed in
feminine motifs illustrated in the Big Five sites. However, just as telling, is the lack of other
previously associated feminine imagery from the GRC in the form of vegetation. The Big Five
may document this transition in female motifs from the GRC and into the MCR where differing
female-related motifs increase in frequency.

**Vulva Motifs**

The vulvar motif is the main feminine motif found at the Big Five, especially in the sites
in the southern region of the area. According to Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2004), 18 recorded
rock art sites in Missouri have at least one, and sometimes more than one, vulvar motif.
Examples range from Washington State Park in the form of a large vulva motif and Miller Cave
in the form of a bisected horseshoe shape (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004:191). The vulvar
motif is referred to as Uye by the Omaha and Ushje by the Osage, both of whom, along with
possibly all Dhegihan speakers, believe this symbol represents the womb of the world (Radin
1948:37, see also Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004:200). The motif is also referenced as a portal
to the underworld (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004), from where Earth Mother’s children also
emerged (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018), and as a womb or grave of the Earth where people
are buried (Diaz-Granados 2004).

The vulva motif, as previously stated, is also a metaphor for the portal to the Lower
World at the time of death. This can be seen in a mythic narrative recounted by Radin in which
Morning Star is told not to go near Earth Mother’s vulva. He enters it and discovers it is full of
people (Radin 1948). This may reference the idea of graves inside the Earth and the womb of Earth Mother being linked to a grave, which acts as a holding place for those waiting for reincarnation or travel to the Realm of the Dead (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018).

Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018:61), in discussing vulva motif placement in caves, state the motifs are in a location to receive the sun’s light as it sets, “Because of its placement we are reasonably certain that this vulvar motif represents the portal where the sun enters the body of First Woman at end’s day”. They further state that no vulva motifs have been discovered in the dark zones of caves, which is interesting considering Earth Mother’s ties to the Beneath World.

Vulvar motifs are not limited to cave art, they are also depicted on the back of the heads of cat serpent effigies in the CMV (Figure 8) and on hooded female effigy bottles occurring in the MCR and the CMV. Its frequency in cave art, however, suggests a strong tie to Earth Mother and caves. This affiliation may also be seen in the GCR in Missouri Flint Clay female statuettes, which possibly depict Earth Mother (Emerson and Hughes 2000:93). It is important to note that multiple of these female statuettes depict associated serpent imagery. Associations between Earth Mother and serpents, especially the Great Serpent, have also been noted in cave art (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018).
The vulvar motif is thought to be a Lower World motif, one of the most widespread of cave art petroglyphs. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018:36) note that the “vulvar motif is the second most prolific and it seems to be limited in its geographical distribution when compared with the aviamorphs”, and that it is a predominant motif associated with the Big Five with 44% of vulvar motifs found at Malden Creek and Washington State Park A.
However, motifs possibly related to the Great Serpent are also frequently found at the Big Five, with 50% of the serpent motifs occurring at Washington State Park A. This association between vulvar and serpent motifs is further strengthened by vulvar motifs accounting for 38.5% and serpent motifs 38% of motifs depicted at a smaller site, Wallen Creek. The frequency in which vulvar and serpent motifs occur together, or near each other, at the remaining Big Five petroglyph sites is also significant.

While Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) suggest a gendered feminine landscape at the Big Five sites, the vulva motif is also found at rock and cave art in other regions, accompanied by serpent motifs. Petroglyphs in Allamakee County, Iowa, found at the Ratcliffe Sacred Rock (13AM140), contain possible imagery related to Earth Mother and the Great Serpent (Stanley 2004). Lori Stanley states the Ratcliffe Sacred Rock is unique due to its independence, “All other known petroglyph sites…of northeast Iowa consist of multiple figures incised into sandstone and are located within rock shelters or crevices”. Stanley suggests the rock may have fallen from a higher outcrop (2004:19). The Ratcliffe Sacred Rock occurs on dolomite instead of sandstone and “exhibits a single petroglyph” (Stanley 2004:19).

The imagery on the rock is described as, “two concentric circles with an undulating tail extending downward from the outer circle” (Stanley 2004:19) (Figure 9).
Figure 9. Sacred rock illustrates a possible vulva and serpent motif intertwined (From Stanley 2004:21).
Ellison Orr (1963:85) interpreted the imagery as having, “a more than usual mystical meaning” and suggested it was, “the dwelling place of a more than usually powerful spirit”. The imagery may also infer a vulva motif along with serpent imagery. What is being described as a tail may in fact portray a serpent and reference the Great Serpent in his role as a consort to Earth Mother. The concentric circle symbol is similar to what Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) have inferred as a vulvar motif in sacred imagery occurring at the Big Five petroglyph sites. Though the Ratcliffe Sacred Rock symbols were created by Oneota people, rather than Mississippians, a shared sacred esoteric knowledge may exist between the two cultures as it relates to the importance of the relationship between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent.

This association with Earth Mother and the Great Serpent may be linked to intercourse with the Great Serpent; being the consort of Earth Mother. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) note multiple intercourse themes between the Great Serpent and Earth Mother at the Big Five petroglyph sites. However, this relationship may extend further, perhaps being associated with a duality between life and death along with Earth Mother’s role in reincarnation. Both beings may command a life force known to Dhégihan speakers as Wakanda, which has the ability to animate with a life force and also take it away.

Vulvas as Vortexes

Imagery associated with the Great Serpent’s role in the removal of Wakanda may be seen in a ceramic beaker from southeast Missouri where two interlocked serpents surround a swirl, or what Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) call a spinning-cross-in-circle.

In 2019 I argued that these serpents were guarding this portal; however, I am now under the impression that the serpents are being illustrated as creating it. Muskogee Creek narratives
refer to a giant serpent being able to create a whirlpool (Dye 2018; Lankford 2004; Loubser et al. 2018:230). While the cross-in-circle may demonstrate the earth, the swirled-cross-in-circle motif may illustrate motion; that motion, in this instance, is that of spinning water to open a vortex allowing for souls to enter into the Under World.

Figure 8 depicts a motif on the back of a cat serpent, which Duncan and Diaz Granados (2018) suggest is a vulva motif. (Turner 1963) notes that in Hopi mythological narratives people are born through the Earth Mother’s womb in water. This vortex may be a positional motif changing the command power of the vulva motif based on its contexts on the Great Serpent. Instead of being born through the vulva in water, as mentioned by Turner (1967), the souls of the dead may go through this vortex/vulva into the Beneath World where they have the opportunity to be reborn. With Duncan and Diaz-Granados’ (2018) argument for the swirled cross-in-circle or swastika motif, and the vulva motif being interchangeable, or having the ability to become polysemous, I would agree both symbols represent a vortex, possibly identified as creating a vulva portal, in the form of a whirlpool opening to the Beneath World. Loubser and colleagues (2018:222) suggest “Water was considered a transformational medium that helped people penetrate the barrier and enter the hidden world”, meaning that water is the veil to the Underworld.

Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018:48) in discussing the Three Creeks Hill site state that the cross-in-circle-motif may illustrate, “the First Woman, her body, her realm beneath the Middle World”, suggesting the First Woman or Earth Mother has the ability to access or even possibly reside in the Beneath World and allowing for a vulva motif to open as a vortex in the water leading to the Beneath World. In the Big Five, vulva motifs are referenced as facing west, the direction associated with the Realm of First Woman and death (Duncan and Diaz-Granados...
Cherokee and Creek mythic narratives describe the spirits of the dead as “resurrected during their sojourn through the dark land of the dead in the west” (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:218). Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018:61) further suggest the vulva and the swirled-cross-in-circle motifs are interchangeable and the “vulva is the portal where the dead begin their journey”. Loubser and colleagues (2018:230) state, “concentric rings and spirals are graphic allusions to entrances into the spirit world”.

This may mean the vortex or vulva to the Beneath World is the beginning stage in the afterlife and possibly the holding area for beings who were waiting to be reincarnated, thus reinforcing the mythic narrative in which Morning Star steps into Earth Mother’s vulva and sees it full of people. The Cherokee and Creek have narratives in which canoeists could see, the “round dome of a townhouse” underneath the water. When a canoe was sucked into a whirlpool, the occupant “could look down as through the roof beam of a house, and there at the bottom of the river he has seen a great company of people, who looked up and beckoned to him to join them” (Mooney 1900:347; see also Loubser et al. 2018: 230).

However, if the vulva motif and the swirled-cross-in-circle represent Earth Mother, why is this motif present on the back of a cat serpent? Lankford (2004) defines the swastika or swirled cross-in-circle as being associated with the Great Serpent as a shorthand for the Beneath World. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018: 61) also state, “More often, the use of a counter-clockwise spinning cross-in-circle is found on the heads of serpentine figures with feline attributes, representing the Great Serpent”. How can a motif associated with Earth Mother also represent the Great Serpent? This is where positional symbols come into play, which in turn transition dominant symbols, such as the swirled cross-in-circle, to polysemous, or having multiple meanings based on the symbols in context with them (Turner 1963). In cave art imagery
containing vulva motifs, Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) associate the vulva motif with Earth Mother through creation stories related to giving birth to her and her more-than-human-being children. The use of this symbol, now associated with the Great Serpent, changes its meaning to an underwater vulva, though it still maintains its original representation of Earth Mother, suggesting this particular command symbol, demonstrating a specific command of power to the Great Serpent in the form of opening a portal through a whirlpool, is still related to Earth Mother, thus reinforcing a strong association between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent.

Diaz-Granados and colleagues (2004) in discussing serpent imagery in caves states, “there is no doubt that water spirits, with their rattlesnake bodies, are connected with the cycle of death and rebirth” (Diaz-Granados et al. 2015:52). Shared imagery between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent reinforces the possibility of both beings playing significant roles in death and reincarnation, in addition to the possibility that the Great Serpent has the power to call forth Earth Mother to create a vulva/vortex within the waters, or perhaps that he possesses that ability himself.

**Earth Mother as a Mother**

Earth Mother has also been associated with possible creation stories through cave art. Imagery depicted in the cave associated with Washington State Park, by the Osage, has been interpreted as displaying imagery associated with the creation of the Earth (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:45). Within the Madden Creek and Three Hills Creek sites, Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) infer motifs associated with a female anthropomorph possibly demonstrating a birthing scene. They argue this motif illustrates the creation of other-than and more-than-human-beings, which are referenced as Earth Mother’s six children. They further note that other imagery within the Big Five suggest intercourse scenes associated with the Great Serpent and Earth
Mother, referencing the strong association between these two beings. According to Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018), the large frequency of vulvar motifs in cave art at these sites reminds us that it was a sacred landscape to creation stories, which they suggest may be seen in current Osage narratives.

While Earth Mother is frequently depicted on ceramic effigies and Missouri Flint Clay statuettes in three dimensional forms, symbols act as a shorthand demonstrating not only her presence but also her command powers. While vulvar motifs in cave and rock art frequently depict Earth Mother, other symbols such as concentric circles may also demonstrate her presence. Simek and colleagues (2018:182) identify concentric circles and circle-in-cross motifs as some of the most common motifs in open air rock art sites in Tennessee. At least three of the cases concerning locations of concentric circle motifs are associated with falling water. According to Loubser and colleagues (2018:230), “concentric rings and spirals are graphic allusions to entrances into the spirit world”.

Concentric circles also occur on ceramic vessels, such as female hooded effigy bottles, possibly demonstrating an association between Earth Mother and this motif. Robert Sharp and colleagues (2011), in examining female ceramic effigies in the MCR, have identified concentric swirls on a negative painted female effigy in which a shawl or cloak is illustrated with concentric circles at the shoulders. They suggest this figure may represent Earth Mother and a possible association with reincarnation due to many of these vessels being located with sub-adult burials. Earth Mother may be further tied to death and reincarnation through caves within the Cliff Dwelling Section of eastern Kentucky, which frequently contain, “scores of burials excavated” which, “virtually all were those of women and children with adult males being conspicuously absent” (Ison 2004:186, see also Webb and Funkhouser 1932).
Mounting evidence suggests Earth Mother played a vital role in death and reincarnation, something that seems to maintain cultural continuity throughout the research areas discussed. Earth Mother also is viewed as a creator in her renewal of agriculture and fertility. There is some suggestion that Earth Mother was a creator, not only of her powerful more-than-human offspring, but also as a creator of the Middle World. The Mandan-Hidatsa consider the First Woman as the creator of all female beings, suggesting this more-than-human-being is responsible for the female line since the beginning of time (Pybus 2009). The Arapaho maintain mythic narratives surrounding a Whirlwind Woman (Neyooxestusei) who was the First Woman on earth, which references First Woman and Whirlwind Woman as the same person. The Arapaho legend states, “She wandered across the first, small world created by an earth diver, not knowing where to rest, roaming from point to point. As she circled the tiny new earth, it began to expand and grow in size until it was as large as it is today” (Pybus 2009:40).

When Whirlwind woman completed this task, she recorded her journey on a quilled embroidery, the pattern consisting of concentric rings, similar to motifs associated with Earth Mother in cave and rock art, and also on MCR negative painted human female effigies (Diaz-Granados 2004, 2011; Sharp et al. 2011). The Arapaho also have a specific food bag decoration, which portrays her creation. The bag has a series of six black spots, which illustrate the six places Whirlwind Woman rested at during her journey (Kroeber 1902). This narrative is similar to the Osage one described by Duncan and Diaz-Ganados (2018) in which petroglyphs at the Big Five, depict a female figure in a birthing position with six circles, suggested to be her six offspring. Could the birthing scenes at the Big Five, representing the birth of six, reference the creation of the Earth, which may have been viewed as a form of birth? Perhaps the two creation
stories share some fundamental forms of cultural continuity based on possible shared imagery related to Earth Mother and six items within a creation narrative.

Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) propose that the Big Five petroglyph sites sit on a north south axis, and act as a microcosm with the northern sites pertaining to the Above World and the more southern sites denoting the Beneath World. The Osage identify the scenes at the Big Five as a creation theme, which might fit with Whirlwind or Earth Mother mythologies of creating not only powerful offspring but also the Middle World. There is also a sacred landscape around the cave sites focusing on water, similar to large Mississippian sites; water increasing the power associated with the imagery of the caves (Loubser et al. 2018:223).

Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2004, 2018) place Earth Mother in the Beneath World and suggest specific iconography associated with her illustrated Beneath World imagery. They further state the Big Five are aligned along a major waterway, which acts as an axis, and may represent the seminal fluid of the Great Serpent possibly reinforcing the sacred landscape as portraying a creation theme. With imagery associated with intercourse and the birth of Earth Mother’s children, the perspective of the water ways, or Beneath World, becomes even more vital to the story of the beginning with Earth Mother and the Great Serpent being prominent models in the development of the beings which inhabit the cosmoscapes. Figure 10 shows an illustration of the (Osage) cosmos, with motifs similar to those found at Missouri petroglyph and pictograph sites such as: Earth Mother, the Great Serpent, concentric circles, a cross in circle, and a swirled cross motif (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018).
Figure 10. The Dhegihan Cosmos (From Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:39).
Analysis of Mississippian enhancement of sacred landscapes, such as caves, through symbolic imagery, allows for inferences to be made concerning Earth Mother and the Great Serpent that are not readily apparent through the use of iconographic interpretations of a ceramic corpus. While cave art and rock art have been dismissed in their role of advancing the archaeological record in the past, they are now considered a vital component of Mississippian ontology research. Another form of iconographic analysis, which has been overlooked in the study of Mississippian symbological imagery, is dendroglyphs, which may have been prominent in the Mississippian landscapes of the eastern Woodlands.

**Dendroglyphs**

The study of imagery in-situ allows for a different perspective than research involving moveable artifacts. Advancements in dating methodology have also permitted accurate dating for pigments from pictographs. Cave art and rock art allow the researcher to stand in the same vicinity as the creator(s) and share the same view, if not the same perspective from hundreds of years ago. For the most part, the sacred landscape, occurring in a cave, still maintains its original integrity, which drew the attention of the original creators allowing for intangible qualities of the mind to possibly be viewed in the tangible creations left behind. This experience would not be possible with other sacred artifacts that may have been removed from their original ceremonial landscape.

Fred Coy (2004) suggests this in-situ experience related to sacred imagery may have been available outside cave art and rock art. Coy states that dendroglyphs, or paintings and carvings on trees, may have existed at a higher frequency than cave and rock art, and may have been, “the most frequent form of nonportable intercommunication used by the Native Americans of the
Eastern Woodlands” (Coy 2004:4). Unfortunately, since trees are organic and prone to damage and death, none of these examples exist any longer.

Coy (2004) points out the frequency of cave and rock art sites seem to decrease when viewing totals from the west in the eastern United States. He mentions this may be due to exposed rock surfaces not being, “conveniently available for painting and engraving” (Coy 2004:4). Archaeologists have noted that some cave art is located in dark zones, which are hard to reach due to the need of a light source, and cliff facings and overhangs, which were high up and difficult to reach. Frequently, rock art seems to be designed for the purpose of exclusion and secrecy, so the esoteric knowledge was only available to those trained in it and the other-than and more-than-human-beings for which it was intended. If this is the case, then inconvenience would not be a deterring factor in the frequency of rock art in the eastern United States.

Coy (2004) notes that stone surfaces experience damage from weathering and vegetation, along with modern graffiti, and damage by looting and the removal of rock art panels. He also stresses the lack of interest in the archaeological field concerning rock art, something Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2004) also discuss. This lack of archaeological focus, concerning cave and rock art, may also demonstrate the reason for a limited number of recorded cave art sites in the eastern United States.

Coy (2004:4) examines multiple ethno-historical accounts discussing markings on trees throughout the historic period and states, “I would like to proceed on the premise that the preponderance of picture writing on nonportable surfaces done by the northeast Native Americas was more often executed on trees rather than on rocks”.

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The ethnohistorical examples Coy provides discuss multiple markers on trees and identify them as, “directions for trails and campsites, deeds of accomplishments, warnings, identification” (Coy 2004:4). Coy (2004:4) suggests the symbols offer, “about the same information as one would find along the highways today”. This raises an important question concerning the historical dendroglyphs presented by Coy (2004). Were these symbols meant as directions, identifications, markers of accomplishment, and warnings, or is that an oversimplification from a collection of historical ethnocentric etic observations? Recordings of the Alton, Illinois Piasa recounts its use as a warning, possibly to note swift waters ahead. However, one account states even the strongest of the warriors would avert their eyes from the image of the Piasa on the rock facing (Loubser et al. 2018). Is this an example of a polysemous symbol, which changes its meaning based on its context, or are European perspectives identifying these sacred symbols through an ethnocentric lens with the inability to understand Native esoteric knowledge?

Coy (2004:15) suggests that the frequency of dendroglyphs in the Eastern Woodlands, “should not be construed to indicate that the eastern Native Americans were less literature than their neighbors to the west”. This use of the term literate suggests the symbols may be viewed as a form of writing, instead of sacred imagery relating to the creation of the cosmocapes, and the illustration of other-than and more-than-human-beings along with their command powers. Coy (2004:15) goes on to state, “pictures on trees were universally used by the Native Americans for communication”. I would argue this communication is more than a trail marker or informational in the sense of highway markings, and while ethnohistorical accounts provide Native interpretations of dendroglyphs, the markers may have been esoteric in their communication. For example, the Piasa at Alton may reference a warning or a marking, one in which swift waters
flow in the area. However, the symbol acts more as a locative, and not as a trail marker. The symbol denotes the possible location of the Piasa, which resides at the head of streams and in turbulent waters. Indigenous passengers avoided their eyes due to the knowledge of who the symbol was portraying and not wishing to conjure him. To Europeans, this marking may have just been a trail marker indicating a hazard, however to Indigenous groups it contained powerful esoteric knowledge. These historical symbols trail markers may reduce the overall intent and importance of enhancing or altering the landscape into a sacred space related to symbols illustrating other-than and more-than-human-beings’ command powers, locatives, supplications or venerations, and creation stories. Dendroglyphs may have been prominent in the Eastern Woodlands, especially when considering the expanse of forests in the region, and suggest sacred landscapes related to more-than and other-than-human-beings may have been more prominent than we are currently aware.

Dendroglyphs would have been more frequent than cave and rock art due to their accessibility as a media and possibly its importance as an axis mundi to carry the information to the Above and Beneath Worlds. Trees are frequently referenced as axis mundi and narratives associated with cedar trees occurs in ethnographies associated with Whirlwind Woman, who may be Earth Mother. Unfortunately, these dendroglyphs are no longer available for examination, however Coy’s research (2004) brings up valuable insights into the alteration of the landscape into microcosms notating symbols associated with more-than and other-than-human-beings such as the Great Serpent and Earth Mother.

Just as dendroglyphs, through the Western lens of ethnocentrism, are defined as trail markings, cave and rock art is interpreted as representative and artwork, as if being displayed for public viewing. However, when the positional contexts surrounding the sacred imagery is
examined, locations such as the dark zone, ledges, and the ceilings of caves suggest such images are not for those in the physical world but is directed towards others viewing them from different realms. The Cherokee and Creek maintain mythological narratives stating the Above and Beneath Worlds were invisible and that other-than and more-than-human-beings could, “see them from behind the veil of rock or water wherever they went and were with them whatever they did” (Loubser 2018:217). It is not too far of a connection to suggest trees may have operated in the same way, with beings from the other worlds being able to be present and view the Middle World through trees enhanced with sacred imagery, especially since trees were frequently referenced as an axis mundi connecting the worlds and open lines of communication (Reilly 2004).

Southwest

Ethnohistorical accounts detailing imagery associated with Southwest rock art record detailed themes with strong cultural continuity, something that the ethnohistorical accounts of the Southeast were unable to obtain. Though the two areas maintain their own varying cultures and ontologies, a cross comparison of imagery in the Southwest and Southeast cave and rock art systems may open new lines of references, which would be unobtainable without examining imagery from both locations. This section investigates similarities in motifs and possible spatial continuity in inferences related to the associated other-than and more-than-human-beings presented.

In the Southeast Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) identify sacred imagery described as a fabric draping motif on the sides of boulders at the Three Creeks Hill. They (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018:49) suggest this motif may be ‘the snare of the breath of life’ and connect this motif to Earth Mother through the mythologies related to Spider, where the other-than-human-
being accesses fire for the Middle World and ensnares lifeforces through her web. However, this
motif may be a command power associated with the Earth Mother and possibly the Great Serpent
in their ability to control this life force through the animation of life, the removal of this life
force in death, and then the reintroduction of it during reincarnation.

This snare of the breath is called the Ho-e-ga in the Osage cosmos and is illustrated
through symbols such as a cross-in-circle, which Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) have also
associated with portraying the body of Earth Mother. While concentric circles may demonstrate
this snare of life, it may not illustrate a snare of life through a web. Instead, it is illustrating the
snare of life through winds. Earth Mother ceramic hooded effigy bottles in the CMV have been
referenced with motifs on them possibly identifying wind motifs (see Figure 22a and 22b in
Chapter 7). Further, hooded effigy female bottles from the MCR and the CMV show lines
emitting from the mouths of Earth Mother effigies and possibly from the mouth/nose area of the
Great Serpent, which flow down his body and to a swirled pattern on his body. These motifs
demonstrate the breath of life and illustrate that the Great Serpent and Earth Mother have
command over this energy force or Wakanda. The motif on Earth Mother may demonstrate her
ability to animate and reanimate through the giving of this life force, while the motif on the Great
Serpent may illustrate his ability to remove this energy force, especially through vortexes/vulvas
in the form of whirlpools.

Wakanda is believed, by the Osage, to be a sacred force or energy which animated the
visible and invisible of the cosmos, in which “This great force also tended to concentrate and
flow through the great axis” (Diaz-Granados 2004:140). Did one supreme being control this
Wakanda and have the ability to form, open, and close portals along the axis mundi? Or was the
being the Wakanda herself, with the ability to shape shift into an axis mundi and shapes familiar
to humans in the form of tornadoes and water vortexes? This sacred force, or Wakanda, while intangible in its normal state, had the ability to be visible or invisible and to animate all beings in the Upper, Beneath, and Middle World. If Earth Mother is this Wakanda or creation being, we can see her dominance over the Great Serpent, another powerful other-than-human-being in the Mississippian cosmoscape. We may see this ability to control Wakanda through the birthing scenes in the Big Five where she created powerful offspring or in the Arapaho creation stories where she created the world. While the Great Serpent may have had the ability to remove this Wakanda, he was not allowed to keep it. It would have been returned to Earth Mother who had the ultimate say in reincarnation, which is why effigies of her were buried with children (Sharp et al. 2011), whose grief-stricken parents prayed to her to recycle their children’s souls. Further evidence of vortexes and their association with Wakanda may be seen in imagery from the Southwest.

The Hopi have a swirled motif similar to the concentric circles in Southwest and Southeast rock and cave art. One spiral is said to be the Ho-bo-bo, known as the twister, and is frequently presented in rock petroglyphs (Patterson 1992) (Figure 11).
Figure 11. Ho-bo-bo petroglyphs from the Southwest (From Patterson 1992:186).

The myth of this creature states, “a great whirlwind blew all the vegetation from the surface of the Earth and all the water from its courses” (Mallery 1893:604-5), which may have many references to Earth Mother. The blowing away may reference wind commands of Earth Mother who oversees vegetation. She may also have blown the waters away either in a feud with the Great Serpent or as some form of punishment. Multidecadal droughts occurring in the Southwest and the Southeast may be reflected in Earth Mother removing water and removing key vegetation needed to sustain life. Could this explain, in the Southeast, why early portrayals of Earth Mother show vegetative imagery and later illustrations show wind motifs? Did the Mississippian view the droughts as Earth Mother blowing the vegetation away?

Further Hopi mythology states that he (whirlwind) was, “the keeper of the breath” and that “the whirlwind and the air which men breathe come from this keeper’s mouth” (Mallory 1893:604-605). The use of whirlwind as a male and an emphasis on the air men breath instead of
including women, may be from the interpretations of European recorders who focused more on the importance of the male sex than women.

Turner (1963:53) in his analyses discusses a similar swirl design states, “Watchspring scroll is symbol of cyclone or cyclone’s home”. Historical accounts frequently call tornadoes cyclones and again suggest a creative licensing in retelling the information provided to them by Indigenous people. Fewkes (1892:20) adds to the association between the whirlwind and the spiral symbol by stating, “Of coiled spirals, which are regarded as whirlwind symbols there are many represented in pictographs. Ho-bo-bo or whirlwind symbol is crosier shaped, with a straight shaft and several coils”.

Another motif, from the Hopi area, may reference Earth Mother’s ability to control Wakanda. This symbol is composed of multiple triangles grouped together with a lightning element in the center. Mallery (1893:705) in recounting a narrative from a trader in the Hopi area in the 1880s states, “The figure represents a woman. The breath sign is displayed in the interior”. While this symbol does not resemble any associated with Earth Mother in the Southeast, the reference of breath inside a motif illustrating a female being is important in inferring a connection between the command of breath and Earth Mother. It may also illustrate fertility and Earth Mother’s ability to create life, or re-give breath to life within her womb, or the earth, which may be considered graves.

The shared sacred imagery of concentric circles and swirls between Southwest and Southeast cave and rock art may be linked through interactions in which symbols associated with a more-than-human-being were linked with the command of winds. European acculturation may have gendered this being as male, something also seen in ethnohistorical accounts in the Midwest and southeast concerning historical tornado mythological narratives.
Chapter 6

The Womb of Earth Mother in the Middle Cumberland Region

During the Cahokia diaspora, Mississippians began migrating out of the region and into the east, west, north, and south (Cook and Comstock 2022). One of these areas is the MCR during the mid-thirteenth century (Cobb and Butler 2022; Kelso 2017; Meeks and Anderson 2013). Though Mississippians were already living in this area, the influx of new people with new ontologies may have led to a shift in the mythical narratives associated with the more-than-human-being named Earth Mother. This transition seems to move away from Earth Mother’s focus on agricultural fertility and into a role more centered on winds through possible wind imagery. Her command power of winds exceeds the expressions related to the four cardinal winds and instead centers on the wind of animation or life, sometimes referred to as Wakanda.

Robert Sharp and colleagues (2011) and Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2011, 2018) suggests a female figure may have been responsible for the reincarnation of children’s souls. This female figure is more than likely Earth Mother and her ability to reincarnate would have been expressed as a command power on imagery associated with her and possibly depicted on effigies illustrating her. Sharp and colleagues (2011) offer evidence for this command power of Earth Mother’s through the identification of ceramic female hooded effigy bottles occurring in the graves of subadults in the MCR. This chapter will examine these female hooded ceramic effigy bottles from the MCR, in the form of hump-back figures, straight-back figures, and figures who exhibit a pattern known as Nashville Negative painted, in order to evaluate the possible transformation of command powers associated with Earth Mother and her ability to reincarnate children’s souls through the control of the breath of life in the MCR.
The Before

Missouri Flint Clay female statuettes, centered around the GCR and the American Bottom, seem to illustrate a female more-than-human-being who has a strong association with vegetative matter and the growth or renewal of plants (see Chapter 4). Most of the female statuettes exhibit some form of plant-like imagery on the female’s body whether this is occurring as vines, sunflower heads, or stalk like items in her hands. A few of the statuettes also show an entanglement with the Beneath World through serpent imagery such as the large, possible deceased feline serpent in the Birger figurine and the West figurine. A few others present with no serpent or vegetation imagery but are shown in reference to a lidded container in front of them, which may illustrate a sacred bundle, a charnel house, or the figures’ ability to merge into the world or be conjured from the box (Reilly 2004). What we do not see on the Missouri Flint Clay figures are vulva, swirled cross-in-circle, concentric circles, or possible wind or vortex motifs. The creator of the figurines makes the sex of the statuettes known through various notations such as enlarged breasts and a knee length skirt, which as C. F. Voeglin notes, in reference to Earth Mother’s appearance, “Grandmother…possibly even a “Supreme Deity” [who] wore short skirts and can change her appearance” (Sharp 2009, also reference C. F. Voegelin 1936), emphasizing the creators use of displaying a knee length skirt as a direct expression of Earth Mother to those viewing the figure.

The Missouri Flint Clay female figures, besides the Birger figurine, are in a sitting position with their legs and feet tucked underneath their body. Besides the knee-length skirt they do not exhibit any other form of clothing.

Another important element to point out is hair style. The majority of the figurines are depicted with long hair trailing down their backs, though the Sponemann figurine may have their
hair in a turban, or a braid wrapped around the top of their head. The style of the statuettes is similar enough to suggest a concentrated area of production even though a few of the figurines have been found far from Cahokia such as the McBeth in Ohio (Boles 2022), the Westbrook figurine in Arkansas, and the Spiro figurine in Oklahoma (Boles 2022; Brown 2020). The distinct similarities in style, along with the source analysis of the Missouri Flint Clay, and the limestone and sandstone used from the Cahokia region provide evidence for a centralized region associated with the ontologies around this possible Earth Mother figure during the Stirling phase.

Thomas Emerson (1982) suggests the GCR contained a feminine cult with emphasis due to the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes and their association with temple architecture. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) have also argued for a female gendered landscape at the Big Five Petroglyph sites in southeast Missouri, where motifs, suggested to illustrate Earth Mother, have been recorded in the form of vulva, cross-in-circle, concentric circles, and swirled-cross-in-circle motifs as petroglyphs inside caves. It could further be argued that a female gendered landscape in the MCR is visible in the form of subadult graves where Earth Mother seems to maintain a predominant presence over differing more-than and other-than-human-beings inside these graves along with the inference that the grave may have been considered Earth Mother’s womb (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018).

While a varying display and emphasis on motifs, possibly associated with Earth Mother, exist from the GCR to the Big Five Petroglyph sites in Missouri and, into the MCR, it is important to note that specific motifs have maintained cultural continuity not only temporally but also spatially. One key piece of the Earth Mother mythological narratives that suggest continuity from the early Cahokia fluorescence, the Big Five Petroglyph sites, the MCR, and CMV, is imagery depicting serpents or possibly the Great Serpent himself. Serpent imagery is illustrated
on the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes on the Birger figurine and the West figurine. Serpent imagery is also prominent in the Big Five Petroglyph sites with most of the motifs containing serpent-like characteristics (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). Serpent imagery is also present on ceramic hooded female effigy bottles, both hump-back and straight-back in the MCR, suggesting that the two are intertwined within certain command roles, thus maintaining this association from region to region.

Background

In 1977 Stephen Williams defined a Vacant Quarter region within the Mississippian heartland, including the MCR, in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Multiple causes for the abandonment of various river valleys in the Midwest and Southeast have been suggested, such as a possible increase in warfare, an influx of migrants from other areas, the large spread of diseases, and climatic anomalies such as megadroughts (Williams 1990; Morse and Morse 1983, Lewis 1990, Cobb, and Butler 2002, Meeks and Anderson 2013). Charles Cobb and Brian Butler suggest that abandonment of these vacant quarter regions was widespread and included not only large mound centers but, “Mississippian groups living in remote settings, as well as along major draining” (2002:625). Meeks and Anderson (2013) examine possible stressors involved in the abandonment of the vacant quarter. While focusing on the sustained droughts, and the possible maize and other crop failures, they emphasis that the cause of this abandonment, or out migration from the region, would have been multivariant, though drought could have well exasperated a pre-existing sociocultural problem.

In an examination of food surplus, as it related to drought conditions, in the Vacant Quarter, Meeks and Anderson (2013) conclude that there were pockets of favorable conditions in the vacant area which may have allowed for the storage of a surplus in the years AD 1200-1287,
1309-1384, and then 1414-1448. However, the area had already experienced a large abandonment by the AD 1414–1448-time frame (Meeks and Anderson 2013:71). Severe drought induced stress periods, for the region, include AD 1288-1308, AD 1385-1413, AD 1449-1458, and 1483-1492 (Meeks and Anderson 2013:72).

As mentioned in Chapter five the American Bottom Region and the GCR experienced a large depopulation event around A.D. 1280 with a possible fragmentation politically and socially occurring towards the end of the Moorehead phase (AD 1200-1275), which may have been pushed beyond a reconciliation due to a lack of food surplus and a possible food shortage from prolonged extreme droughts and pluvial events.

The MCR experienced a rapid increase in population between AD 1250 and 1310, possibly from migrants moving from the American Bottom Region. This coalescence of Cahokia region migrants and the already existing population in the MCR can be seen due to the population increase in the MCR which occurred around the same time as the depopulation of Cahokia (Meeks and Anderson 2013:74). With this population increase leveling out after AD 1310 and then a possible depopulation of the region starting around AD 1380, the MCR experienced a nucleation, similar to the boom in population at Cahokia, though on a smaller scale beginning in the mid-thirteen century. “The dispersed settlements witnessed during the Dowd period shifted to a focus on nucleation with the establishment of large, fortified villages during the Thurston period (AD 1250-1450)” (Meeks and Anderson 2002:74). Sharp and colleagues (2011) delineate the Thurston period from A.D. 1250-1400, which fits closer to the outmigration around A.D. 1380.
The Thurston Period

The Thurston period experienced large population growth during the mid-thirteenth century and a decline in population beginning around A.D. 1380. One site under discussion in this chapter is the Averbuch site (40V60) (A.D. 1250-1450), which is described as a Late Mississippian period town defined by Rebecca Kelso (2017:418) as dating circa A.D. 1300. The Averbuch site is a palisaded site in the MCR, which contains separate cemetery areas and over 600 burials. These cemeteries have been examined for skeletal stressors related to violence and nutritional deficiencies to establish similarities and differences between the MCR and the eastern Tennessee region (Berryman 1984; Kelso 2017). One of these burials, from the Averbuch site, contained a Negative Nashville painted female hooded effigy bottle, along with others of this same style at other nearby sites.

Kelso (2017) suggests that the MCR experienced a series of climate changes that were not documented in the eastern region of Tennessee. She suggested this, “major climate shift” (Kelso 2017:418) impacted only the central and western parts of Tennessee and had, “a significant effect on subsistence and demographics not documented in the eastern region” (Kelso 2017: 418, see also Meeks 2009). Kelso (2017:418) defines this eastern region of Tennessee as bordering, “the western foothills, ridges, and ranges of the Appalachian Mountains” and bordered, “to the east by the Southern Blue Ridge and to the west by the Cumberland Plateau and Mountains”. Multiple prolonged droughts struck the MCR (Cobb and Butler 2002; Meeks and Anderson 2002, Kelso 2017), however Kelso (2017) argues that elevation differences between the MCR and the east Tennessee region resulted in a rain shadow effect causing an increase in the amount of rain in the Tennessee River Valley in the east and a reduction in rainfall amounts in the MCR. These droughts reached a peak in the late fifteenth century, and due to the elevation
differences between the MCR and the eastern Tennessee Region, Mississippians may not have easily received help from the eastern Tennessee region choosing to migrate from the MCR into eastern Tennessee and south down into the CMV (Kelso 2017; Harle and Meeks, 2013).

While maize was a predominant agricultural crop beginning in the Early Mississippian period, it is suggested that the Averbuch site, and possibly other sites in the MCR, relied more heavily on the production and surplus of maize than their counterparts in East Tennessee, which may have been due in part to narrow floodplains and a lack of soils with nutrients available to support maize (Benthall 1983; Crites 1984, Harle and Meeks 2013; Kelso 2017; Smith 1992). Kelso further states evidence for a cultural shift including, “the razing of villages, increases in the prevalence of palisade walls, and the scorching and abandonment of the Dallas site” (2017:420), which may have occurred with the mid-fourteenth century droughts (Sullivan 2007, 2009).

To evaluate the health and population movements of people from the MCR, Kelso (2017) examines growth patterns and pathological conditions of more than 50 subadults from the Averbuch site, suggesting subadults are more susceptible to environmental stressors and act as an early indicator of population stress. The subadults were further classified into five categories based on chronological ages with 0-1 year considered perinatal, 1.5-3 years early child, 3.5-7 years as late child, 7.5-12 early adolescent, and 12.5-18 late adolescent (Kelso 2017:421). According to Kelso (2017: 425), “the preadolescent subadults (i.e., those under the age of thirteen) from the MCR were shorter in stature, and all subadults had higher occurrences of pathology compared to the East Tennessee sites”. Kelso (2017) suggests the results may indicate a difference in stressors between the subadults of the MCR and those of the east Tennessee region. She further states, “the variation in local environment may have created distinctive
practices between the Middle Cumberland and the East Tennessee regions” (Kelso 2017: 426).
This variation may have been caused by differences in dietary habits from the two regions due to “average temperatures, annual rainfall, available farmland, topography, as well as accessibility to water” (Kelso 2017:426).

The geographical location of the Averbuch site on a tertiary subsidiary of the Cumberland River (Kelso 2017; Klippel and Bass 1984,) along with its palisade wall may demonstrate the decision to put buffers between themselves and others within the area, suggesting conflict was dominant in the region. This conflict may have occurred or was exasperated by the severe droughts and the increased shortage of maize and food surplus, hinted at by the stressors indicated in the subadults from the site. Sharp and colleagues (2011) note the presence of Earth Mother hooded effigy bottles frequently occurring in stone box graves of sub adults. However, of the almost 100 sub-adult burials at the Averbuch site, three hooded hump-back female effigy bottles are mentioned. Though others do occur in the MCR, and in particular Davidson County, this low sample size may identify a religious sodality centering around this more-than-human-being and her ability to reincarnate children’s souls.

**Earth Mother and Children**

In an extensive study of over ninety figurines from the MCR Sharp and colleagues (2011) identify more than two dozen figures with a cloak-like design known as the Nashville Negative pattern from a seven-county region including Davidson County. Sharp and colleagues (2011:178; see also Ferguson 1972) argue that this figure, “is without a doubt the single most important subject in the pottery of the Middle Cumberland Culture”. Sharp (2009) states that this female figure is a “Cumberland cult figure and illuminate[s] the widespread adoption throughout the Middle Cumberland…with respect to the recycling or return of the souls of children” and further
suggests this association with Earth Mother, “was sparked by concepts that took shape in the American Bottom and then were introduced into the Middle Cumberland in the mid-to-late-twelfth century”. While I would argue that Earth Mother played differing roles associated with her command powers in the American Bottom and the MCR, cultural continuity of some ontologies and imagery exist and did move into the MCR.

While other female effigies, possibly associated with Earth Mother in the Greater Cahokia and American Bottom area did exist outside of the Missouri Flint Clay female figures, a large increase in Earth Mother portrayed in straight-back and hump-back hooded effigy bottles occurred in the MCR beginning in the early thirteenth century. Of these straight-back and hump-back hooded effigy bottles in the MCR, “all or nearly all, as far as we know, were recovered from stone-box graves of children (or at the very least subadults) of the Thurston phase, AD 1250-1400, and share similar deposition in mortuary contexts” (Sharp et al. 2011:180).

While there is not a large corpus of sub-adult graves associated with these figurines, there is a large amount of these figurines associated with subadult graves. When the number of subadult graves excavated in the MCR and the amount of these female hooded effigy bottles are examined in correlation it can be seen that while the ontologies associated with Earth Mother and her burial with children is widespread, as in regionally across the MCR, in may not have been widespread within specific sites.

The Yuchi maintain a mythical narrative associated with an Old Woman, also known as Earth Mother, who was in charge over the souls in the Spirit World and controlled the return of some souls to life (Sharp 2009, Grantham 2002:38). This may be seen in the occurrence of Earth Mother effigies in the graves of subadults and the possibility of narratives associated with Earth
Mother having the command power to reincarnate Mississippian children through the breath of animation, or life.

However, this low number of Earth Mother effigies at a cemetery of over 100 subadults may suggest only some of the souls were returned to life. Religious sodalities focusing on the esoteric knowledge associated with being able to perform the ritual asking Earth Mother to reincarnate the child’s soul may have maintained strict control over the ritual and sacra associated with it. Ethnohistorical accounts demonstrate “brief prayers [were] made and tobacco offered at the grave of an especially beloved child with the request that the deceased child be returned as one of the future children on the parents” (Voegelin 1936:15), however what if the term of beloved child really meant elite child.

Just as the esoteric knowledge concerning the Missouri Flint Clay figurines seems to have been tightly controlled, the sphere of those associated with the ability to ask Earth Mother for assistance in reincarnation may also have been exclusive and selective. This thought is somewhat sad to think about when Kelso’s (2017) work suggests subadults in the MCR such as the Averbuch site were prone to an early death based on over 100 of the 800 individual human remains being subadults and only 3 of those over 100 being buried with an Earth Mother figurine. These numbers possibly illustrate that a large majority of the caregivers, for these subadults, may not have possessed the availability or the privilege to ask Earth Mother to reincarnate their children’s soul.

**Hump-back vs Straight-back**

Of the three-ceramic hooded female effigy bottles recovered from the Averbuch site, three of them are hump-back and exhibit stylistic similarities (Sharp et al 2011). One of these
three contained the Nashville Negative pattern, which Sharp et al. (2011) have described as cloak like, which the authors state occurs on both straight-back and hump-back female effigy bottles. The hump-back female effigies have been the subject of discussion in archaeological literature in relation to nodes or ridges along the backs of some of these vessels. These vessels frequently display a bulge in the back area and an expanded chest cavity, which have both been attributed to a display of old age.

The straight-back back hooded female vessels are stated as having, “a vertical groove along the line of the backbone”, which has been suggested to be intended by the creator, “to emphasize that the character being depicted was emphatically not a humpback by showing virtually the opposite feature: an indentation of the spine” (Sharp et al. 2011:179).

Though the hump-back and straight-back vessels vary in their bodily depictions Sharp and colleagues (2011:180) suggest they are both, “intended to represent the same character”. The vessels share other similar characteristics such as both types containing the Nashville Negative pattern, occurring in stone box graves of subadults, and are female and possibly representing Earth Mother. While the hump-back hooded female effigy bottles occur in large frequencies in northeastern Arkansas and southeastern Missouri the straight back-females seem to mostly occur in the MCR, suggesting a possible regional ontology surrounding her. The Nashville Negative pattern, as the name suggests, is also mostly centralized around the Nashville area though some vessels bearing this pattern have been discovered outside of the region, possibly through the movement of religious sodalities.
Braids and Vertebrae

The node-like areas along the backs of the hump-back female hooded effigy bottles, occur not only in the MCR but throughout the Southeast, and have been defined as portraying vertebrae along the spine of an elderly female figure. The argument for these raised areas has been for the intentional display, by the creator, of an elderly female with a bulging upper back and prominent vertebrae. However, I would argue for a closer examination of these node ridge-like areas along the backs of female hooded effigy vessels and suggest that instead of vertebrae they may reference a hair braid.

While numerous hump-back female hooded effigy vessels contain node like ridges along their backs, not all of them do so. Suggesting the ridges may not represent all the hump-back vessels or perhaps they are implied when missing. The amount of nodes along the back also differs with some effigies only having one node at the base of the neck, one along the mid back, one along the lower back, or multiple running the length of the center of the back. Along with the number of nodes present, the shape of the nodes, the spaces in between them, and where on the back they occur are also frequently different, making it hard to discern any form of patterning.

Sharp and colleagues (2011) note the creators of straight-back hooded effigy bottles have no indication of a backbone and that even in some cases an indentation is placed on the effigy to possibly suggest their difference from the humpback vessels. However, there is one example, in my corpus, of a straight-back female hooded effigy bottles with nodes along the back similar to humpback effigies, suggesting while more prominent on hump-back effigies, that the nodes may not be only designated to them. This further suggests the nodes may not be related to age and have been misinterpreted as vertebrae.
Another identifying feature for humpback humans is the tendency of the head and neck to appear shifted forward and downwards. The humpback’s posture may originate from difficulties raising the head to a straight posture from the humped area on the back. The effigies mentioned in this research are frequently depicted with their face inclined upward and in alignment with the rest of the body.

Could the bulge along the back of the figures along with the expanded chest cavity be forms of fertility markers as the overexaggerated anatomy of the fertility figures in Austria such as the Venus of Willendorf? Could it represent the womb of the Earth, or a pack of some sort? Suggesting human characteristics of ageism to a more-than-human-being in the form of vertebrae may be dimensioning the power associated with her by applying European ideologies towards attempting to humanize a more-than-human personage.

The expanded area along the back of these figures may be illustrating a form of pack similar to the packs and containers seen on and with the Missouri Flint Clay figures from the GCR. The MCR transitioned this idea of a pack for the growth of vegetation into a container for transporting souls, which would have been synonymous with the grave. As the main role of Earth Mother changed from agriculture into one needed for the reincarnation of children’s souls the equipment and imagery associated with her also transitioned. Figure 12 illustrates a pack on the back of a female effigy, in a hump shape, with a possible child inside.
Figure 12. Hooded female effigy bottle with a possible child in a pack on her back from the Scott site in Mississippi Co, Arkansas (From Hathcock 1988:192-193).

However, this does not represent a mother and a child, but instead illustrates Earth Mother transporting a child’s soul for reincarnation. The bulge along the back of the effigies
signifies an extension of the grave, in which the children lay while being transported for reincarnation. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018:62) state that Earth Mother, also known as First Woman, is associated with death and her, “body is the grave of the Sun and all of her children and she is the one who returns them to life”. This bulge represents her command power in the role of transporting children’s souls as Earth Mother is the “mythological womb from which all life emerges and to which all life returns at death” (Smith and Miller 2009:33).

The noded area down the figure’s backs illustrates a hair braid and not vertebrae. The noded areas along the back of the figures do not occur in the same vicinity on the back, nor do the same number of nodes occur. Some hump-back figures do not have nodes, which upon further study may correlate with specific hairstyles in which the braid is not needed. Furthermore, the nodes rarely reach all the way down the figures back, instead they do seem to focus on the hump, which may signify where the braid would naturally lay if it was laid over something such as a pouch. Figure 13 shows the braid attached to the back of the head and running down the figures spinal area, which has led to the inference that the nodes are vertebrae.
Figure 13. Hooded female effigy bottle with a possible braid attached at the back of the head from the Campbell site in Pemiscot County, Missouri (From Hathcock 1988:184).

Through the Missouri Flint Clay female figures we can see the importance of hairstyles and their possible association as key markers to identify specific more-than-human-beings. The majority of the Missouri Flint Clay female figures have long hair illustrated down their back. It is not a far stretch to suggest that the portrayal of hair on Earth Mother maintained its importance,
though while ontologies and imagery related to her transitioned, so did her hair style. We do not see the continuation of the braid from the back of the head due to the opening in the bottle.

Other human effigies have also illustrated nodes along the back such as figure 14, which illustrates hair, sectioned in nodes down a male figure’s back. We can see the attachment of the hair to the scalp on this figure due to the lack of an opening in the back of the effigy.

Figure 14. Illustrating a male hairstyle along the back of the head and neck, resembling nodes (From Smith and Miller 2009:23).

Smith and Miller (2009:23) note that hairstyles on statuary are considered significant and “certainly originally had significant messages about a specific status or role held by the
individual or character depicted. Smith, in discussing hair styles, points out male hair knots in which the hair, “is depicted on the back of the head extending perpendicular to the long axis of the body” and that the typical female hair knot, “is an elongated hair knot usually depicted on the lower neck and upper back extending parallel with the long axis on the body”. Also “incised grooves are sometimes incorporated and may depict either braiding or plaiting of the hair” (Smith and Miller 2009: 23).

Cloak

The Nashville Negative pattern on female hooded effigy bottles, both hump-back and straight-back, has been suggested to illustrate a cloak like garment worn by a female figure (Sharp et al. 2011) (Figure 15).

Fabric recovered from the Spiro site has demonstrated geometric designs in yellow, which are, “produced by a resist technique comparable to the negative-painting treatment of
Figure 15 Nashville Negative Painted hooded effigy bottle from the MCR (From Sharp et al. 2011:183).
ceramics” (Sharp et al. 2011:183, see also Drooker 1992:80-83, Willey 1948, Wiley and Phillips 1944, Willoughby 1952:115-118). Shoulder roundels, which occur as concentric and quadripartite designs, are suggested to be the identity marker of the individual, which in this case is Earth Mother (Sharp et al. 2011).

The Arapaho maintain a mythical narrative associated with a black and yellow tent design known as the Track of the Whirlwind Woman in which concentric rings are quilled and used as a decoration to note a creation story concerning First Woman and her expansion of the earth through her wandering (Kroeber 1902:60-61). This black and yellow concentric design is used as an identity marker for Whirlwind Woman, a possible alias for Earth Mother, and as a shorthand for the creation story concerning her, just as the concentric design on the shoulders of the cloak like pattern are identity markers for Earth Mother in the MCR. The concentric circles association with Earth Mother creating the Earth and the use of concentric circles on the shoulders of female effigies from the MCR may both notate wind or vortex imagery in the form of the breath of animation, where one is contributed to providing animation to the Earth and the other to children’s souls.

**Tennessee Cumberland Style Statuary**

While female effigies in the form of the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes and the hooded effigy bottles are identified as illustrating the female sex through knee length skirts, hairstyles, and enlarged breasts, we do not see distinct female genitalia through these effigies though Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) frequently reference vulva motifs in petroglyph sites in southeast Missouri. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) have made the argument that the vulva motifs are a form of shorthand to represent Earth Mother. We could argue then that if we have three dimensional effigies of Earth Mother then the shorthand of a vulva motif may not be
needed. However, Smith and Miller (2009:26-27) have identified three statues, CSS-013 from Beasley Mounds; CSS-039 from Big Bigby; and CSS-045 from the Jones collection, from the Cumberland Statuary Survey, which exhibit female genitalia in the form of an anatomically correct vulva. Smith and Muller (2009:26) state, “We believe the sculptors used the vulvar motif on these three statues to assert their identification as the powerful supernatural character ‘Old Woman’. The identification of these vessels containing vulva imagery from the MCR along with the hooded effigy bottles depicting concentric circle motifs suggest a continuation of imagery from petroglyphs at the Big Five Petroglyph sites and the continuity of an important female more-than-human-being in the Mississippian cosmoscapes. Key characteristics associated with Earth Mother imagery have also been observed on hooded female effigy bottle along with possible shared imagery on Cat Serpent bowls and bottles in the CMV.
Chapter 7

Balancing the Cosmos in the CMV

The CMV is defined as, “just north of the Ohio River to the mouth of the Arkansas river, from Cape Girardeau to the Arkansas Post” (Morse and Morse 1983: xi). This research will focus mainly on the sites in extreme southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas. From the lower Pemiscot Bayou to its north, the Mississippi river to its east, Crowley’s Ridge to the west, and Frenchman’s Bayou to the west. The late Mississippians of this region have been termed as belonging to the Pemiscot Phase, Armorel Phase, or the Nodena Phase. The nucleation of this area, though in no way as large as the nucleation of the American Bottom, resulted in large polities. This region has also been associated as Pacha, which was at war with the Parkin phase region to the west known as Casqui (Morse and Morse 1983).

The stressors associated with war may have been exacerbated due to environmental stressors in the form of severe and prolonged droughts. This accompanied by the De Soto expedition in the early 1540’s resulted in foreign stressors on top of current political, social, and environmental stressors possibly resulting in a transformation of religious ontologies, similar to the changes in the mythological narratives associated with Earth Mother in the GCR and the MCR. From A.D. 1500-1550, this region experienced a shift in ritualism, which seems to have reorganized itself around a focus on death and death imagery (Morse and Morse 1983).
Droughts

In order to determine if there was a possible correlation between the shift in ontologies to possible death imagery in A.D. 1500-1550, I examined PDSI data from this time period. The PDSI data seems to illustrate that the area was in fact experiencing drought like conditions. However, figure 17 which shows PDSI data from A.D.1450-1500 seems to demonstrate this fifty-year period was experiencing more severe droughts than the following 50 years, which Morse and Morse (1983) suggests sees a change in ritualism.

Figure 16. PDSI Data from the CMV dating circa A.D. 1500-A.D.1550. www.drought.memphis.edu
Figure 17. PDSI Date from the CMV dating circa A.D. 1450-A.D.1500. 
www.drought.memphis.edu

The fifty years of severe droughts were one of possibly many, catalysts in facilitating that shift in ritualism and the focus on possible death imagery. While death imagery occurs on other themes, within my area of study, this research focuses on the Mississippian ontologies associated with not only death, but the control of the command power linked to reincarnation. This worldview relating death to Earth Mother is not new, and while she may have maintained some mythologies surrounding death since her creation, we see a strong emphasis towards her
command powers being used in relation to death after the Cahokia diaspora and the in migration of people into the MCR. These beliefs are further seen in the CMV, though they do seem to become broader in their relationship with adults instead of a high frequency with sub-adults.

**Burial Data**

Unfortunately, the burial data associated with the CMV and hooded female effigy bottles in the MCR does not currently exist in the CMV, especially within the research area of extreme southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas. Many of the vessels have been recorded by collectors with no burial data and sometimes no provenience for the artifacts. Therefore, this research is unable to state whether these female hooded effigy bottles were also predominately associated with sub-adult burials as in the MCR. From the small amount of recorded burial data available there has been no identification of patterning associated with sub-adults and these vessels.

Michael O’Brien (1994) has examined the records of 91 burials from Murphy’s mound in Pemiscot County, Missouri (see Appendix B). O’Brien identifies the number and percentage of intact ceramic vessels from the site (1994:167 table 5.2). In this table ceramic types such as Fortune Noded, Campbell Punctuated, and Parkin Punctuated is mentioned. However, he does not describe any effigies or effigy types. I am unsure if this data suggests there were no effigies recovered from the 91 burials or if they simply were not included within the ceramic type categories. O’Brien does mention, “Vessel forms and ceramic types present during this intermediate stage include cat-monster and turtle effigies and Parkin punctuated, all of which occur at Campbell” (1994:169). This statement seems to imply that effigies did occur at the Murphy site but were possibly identified under a differing form of typology than the one reported in his chapter on the site.
O’Brien (1994) also discusses burial information from the Kersey site in Pemiscot County, Missouri. However, it seems to be a specific selection of material, such as from the Murphy information, and does not mention effigies besides the infrequent mention throughout the chapter. Sub-adult burials are mentioned at both the Murphy and the Kersey site, but there are no mentions of female effigy bottles buried with them, something that would probably have been noted within the chapter. Even though the data provided would seem to suggest sub-adults are not buried with hooded female effigy bottles within the CMV this may not be an accurate picture. When Robert Sharp et al. (2011) examined sub-adult burial data from the MCV they discovered hooded effigy bottles were buried with sub-adults, suggesting an association with sub-adults and this vessel theme. When we view the data from an opposing side, we see that while the discovery of a hooded female effigy bottle within a burial normally results in the burial being of a sub-adult, a sub-adult burial does not necessarily mean a hooded female effigy bottle is present. At the Averbuch site only 3 sub-adult burials contained hooded female effigy bottle ceramics (Sharp et al. 2011). In reviewing two data sets concerning burial information at sites in Pemiscot County, Missouri there may not be sufficient data to reach the conclusion that these vessels are associated with sub-adult burials based on the small sample size that may occur per site. More examination of burial data from sites within southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas would need to occur before a rate of confidence, one way or another, could be achieved.

However, we do have sufficient data to state the region was experiencing a similar level of drought-like conditions as the GCR after A.D. 1100 and in the MCR in the late 14th century. While we could argue the region did not have the same resources such as the Richard Farming Complex to sustain the nucleation of populations, based on the size of the polities compared with
Cahokia, we can suggest the region may have still maintained sufficient food sources through the agriculture that was utilized, along with aquatic resources and wildlife.

Environment

The environment of the southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas region consisted of multiple oxbow lakes, swamps, bayous, and the Mississippi River (O’Brien 1994:98). This region also saw frequent severe thunderstorms in the spring and sometimes the fall seasons, which attributed to 60% of its annual rainfall and made the area rich for agriculture and possible irrigation (NOAA 2008; also reference Pybus 2009:8). While the CMV receives much of its needed annual rainfall from severe thunderstorms, it also has an increased risk of those severe thunderstorms becoming tornadic (Figure 18). Between 1997 and 2021, Arkansas saw a state average of nine tornadoes, just in the months of April (Figure 19). This number fluctuates in various years depending on the environmental conditions associated with the southern oscillations known as La Nina and El Nino. For example, in Jan 1st through April 20th of 2018, during a La Nina oscillation, the northern Lower Mississippi Valley experienced an outbreak of tornadoes (Liberto 2018) (Figure 20). While the large amount of annual rainfall, in a region prone to droughts, could have been the reasoning behind nucleation in the CMV, it came at the price of seasonal severe weather. This awareness of severe weather and tornadoes as an environmental hazard would have been known to the Mississippians of the region and would have required an explanation probably in the form of other-than and more-than-human-being involvement.

This region may have been seen as a sacred landscape focusing on the watery realm and its ruler, the Great Serpent through the many water ways along with the large percentage of seasonal rainfall. The area may also have been viewed as a sacred region due to the frequency of
severe thunderstorms producing strong winds and tornadoes. If Earth Mother and the Great Serpent were considered the reasons for the winds and the vortexes the frequency in this area of the CMV may have been considered a special area where these two beings came together. This ancestral association between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent may have been perceived as physical manifesting in eastern Arkansas and southeastern Missouri leading to an increase in effigies associated with the two beings and wind/vortex imagery occurring on the ceramics associated with them.

Figure 19. Map showing the average number of tornadoes per state from 1997-2021. [https://www.spc.noaa.gov/wcm/permonth_by_state/] Accessed on March 9, 2023.

The Great Serpent

We may see the focus of a religious sodality centered around the Great Serpent through a concentration of a new form of the Great Serpent, the Cat Monster, in northeast Arkansas and southeast Missouri (Figure 21). This religious sodality possibly demonstrates a transitional adjustment to the environmental conditions where adaptations can be seen through the
fluorescence of cat serpent effigies (Burnette et al. 2020) These transitional adjustments were possibly seen in the MCR with the adaptation of new Earth Mother ontologies associated with the reincarnation of children’s souls before a transformational adjustment occurred through the outmigration from the MCR into the CMV (Burnette et al. 2020).

During the fourteenth century the MCR experienced an outmigration, shifting from transformational adjustments into transitional adjustments. This outmigration resulted in an influx of populations in the CMV, and possible ontologies associated with Earth Mother and her ability to reincarnate children’s souls. While there is cultural continuity visible in imagery associated with Earth Mother, the Great Serpent seems to take on a more frequent role in the CMV with a tight centralization occurring in northeastern Arkansas and southeastern Missouri.
Figure 21. Artist rendering of a Mississippian man with a cat serpent vessel. (Drawing Courtesy of Ren Harvey)
The Great Serpent is associated with the Beneath World or the watery realm and is considered to be the ruler of the Realm of the Dead. This world may have been accessible through whirlpools and cave systems. While the region of extreme southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas does not support the karst topography needed for cave systems, the area was once inundated with waterways. The Mississippians of this region took advantage of natural high areas to support their societies and used these waterways for transportation, natural defenses, and subsistence practices through diets consisting of aquatic animals and flora. This landscape may also have provided a natural prototype for a microcosm of the Beneath World. Pauketat and colleagues (2015) has suggested landscape alterations at Cahokia such as the Rattlesnake Causeway leading from Monks Mound to a southern cluster of mounds may have represented the journey of the dead through the Great Serpents cosmoscape in order to reach the Realm of the Dead. This relation of this elevated causeway to the Beneath World is suggested in reference to the depressed or pond-like areas flanking both sides of the causeway. Mooney (1900) discusses mythologies associated with seeing people under the water, possibly waiting for their next step along their journey. One may suggest a transformational adjustment, in the region, emphasizing the Great Serpent and the use of their natural landscape to form a religious sodality focusing on the Great Serpent in an underwater form of an Underwater Panther also sometimes referred to as a Cat Serpent or Cat Monster.

David Dye (2018) assembled a corpus of six pottery groups focusing on a water serpent corpus in which he was able to identify stylistic variabilities. These six groups all originated from southeast Missouri from the Berry, Campbell, Denton, Humber, Lee, and Phillips counties. In discussing two vessels from the Berry site, Dye (2018:39) suggests the red slip on the vessels
may signify the vessel’s power, “Caking the vessel’s engraving by rubbing red ochre into the lines would have imbued the vessel with underworld attributes, including powers that could be summoned from the underwater spirit”. In discussing a Berry site bottle with serpent imagery Dye (2018) suggests an interlocking scroll motif may represent a vortex or a portal which, “may have been perceived as snares that attracted and trapped life or spiritual forces”. Dye reinforces this idea through a ritual recitation recorded from La Flesch (1921:104) from the Osage in which a great snake makes a sound of the blowing wind and sounds his rattle to the four directional winds. The recitation states little ones, presumably children, will pass into the realm of the spirits, or possibly the Realm of the Dead. This recitation is reminiscent of Sharp et al. (2011) suggestion that Earth Mother hooded effigy bottles are buried with children in order to reincarnate their souls.

**Earth Mother**

Figure 22a and 22b shows a hooded female effigy bottle from the Upper Nodena (3MS4) site in northeast Arkansas with a unique quadripartite motif on her back. Her head is titled towards the sky, her mouth is agape, and lines are noted towards the sides of her mouth. I suggest this imagery on her back depicts the four directional winds, just as mentioned in the ritual recitation of the Great Serpent. Her association with sub-adult burials in the MCR also mirrors the line concerning children passing into the Realm of the Dead. It seems the environmental conditions, occurring in the MCR, that led to an increase in sub-adults’ death may also have been occurring in the CMV. An increase in female hooded effigy bottles in the MCV associated with Earth Mother may demonstrate transformational resiliency in the form of modifying ontologies to increase a focus, through the establishment of a religious sodality, of Earth Mother’s role and command powers. These ontologies may have inundated the CMV after
the outmigration of the vacant quarter. This was accompanied by another religious sodality focusing on the Great Serpent and his powers associated with death. Previous esoteric knowledge associated with the Earth Mother and the Great Serpent entanglement from Cahokia and possibly earlier may have been reevoked, or possibly increased to assist in the need for these other-than and more-than-human-beings to assist in the continued environmental stressors which may have been exasperating warfare in the region.

Figure 22a. A frontal view of a hooded female effigy bottle from the Upper Nodena site (3MS4) in Mississippi County, Arkansas. (Photo courtesy of David H. Dye).
Figure 22b. A back view of a hooded female effigy bottle from the Upper Nodena site (3MS4) in Mississippi County, Arkansas. Bottle may illustrate a vortex or wind imagery. (Photo courtesy of David H. Dye).

This relationship can further be seen in Figure 23a and 23b, in which a serpent or possible two intertwined serpents are wrapped around the neck of an Earth Mother hooded effigy bottle from eastern Arkansas. This figure also demonstrates lines emitting from the mouth area and swirled marks on the upper and lower torso, though more abstract than the motif on Figure
This Figure also has diamond shapes along her back flanking nodes described by Sharp et al (2011) as vertebrae and may illustrate a hair braid.

Figure 23a. A frontal view of a hooded female effigy bottle with markings on the face, chest torso, and arms. She is also illustrated with a possible serpent(s) around her neck. Bottle from Mississippi County, AR. (Photo courtesy of David H. Dye).
Figure 23b. A back view of a hooded female effigy bottle with a diamond motif is illustrated on her back, along with the tail of a serpent(s) around her neck, and nodes along the center of her back. Bottle from Mississippi County, AR. (Photo courtesy of David H. Dye).
Joint Imagery

This entanglement between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent is further presented through Figure 24, where Duncan and Diaz-Granados state, “all of the above symbolism and more is combined on a Walls Engraved bottle from Murphy Mound (23PM59)” (2018:60), meaning the vulvar and vortex imagery associated with the Great Serpent and Earth Mother are all emerged into one theme, the cycle of life, death, and reincarnation.

On this vessel (figure 24) feline serpents, possibly illustrating cat serpents are depicted as the head of a more-than-human-being. One serpent is right side up, with vacant eyes, cross hatching on the neck, a pointed ear, snake like tongue, and a swirled body in the form of a swastika, swirled cross in circle, or a vortex motif. Another serpent is inverted with a mouth possibly illustrating teeth, cross hatching along with terraces on the neck, vacant eyes, pointed ears, and a swirled or vortex motif as the body.
This serpent seems to be in a state of agitation, is lacking the illustration of a serpent-like tongue and is connected to the body of the female figure, where the other serpent is above and separate from the body. The first theme is of the relationship between the Great Serpent and Earth Mother in their own narratives, but still demonstrating their connection. They have differing roles in the Above and Beneath Worlds and on their influence on the Middle World. The Great Serpent oversees the Realm of the Dead, activities in the night sky during certain calendar cycles, and bestowing power and medicine. Earth Mother is in charge of fertility, agriculture, and winds, yet through the creation stories they will always be interconnected.
The second image is showing the Great Serpent’s command powers associated with the two beings creating vortexes when they are involved in their joint role of death and reincarnation. The theme is showing a female figure in a possible birthing position, a larger and more complex version of the vulva motif, identified by Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) in the big five petroglyph sites as illustrating a creation narrative associated with Earth Mother birthing sacred offspring.

Lines or bands cut across the upper body, which Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) suggest are necklaces, however I argue they may be straps. The straps are shown under the arms more than the neck region and resemble straps on the Birger figurine associated with the pack on her back, which vegetation is emerging from. The figures arms are outstretched and are either missing the hands or are replaced by either a distorted square shape with a circle in the center, a diamond or possibly star shape with a circle in the middle or interpreted by Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) as asterisms. I suggest this imagery has multiple meanings. The first meaning may be as a locative, with the stars or asterisms demonstrating the night sky, the birthing position the Middle World, and the serpents the Beneath World, showing a possible association with Earth Mother and her influence on the tripartite cosmoscapes. Secondly, elements associated with temporal transitions of Earth Mother mythology may also be depicted since this image is late Mississippian. The birthing stance may be an illustration of Earth Mother’s role in the creation along with early focuses associated with fertility. The bands around her upper chest may reference the straps worn by Missouri Flint Clay female figurines in which the straps held a pack on the back and contained imagery associated with agriculture. These two elements demonstrate early Mississippian Earth Mother ontologies focused on agriculture, food, and fertility. The stars may again reference a creation story or possibly the night sky. Earth Mother has been referenced
in mythological narratives as having an association with the moon and also as stars in the Orion constellation. The diamond elements may also represent portions of the Path of Souls in the night sky where in Chapter 6 I discuss Earth Mother’s role in reincarnation of children along the Path of Souls. Finally, the serpents creating vortexes may illustrate the focus in the CMV of watery realms and possible death.
Chapter 8

Discussion

Through an iconographic interpretation, a stylistic analysis, and examination of archaeological data, climate data, and ethnographies associated with the GCR, petroglyph sites in southeast Missouri, the MCR, and the CMV I argue for a shift in Earth Mother ontologies. This transition may have occurred due to stressors such as environmental stressors and be illustrated through imagery related to the winds and vortexes. Earth Mother themes, though maintaining some cultural continuity, have changed from a fertility and agriculture focus into a theme related to reincarnation, and finally into an association with vortexes. Her relationship with the Great Serpent can be seen throughout the Mississippian period, though its frequency increases within the CMV, possibly due to the high occurrence of severe weather and tornadoes within the region. Through this research I present evidence for my argument related to Earth and will summarize these arguments in this discussion chapter beginning with the GCR, where I argue this transition of Earth Mother themes, within the Mississippian period began.

Greater Cahokia Region

Iconographic interpretations of Earth Mother narratives and imagery has centered around fertility and agricultural inferences. These inferences seem to have begun in regard to the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes in the GCR and ceremonial architecture described by Emerson (1983). He proposed that these sacred objects and their possible association with ceremonial structures suggests the area had experienced a religious focus centered around feminine powers in the form of fertility and agriculture. He also argued that the elites of the area may have formed
a cult in which the ritual specialists used these sacred feminine centered themes to gain control over the population. Fritz (2019) disagrees with this explanation and states the Earth Mother theme may have been used by female religious sodalities to venerate and supplicate Earth Mother and her powers associated with human and animal fertility, along with the fertility of agriculture. While I have found no reports of a male or a female dominated sodality focusing on Earth Mother, within the archaeological record in the GCR or the American Bottom, burial evidence has demonstrated adult females being buried with hooded female effigy bottles. This sampling size is however small and is no indication that a gendered association may have been the norm.

Currently, the only evidence we have surrounding the Missouri Flint Clay statuettes is that their source has been identified as the Missouri Ozarks and they seem to have originated in the GCR. Some of the female figurines have been located within pits, possibly associated with religious structures, and the majority of the figurines have been ritually killed, burned, and or buried. We do know some of the female figurines have been located outside of the GCR, suggesting the movement of a sodality related to her since esoteric knowledge would not have been readily available and would have needed a ritual specialist to perform and guard the knowledge. The creation, fluorescence, and death of these centralized sacred objects suggests they served a function within a specific temporal and spatial range. Once this function was no longer required or no longer performing as expected, the objects were killed, or separated from their power, and placed in the ground.

In order to gain a better understanding of why these statuettes were decommissioned I examined the iconography associated with them, along with any available archaeological data, and a stylistic analysis. The female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes are all similar in their depiction
of a female figurine as the central theme and vegetative material in some form whether that be through plant stalks, plant like mats, or possible baskets. On the statuettes, where the lower body has been found, they depict a skirt just above the knees, though no form of shirt has been illustrated. The figures frequently are in a kneeling position on a circular disk and are engaged in some activity such as hoeing a snake, holding a snake, presenting vegetative material, or placing their hand on a lidded basket in front of them. Though not every figure seems to be active in the same task, the tasks are all interconnected though different parts of the theme are being highlighted. These statuettes all contain similar aspects in regard to style, which leads to the ability to say with confidence that the figurines were created within the GCR and then moved with the religious sodalities instead of people coming to Cahokia and then going back to their home and creating a similar statuette. Not only was the knowledge associated with the theme of the figure controlled, but how she is represented was tightly regulated through the style of the eyes, the knee length skirt, the kneeling position of the figures, the circular disk underneath the figures, and the hair styles. Her theme was also contained, without variations, with the figure either focused on agriculture, a bundle, or serpents though at times all three of these themes were interwoven together.

After the iconography was interpreted and the style analyzed to suggest a regional focus on this more-than-human-being’s particular theme, the archaeological record was examined to evaluate the archaeological contexts associated with the female statuettes. Unfortunately, some of the statuettes were found by collectors without any archaeological data outside of the site location. Others were found during salvage work and did not receive the documentation one would hope for. The statuettes that do contain documentation normally show them associated with pits, sometimes within structures stated to be ceremonial architecture and sometimes
outside of these structures. The data that is available suggests the purpose of these statuettes was ritualistic and not involved with the burial of humans. This leads to the argument that their function may not have been related to reincarnating souls or assisting in the journey of the soul along the Path of Souls and to the Realm of the Dead. This then raises the question as to what their purpose was and why they were abandoned, possibly within a 50-to 100-year time frame, while other themes occur throughout the entirety of the Mississippian Period (A.D. 1000-A.D. 1650).

The statuettes, in the GCR, seem to have been abandoned sometime near the end of the Stirling Phase A.D. 1100-1200 (Colvin 2012). We know the boom of Cahokia occurred around A.D. 1050 (Benson et al. 2009), thus allowing for a one hundred to one-hundred-and-fifty-year span that they may have been created and used. Though we do not know their date of creation, Colvin (2012:19) states that their Braden type style suggests they were also created during the Stirling phase, which narrows our time window down to a possible one-hundred-year span if this argument is accurate. If we continue with this line of thought then focusing on the social, political, and environmental climate during the Stirling phase may provide a better insight into the disuse of these statuettes.

Around the middle of the Stirling Phase in A.D. 1150 the GCR was in the latter part of a 15-year drought with PDSI data showing that, “drought occurred frequently during the early Stirling phase and that it dominated the late Stirling phase” (Benson et al. 2009:474). Stirling phase sites were also at lower elevations than previous phases suggesting the water table might have been lower. By the end of the Stirling phase the Richland Farming Complex had been abandoned, 50% of the population had left, and a palisade wall would be built (Benson et al. 2009). All of this suggests factors leading to the fragmentation of the region were in place and
causing the Mississippians to use transformational and then transitional resiliency methods to try and cope with the inability to sustain these large polities. I argue that the timing of these fragmentations and the killing and interment of the female Missouri Flint Clay figurines are correlated.

During the beginning of the Stirling phase the GCR was just emerging from a fifty-year pluvial period. It may have been during this time when the female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes and sodalities associated with them began to be created. This region had experienced multiple decades of ideal environmental conditions, surplus food storage from the Richland Farming Complex, and the formation of elaborate ritual-administrative complexes. This led to a focused ontological theme associated with fertility of the earth through the renewal of agriculture and the fertility of human beings and animals who were able to produce children in a time of abundance. This more-than-human-being, possibly known as Earth Mother, may have been born of previous mythological narratives associated with her and these statuettes may have been guarded, venerated, and supplicated to thank this more-than-human-being for fertility and to make sure the ideal conditions continued. These religious sodalities traveled to other polities outside of the GCR to bring esoteric knowledge associated with this Earth Mother theme to other regions and to initiate their own influence. However, during the beginning of the Stirling Phase, droughts were already beginning to occur though ramifications of them may not have begun to cause consequences yet. By the end of the Stirling phase the region had been plagued with multiple and severe droughts, which led to the abandonment of the Richland Farming Complex, battles over resources, a discontent with the elites in charge, and a possible feeling of abandonment from this mother figure who may have been viewed as taking away the climate they had experienced. She may have been seen as angry and vengeful instead of benevolent and helpful. Venerating these
statuettes may have increased, until it was realized the requests for help were in vain. In order to neutralize the power bestowed within the statuettes they were ritually killed and buried in pits, instead of receiving funerals that other sacred objects have received throughout the Mississippian world.

The Arikara’s have a mythological narrative associated with a more-than-human-being, called Whirlwind Woman, who becomes vengeful when she is not offered tobacco (Pybus 2009:232). Also, in the southwest the Hopi have a narrative in which, “a great whirlwind blew all the vegetation from the surface of the Earth and all the water from its courses” (Mallery 1893:604-5, see also Patterson 1992:186). Due to the severe and multidecadal droughts experienced by the GCR Earth Mother ontologies began to shift from fertility and agriculture oriented to an association with death, and reincarnation, along with wind and vortex imagery. Her previous association with the fertility of agriculture, possibly through rain, would have been a curse when strong seasonal rains fell on drought-stricken ground. This would have killed any surviving plants and washed seeds out of the ground, along with the possible loss of human and animal life during flash flooding. Earth Mother was angry, and the only option left was to remove as much of her power as possible. Once this had been accomplished, along with other transformational and transitional resiliency methods, sodalities associated with resetting the balance of the cosmoescapes occurred in areas such as the Big Petroglyph sites in southeast Missouri.
**Big Five Petroglyph Sites**

Duncan and Diaz-Granados have spent the past few decades investigating petroglyph and pictograph sites in Missouri and Illinois. One of these cave clusters is called the Big Five Petroglyph sites in southeast Missouri. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) have suggested that some of these sites may have been associated with creation stories, or the retelling of them.

Vulva motifs are frequent within the southern sites of the Big Five, along with serpent imagery. Some of these vulva and serpent motifs are in close association with each other and other motifs may illustrate intercourse scenes between the two beings. Some of the motifs seem to illustrate a female figure, in a birthing position, in association with six dots or circles. Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) have suggested these six dots may depict the supernatural children of Earth Mother such as Morning Star. The Arapaho have a mythical narrative associated with six black spots on a food bag, which are stated to represent the six places Whirlwind Woman rested during her journey of creating the world (Kroeber 1902). Could the two stories maintain a similar theme associated with creation and the petroglyph of a female more-than-human-being “birthing” six objects depicting her creation of six different locations on earth?

The association with Earth Mother motifs and a creation focus at the Big Five Petroglyph sites are an attempt by one or more religious sodalities, in the area, trying to rebalance the cosmoscapes, which became unbalanced and sent the Middle World into chaos during the early Mississippian period. The location of these motifs, within cave spaces and sometimes in dark zones, suggest they were not intended for the general public and were created by ritualistic specialist to communicate with the other-than and more-than-human-beings located on the other side of the rock veil. This may have been an attempt to appease an annoyed Earth Mother who could be vindictive at times and to try and wipe the slate clean and begin anew.
While some of the petroglyphs are associated with the Cahokian fluorescence, a majority of them occur during the Cahokian diaspora (Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2018). The motifs Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) interpret as feminine include vulvar, swirls, cross-in-circle, and concentric circles. This feminine gendered iconography was not previously seen on the female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes though they do occur on other ceramics within the GCR and the American Bottom. These motifs are polysemous, meaning they can take on multiple meanings, which have to be interpreted based on other positional symbols, command symbols, and locatives. I suggest that when these motifs are in particular contexts, they can offer clues as to the command power associated with the other-than or more-than-human-being referenced. This can explain why motifs such as swirls and concentric circles occur on such a wide span of ceramics instead of seeming to focus on one style or one theme.

These themes, related to Earth Mother seem to increase in frequency through their occurrence on hooded female effigy bottles in the MCR. While these motifs do not occur on the female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes from the GCR it should also be noted that agriculture imagery does not occur on these female effigies from the MCR. It seems that the Big Five Petroglyph sites are not only a spatial but a temporal buffer between these two specific themes or at least the decrease in frequency of one theme and the increase in frequency of the other.

The use of these creation motifs, within this cave system, especially during the Cahokian diaspora seems to imply the need to reach Earth Mother. Perhaps she had retreated behind the veil of the Middle World into the world behind the stone wall. Observing, but not interacting with the people of this time.

The Papago have a mythical narrative in which the Whirlwind was driven from the town and took the rain with it, causing droughts and famine. Realizing what they had done, the people
sent animals to try and locate the Whirlwind and bring back the rain. After many failed attempts a bird located Whirlwind hiding in a cave. This story seems reminiscent of this time within the Mississippian period in my research area. Whatever happened in the GCR, associated with Earth Mother, resulted in a change between her and the agriculture theme related to her. Was this viewed as her leaving and were the creation motifs at the Big Five petroglyph sites a “search” to try and bring her back in order to ask for her help in reincarnation?

Story of the Wind and Rain

“Whirlwind was told to leave the village. Rain was a good friend to Whirlwind. Rain was blind; and wherever Whirlwind went, he had to lead his friend. So, when the old man became angry, and said that Whirlwind had to leave the village, Whirlwind left the village and took his friend with him. Where he went, nobody knew. He was gone four years. During that time there was no rain, and there was no wind…They called upon a certain little Bird, a little larger than the humming-bird, but without its long tail and bill. As this little Bird started out of the village, he took a stick and tied one of his down-feathers to it. As he flew into the first of the bushes, he held out this little stick everywhere he went. He would look at the down as it hung on the stick, and it did not move. And everywhere he flew, he carried this little stick; and the down hung there and wouldn't move. One day, somewhere in the east, he put out this little stick, and he saw the down begin to move a little. He flew around here and there, and finally he saw which way this down began to move, and he knew from where the wind was coming. He alighted at a place where there were green grass and flowers and trees, and a little stream of running water. He followed this little stream of water, and came to a big cave. There was a little bit of a fire; and on one side was the Rain, and on the other side was the
Whirlwind. They were both asleep. He took one of the coals and put it on Rain’s back. The coal sizzled and went out. He took another one and put it on his back, and again it sizzled and went out. He did this four times. The fourth time Rain woke up. The little Bird told him that for these four years the people had had no rain and no wind. There was no food and no water, and they wanted him to return. Rain told him that he could not return unless his friend went along with him. So, he had to wake up Whirlwind.

Whirlwind said that although they sent him away, if they now wished to have him back as one of his people, he would return. The little Bird went back. It was after four years he returned. He told them that in the east there was a most beautiful spot, where they had green grass and flowers, and all kinds of little springs, and that there he had found Rain and Whirlwind. But they both thought themselves so important that they would not return. The people had to send again. They had to call for them four times; and the fourth time Rain and Whirlwind said, "All right, we will come along." Then they started out. On the fourth day the wind began to blow and blow. Thus it was on the first day after they started out. It came closer and closer; and on the fourth day the wind was there, and there was a great wind-storm with dust. After this wind had passed, there came the rain; and it rained and rained and rained. They went all over the country, and then they returned home. After this, whenever the people wished rain, they had to call on these two, and they would come at certain times. Whenever Whirlwind came, he had to lead his friend along, because Rain was blind and he had to follow” (Kroeber 103-105).

While this mythological narrative gives agency to both the whirlwind and rain along with implying a masculine gender to both, I argue foundational pieces still exist which may demonstrate cultural continuity. In the story we can see that Whirlwind was
offended and that this caused the rain to leave. People then suffered from droughts and famine with a continual repeat of the sacred number four. This mythological narrative is important in understanding the perspectives associated with the agency these more-than and other-than-human-beings possessed. If Earth Mother left or was forced to leave, it may have been perceived that she took the rain, needed for agricultural fertility and renewal with her. The fact that the story states the two were found in a cave relates to the petroglyphs associated with Earth Mother and creation at the Big Five petroglyph sites. The use of four will be seen in vortex or wind imagery associated with Earth Mother in the CMV, where her command powers have shifted to include those of the Whirlwind. The CMV also sees 60% of its annual rainfall from severe thunderstorms, which would have also produced tornadoes. If the rain leaves, then the Whirlwind would have to follow along.

The MCR also experienced droughts, due not only to the current climate but its elevation and something known as the rain shadow effect which decreased its overall precipitation. The ritualistic specialists may have coaxed Earth Mother back out from behind the veil of the cave walls, but unfortunately rain did not accompany her, instead the people of the MCR would need her to use her previous control over Wakanda, or the breath of life to animate life and plants, in order to reincarnate the souls of their children who were dying from famine.
Middle Cumberland Region

The Middle Cumberland Region seems to have been the location of a new centralized theme associated with Earth Mother. While hooded female effigy bottles occurred in regions outside of the MCR the Nashville Negative Painted pattern associated with these vessels seems to have originated within the area, though there are occasional outliers. This pattern has been referenced as a cloak and occurs predominately on straight-back female effigies though it has also been identified on hump-back female effigies (Sharp et al. 2011). According to Sharp and colleagues (2011) this cloak-like pattern acts as an identifier for the individual being illustrated, which they argue is Earth Mother. They also point out a motif on the shoulders of effigies with this Nashville Negative Painted pattern. This motif is frequently displayed as a swirled or concentric circles on the shoulders of the female figure. These two motifs are similar to the motifs at the Big Five Petroglyph sites which Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) defined as feminine, or more specifically, Earth Mother motifs. Similar motifs will also be seen in the CMV in association with Earth Mother and Cat Serpent imagery.

Sharp and colleagues (2011) have argued for a connection between these hooded female effigy bottles and children through archaeological data showing the majority of these vessels occur in sub-adult graves. Kelso (2017) examined sub-adult skeletal remains from the Averbuch site in the MCR and concluded that the sub-adults were suffering from infectious disease and famine, possibly related to the droughts in the region. If Earth Mother had become associated with death through the droughts a push may have been initiated to focus on her previous abilities to create and renew. However, now this took on a different role with the renewal being the reanimation of children’s
souls. The concentric circle or swirled circles on the shoulders of the vessels displaying the Nashville Negative Painted pattern may be an identifier as to the specific role of Earth Mother. This motif may demonstrate the winds of Wakanda, or the breath of life, merging together into a vortex with the ability to reincarnate a soul.

Other imagery occurring on these vessels from the MCR, and later the CMV, are raised nodes which run along the spine of the female hump-back vessels and in rare cases straight-back female effigies. Sharp and colleagues (2011) have refereed to these nodes as vertebrae, possibly illustrating the advanced age of the figure who does have names such as Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies and Grandmother. Other aspects of the vessels such as the detailed collarbones, the skeletal like arms, and a bloated body have also been used to infer the illustration of a female experiencing old age. I disagree that the imagery associated with the hump-back vessels are illustrating an old woman, and instead are focused on depicting her command power associated with the reincarnation of the dead.

To begin examining the possible characteristics associated with old age I assembled a corpus of hump-back hooded female effigy bottles from the MCR and the CMV. Unfortunately, the majority of the corpus consisted of pictures, which frequently only display a frontal view of the vessels. A more comprehensive analysis will need to be performed for a level of confidence to be stated. However, I feel my analysis is sufficient in opening the discussion on the topic and to provide beginning inferences as to how we have decoded these characteristics and also how our ethnocentrism may have clouded our perspective.

While Earth Mother is defined as an older subject, especially through the names associated with her, we also know through mythological narratives that she had the
ability to rejuvenate her appearance to that of a younger woman. This has been the main argument between the straight-back and hump-back effigies, with the straight-back illustrating Earth Mother as a younger woman and the hump-back illustrating her in an advanced age. I disagree with this conclusion and state that if both vessel types are examined correlations can be made between the two in regard to shared characteristics not involving age.

The first characteristic I examine is the nodes along the back of the spine area, which have been defined as vertebrae (Sharp et al. 2011). I argue these nodes are illustrating a hair braid instead of vertebrae. Hair styles are important in Indigenous communities and provide the viewer information about the person such as marriage status, clan affiliation, and possible social class. The Missouri Flint Clay figurines frequently display the female figure with long hair down her back. This inclusion of a hair style would not have been accidental or to increase the aesthetics of the figure. Instead, they were an identifier as to who the figure being displayed was and possibly a marker as to social norms that we are unaware of. This suggests the hooded female effigy vessels may also have contained specific hairstyles identifying them stylistically temporally and spatially. Sharp and colleagues (2011) have examined hairstyles displayed on top of or on the back of the head. The nodes are extensions of these hairstyles and are displayed as laying on top of the back of the vessel instead of connected to the body as vertebrae would be. A further analysis of a large corpus of these vessels displaying nodes along the back would need to be further examined, including identifying if the nodes only occur with specific top and back of the head hairstyles. Not every hump-back contains these nodes and a few, though rare, straight-back effigies contain these nodes suggesting there is another factor
influencing if the nodes are displayed, and not contingent on the vessel being displayed as old.

The next few characteristics, the exposed collar bones, the bloated or expanded body, and the skeletal type arms are all displaying the figures association with the grave, or the womb of the earth. With her command role now focusing on reincarnating sub-adult souls, in the MCR, she would need a way to transport these souls, possibly to the Great Serpent, for them to wait in the Beneath World before they could be reincarnated. A small number of female effigies have displayed packs on their backs with possibly small children inside of them. They have been interpreted as displaying a mother carrying her child on her back. This is actually showing Earth Mother carrying a child’s soul. I further suggest this is demonstrating continuity from the female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes which are displayed with either a lidded basket or a back on their back. The pack is not frequently displayed in the MCR and the CMV, instead it seems almost built into her body, which is shown through the bulge in her back, which is similar to the shape of the bulge of the packs displayed on some of the figures. Her expanded body may be to demonstrate the volume of the grave, with her womb defined as the grave. The prominent collar bones and the skeletal arms may further show her relationship to the grave and with skeletal remains within the grave.

The religious sodalities within the Big Five Petroglyph region were able to reset the relationship between Earth Mother and the people. However, that relationship would never be the same, though fundamental characteristics would remain and can be identified through iconographic interpretations. Once Earth Mother returned, she was needed in a new role centered around mitigating the damage from the droughts by
reincarnating the souls of children who were buried within her womb, known as the graves within the earth. Instead of long flowing hair down her back, vegetative matter, agricultural tools, and a display of power over serpents, she now has her hair on top of her head, or braided down her back, keeping it out of the way of her tasks. Instead of a pack on her back filled with seeds or a container possibly filled with sacred bundle items, she carries a pack on her back in the form of an expanded area, possibly representing a grave. Sometimes the artists illustrate this pack and display a child inside, sometimes no pack is visible but may carry intended knowledge of its existence. Since she is dealing with burials her body resembles skeletal characteristics in the form of pronounced collarbones and skeletal arms, the rest of her body is expanded and not skeletal related, again possibly demonstrating the volume of a grave.

Similar imagery continues in the CMV, though the Nashville Negative Painted pattern does not seem to expand in the CMV. Also, straight-back effigy bottles become even rarer in the CMV, with a strong focus on hump-back female effigy vessels. The CMV also sees motifs associated with quadripartite swirled patterns possibly illustrating vortexes.

Central Mississippi Valley

During the fifteenth century the MCR experienced an outmigration due to stressors such as multiple decades of severe droughts. During this time the CMV began to see the nucleation of large polities within areas along the Mississippi river such as in southeastern Missouri and northeastern Arkansas. This region consisted of multiple inundated land from swamps, tributaries, bayous, oxbow lakes, and the Mississippi River itself. With the addition of seasonal rains from severe thunderstorms, accompanied by the
possibility of tornadoes, this area may have been viewed as a sacred landscape associated with the Beneath World and the Great Serpent, along with powerful forces in the forms of tornado and whirlpool vortexes.

Lankford (2006) describes what he calls the occurrence of death imagery at the Moundville site in Alabama. I argue that the southeastern Missouri and northeastern Arkansas regions are experiencing something similar and displaying this emphasis on death within their iconography. Religious sodalities focusing on the Great Serpent, through the alias Cat Serpent, create cat serpent effigy bowls at a high frequency and in a centralized area during the Late Mississippian period. These vessels display swirled imagery on them along with some containing swirled cross-in-circle motifs, and what has been termed as “whiskers” along the faces of this other-than-human-being. Inferences concerning the whiskers and swirled motifs have suggested the whiskers notate feline characteristics to the being with the swirled motif on the bodies of the vessels illustrating water and the creature’s movement through the water. I would argue, just as the old woman interpretation of hump-back effigies, that we are oversimplifying or placing our ethnocentric perspectives on supernatural beings. While these more-than and other-than-human-beings have natural prototypes, they are otherworldly beings. Attaching human and natural characteristics to them such as feline whiskers and signs of aging may be doing a disservice to the power and agency they have been imbued with.

The “whiskers” on the vessels may actually illustrate Wakanda and the Great Serpents role in removing this Wakanda from animated beings. While the whiskers and the swirled motifs on the body of the vessels sometimes seem independent of each other (see Figure 25), some vessels demonstrate the attachment of the whiskers to the swirled
motif, suggesting the lines coming from the mouth and nose area of the being are turning into the larger swirled pattern. This larger swirled pattern may illustrate a portal, specifically an underwater portal or whirlpool in which souls are sucked down into the Beneath World while they await the next step of their journey.

Figure 25. Cat Serpent Bowl showing “whiskers” and a swirled motif on the body of the vessel from the Campbell (23PM5) site in Pemiscot County, Missouri. (Photo Courtesy of David H. Dye).
Earth Mother hooded effigy bottles from this area (see Appendix C for Amanda Pesce’s 2017 assembled Earth Mother corpus from the CMV) also demonstrate swirled patterns, with one vessel from northeastern Arkansas displaying a quadripartite swirled motif on the back of the vessel and lines emitting from the mouth area, similar to those on the cat serpent vessels. This quadripartite motif may illustrate the ability of Earth Mother to also control Wakanda, however in the animating sense instead of removing the animation as the Great Serpent vessels may demonstrate. While Earth Mother may command vortexes related to creation and reincarnation and the Great Serpent having command over vortexes related to death and a portal for souls to enter the Beneath World, the relationship between the two, first pointed out with the Birger figurine in the GCR is still visible. This duality can be seen in joint imagery such as serpents on the necks of Earth Mother vessels, the heads of a female more-than-human-being replaced with serpents, vulva motifs on the backs of cat serpent effigy heads, and lines emitting from the mouths of both female effigy vessels and cat serpent vessels. While this balance between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent has been identified in Earth Mother’s control of the Great Serpent and turning his body into vegetative matter in the GCR, creation petroglyphs related to intercourse between the two at the Big Five Petroglyph sites, and possible cross-hatching representing serpents on the cloak of Earth Mother in the MCR, this relationship and its portrayal seems to increase in frequency in the CMV. I argue this increase in the focus on the relationship between the two emerges based on the sacred landscape these vessels are being created in. This region is inundated with water and possibly seen as the realm of the Great Serpent who is the ruler over death. Whirlpools would have been seen at an increased frequency due to the large spans of
water covering the area. The occurrence of these whirlpools within the domain of the Great Serpent would have caused the Mississippians to associate this phenomenon with him. Also, this region is associated with severe thunderstorms, which would have caused an increase in the occurrence of tornadoes, which would have required an explanation. This explanation was placed on Earth Mother, who was already known for control of the winds and the sacred breath of life. This region, such as the MCR and the GCR were also experiencing droughts and were experiencing war as seen from the polities with palisaded walls. The need to balance this death and reincarnation relationship may have been vital, allowing for religious sodalities focusing on the subject to gain control, which can be seen in the increase in ceramics illustrating wind and vortex powers.
Chapter 9

Conclusion

Other-than and more-than-human-beings were vital aspects of the Mississippian cosmoctes, and are made tangible through statuettes, petroglyphs, pictographs, and dendroglyphs, along with ceramic effigies through varying styles and themes. These beings and vessels were given agency to create, influence, and control the Middle World along with the other parts of the cosmoctes such as the Realm of the Dead and the Path of Souls. Humans spent their lives trying to establish and maintain a balance between these beings and between the different levels of their cosmoctes. When these worlds became unbalanced, chaos ensued, and transitional and transformation resiliency adaptation methods were implemented to try and rebalance the world. These episodes of transitional and transformation resiliency can be viewed through iconographic analyses and interpretations along with style analyses to understand why themes change, move to other regions, or are abandoned.

Methodology

Ethnographies related to Indigenous mythical narratives demonstrate the importance of a female figure, known as Earth Mother within the southeast, along with a powerful other-than-human-being known as the Great Serpent. These ethnographies also illustrate the importance of explaining the natural world around them, especially when conditions outside of their control such as environmental stressors began to fragment their societies. One example of explaining an environmental hazard can be seen in the historical narratives associated with a more-than-human-being called Whirlwind, the Creator, Cyclone, and Whirlwind Woman. This being has been associated with the creation of the world, the animator of life, the removal of rain and cause
of droughts, the source of rain and agriculture fertility, the destruction of homes and lives, and as this research suggests, the commander of the winds or breath of life, known as Wakanda.

The archaeological record allows for inferences to be made related to the function of vessels, the movement of these vessels, dates associated with them, and the creation of religious sodalities to control esoteric knowledge related to them along with control over their creation and disbursement. Through burial data Sharp and colleagues (2011) were able to suggest a relationship between hooded female effigy bottles in the MCR and sub-adult burials. Kelso (2017) also examined skeletal remains from these sub-adults to suggest they were experiencing feminine from droughts occurring in the region. Archaeological data further provided contexts related to the ritual killing and interment of the female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes in the GCR along with dates to suggest they were interred toward the end of the Stirling phase.

Climate and weather data in the form of tornado frequencies, La Nina and El Nino oscillations, and paleoclimate data such as Palmer Drought Severity Indexes were utilized to establish a possible additional layer to the fragmentation of these societies in the GCR, Big Five Petroglyph sites, the MCR, and the CMV. This data allowed for inferences concerning the increase and decrease of particular iconographic themes, the movement of styles outside of their creation areas, additional explanations related to out-migrations, and the stressors of inadequate food supplies possibly caused by droughts.

A combination of these forms of methodology such as iconographic interpretations, stylistic analyses, examination of ethnographies, the archaeological record, and paleoclimate data were used to evaluate the transition of Earth Mother ontologies spatially and temporally with in the Mississippian period. This allowed for me to argue, with confidence, that Earth Mother
ontologies shifted throughout these regions and throughout time due to numerous factors, including though not limited to multiple decades of severe droughts.

**Background**

This research adds to a collection of knowledge from previous archaeological, folklore, paleoclimate, and ethnographic research regarding Earth Mother effigies, tornadoes, and drought conditions within my research areas. Archaeologists such as Duncan and Diaz-Granados (2018) and Loubser and colleagues (2018) have examined rock art and its relationship to mythological themes. Boles (2011, 2020, 2022); Colvin (2012); Diaz-Granados (2004); Emerson (1983); Fritz (2019); Lankford (2011), Mueller and Fritz (2016), Prentice (1986); Reilly (2004); and Sharp and colleagues (2011) have all examined the female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes and suggest an Earth Mother association with them. Benson and colleagues (2009); Burnette and colleagues (2020); Cobb and Butler (2022); Cook and Comstock 2022; and Meeks and Anderson (2013) have all examined drought conditions within the Mississippian period and their impact of the resiliency of the Mississippian people. Pybus (2009) became my key reference in tornado mythologies and the identification of a more-than-human-being known as Whirlwind Woman. Finally, Brown (2022); Dye (2018); King (2011); Knight (2013); and Lankford (2004, 2011) led the way in analysis stylistic forms for ceramic assemblages within the Mississippian period and allowed for the identification of religious sodalities associated with female Missouri Flint Clay figurines, female hooded effigy bottles with the MCR and the CMV, and Great Serpent vessels in the CMV.
Greater Cahokia Region

Through my methodology and background research I was able to suggest, in chapter 4, that the female Missouri Flint Clay statuettes in the GCR were created during ideal climate conditions to represent a more-than-human-being known by many names such as Earth Mother. This more-than-human-being commanded powers such as creation and renewal fertility powers through agriculture and the creation of human and animal life. These figurines also illustrated a relationship between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent with the serpent frequently held down or controlled in some way. When mega-decadal droughts began to impact the area, these figurines were ritually killed and disposed of, during the end of the Sterling phase. The fundamental components related to Earth Mother maintained cultural continuity as migrants from the GCR and the American Bottom migrated into other areas such as southeast Missouri where the Big Five Petroglyph sites are located and into the MCR where preexisting Earth Mother mythological narratives probably already existed. This formed a melting pot of not only Mississippians from varying cultures but a merge of preexisting Earth Mother roles and imagery along with the adaptation of a new command power associated with Earth Mother or a least a new level of emphasis on her abilities.

At the end of the Cahokia diaspora creation stories were placed on the walls of a cluster of cave sites, known as the Big Five Petroglyph sites. The recreation of these stories may have been a plea to Earth Mother, who they felt had abandoned them during the droughts. This may have been a time to try and rebalance the chaos that had erupted in the Middle World. These creation stories focus on female motifs such as the birthing of six locations in the world or six supernatural offspring. Intercourse imagery between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent are also frequent, suggesting this relationship was already well establish within the Mississippian
ontologies. Feminine related imagery in the form of vulvar, concentric circles, and cross-in-circle and/or swirled cross-in-circle motifs possibly representing earth mother were identified as petroglyphs within the cluster of cave sites and may have been used to alter the landscape into a female gendered sacred region.

**Pictographs, Petroglyphs, and Dendroglyphs**

The enhancement of possibly already sacred landscapes such as at the Big Five Petroglyph sites, led to the ability of communication across the cosmoscapes and to the ability to link the tripartite worlds through natural conductors such as rock, water, and trees. Other-than-and more-than-human-beings, such as Earth Mother and the Great Serpent, lurked behind these veils separating the worlds and may have been able to access the Middle World through symbolically charged motifs and to open portals for religious officials, with powerful esoteric knowledge, to cross into these other realms and communicate with the beings and their ancestors.

Images occurring on trees, while described as trail markers, may have been informational but not to the humans viewing them. They may have been intended to relay information of war wins and losses, enemies captured, stories, and the different bands in the area to other-than and more-than-human-beings who were a large part of their lives. Those creating the imagery were probably versed in the esoteric knowledge needed to communicate with these beings and the creation of these images would not have been taken lightly. Identifying them as trail markers such as those seen on a modern highway may be doing that intent a disservice.

The description of gendered landscapes suggests these other-than and more-than-human-beings may have been naturally drawn to particular locations, possibly seen in Duncan and Diaz-Granados’ (2018) delineation of a northern (Above World) and southern (Beneath
World) division in the Big Five cave sites through specific iconography. This may account for overlap in motifs representing varying locatives, other-than and more-than-human-beings, and command symbols through similar motifs with the ability to perform polysemous inferences based on various contexts understood by the creators of the images. While archaeologists may never be able to “get inside” the mind of these creators, maybe we can peak behind the veil through patterning of these motifs on various media and in differing spatial and temporal context to gain a better understanding of Mississippian ontologies and the importance of the sacred landscape within their cultures.

The fundamental components related to Earth Mother maintained cultural continuity as migrants from the GCR and the American Bottom migrated into the MCR where preexisting Earth Mother mythological narratives probably already existed. This formed a melting pot of not only Mississippians from varying cultures but a merge of preexisting Earth Mother roles and imagery along with the adaptation of a new command power associated with Earth Mother or at least a new level of emphasis on her abilities.

**Middle Cumberland Region**

Through the examination of burials, archaeologists have established a relationship between Earth Mother hooded effigy bottles and sub-adult graves suggesting Earth Mother may have played a vital role in the reincarnation of children’s souls. Nashville Negative painted patterns on some of these effigies seems to be centralized to the MCR, though some outliers do occur. This may emphasize the presence of a religious sodality centering on rituals related to asking Earth Mother for her assistance in reincarnating children. Through the examination of sub-adult skeletal remains in the MCR versus the Eastern Tennessee Region it seems that children in the MCR may have had a higher fatality rate due to environmental stressors including
drought and the areas dependence on maize surplus. This may be one of the reasons for a needed shift in the ontologies surrounding Earth Mother as she may now have been needed to save children who may have been dying at an accelerated rate. The Vacant Quarter hypothesis may further provide evidence for these dire circumstances with outmigration occurring to the east and to the south as the people of the MCR looked for areas that could support them.

The possible correlation between Earth Mother effigies and children’s graves may be further supported through the artistic licensing taken by the creators of these effigies such as the intentional expansion of the chest cavity and a hump shape on the back of the effigies. This hump shape has been interpreted as the hump occurring during old age, however, this hump may actually note a pack on the back of the effigies, in which something could be carried. Earth Mother’s command powers in the MCR seem to have focused around the death of children with the interpretation of this association centering on Earth Mother’s ability to reincarnate souls. The pack may resemble the way Native women transported young children on their backs, with the imagery suggesting Earth Mother is carrying the children’s souls to be reincarnated. Similar imagery is depicted on the Missouri Flint Clay female figurines where packs, normally filled with plant-like imagery, is depicted on the back of the female figures. Other Missouri Flint Clay figures have been illustrated with containers in front of them which have been suggested as sacred bundles or possible charnel houses (Colvin 2012; Fritz 2019; Reilly 2004).

Further imagery interpreted as representing old age includes nodes along the back of the figures, which I argue may illustrate hair braids, especially with the importance of hair and hair styles on effigy figures throughout the Southeast. This braid may have occurred due to the transition in command powers for Earth Mother, where previously she was illustrated with long hair down her back, a form of pack, and vegetative material now in the MCR. She is shown with
a braid down her back (along with other hairstyles) a pack on her back, and cloak like imagery possibly suggesting her command power of reincarnation through vortex or concentric circle motifs.

**Central Mississippi Valley**

During the fifteenth century the MCR experienced an out-migration resulting in the Vacant Quarter. Many of these people moved into the southeastern Missouri and northeastern Arkansas region. This watery landscape may have increased the frequency of ontologies related to the Great Serpent and his Realm of the Dead. Imagery associated with whirlpools and the breath of life, along with his ability to remove this breath, increase on cat serpent effigy bowls within this region. Earth Mother hooded female effigy bottles also see new iconography associated with them such as swirls and quadripartite motifs possibly display wind and or vortex imagery. There is also a stronger emphasis placed on the relationship between Earth Mother and the Great Serpent through joint imagery occurring on the same vessel and motifs relating to Earth Mother occurring on Great Serpent vessels and snake imagery occurring on Earth Mother vessels. Though current burial data does not currently support these vessels inclusion in burials, their association with death imagery such as vortexes may suggest reincarnation and death were vital to the ontologies of the region.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the importance of a holistic approach in examining iconographic changes in relation to stressors such as environmental stressors. Earth Mother ontologies shifted spatially and temporally throughout the Mississippian period, with one transformational stressor possibly being multi-decadal and severe droughts. These environmental conditions increased iconography related to death and reincarnation with regional variations based on the landscapes and the current needs of the people. Through the various analyses
presented religious sodalities and their control over esoteric knowledge and media related to this knowledge can be identified in the GCR, Big Five Petroglyph sites, the MCR, and the CMV. Imagery related to winds, vortexes, and Wakanda may imply that Earth Mother possessed more command powers than have previously been decoded and that she was more than a female more-than-human-being who focused on agriculture and fertility. Earth Mother may have had the ability to control the sacred life force of Wakanda, reincarnate souls, control the Great Serpent, and present as a tornado through the alias of Whirlwind Woman.
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Appendix A: Averbuch site burial data, death probabilities, and enamel hypoplasia (Berryman 1984:27, 28, 60, 77, 85, 155, 156).

Chart illustrating sex of burials from Averbuch (Table 1 Berryman 1984:27).
Chart Illustrating sex of burials from Averbuch (Table 2 Berryman 1984.28).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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(Including estimates of missing individuals.)

Age and sex distribution of skeletons recovered from the Averbuch site.

Table 2
Figure 5. Age distribution of male and female mortality in the Averrhoa population.

Figure illustrating male and female mortality (Figure 5 Berryman 1984:60).
Chart illustrating mortality rate from Cemetery 1 at Averbuch (Figure 9 Berryman 1984: 77).
Chart illustrating mortality rate from Cemetery 2 at Averbuch (Figure 13 Berryman 1984: 86).
Chart demonstrating enamel hypoplasia at Averbuch (Table 33 Berryman 1984: 155).
Chart demonstrating enamel hypoplasia at Averbuch (Figure 30 Berryman 1984:156).

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<td>Area F</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Small Neeley's Ferry plain jar; Neeley's Ferry plain bowl</td>
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<td>Bowl with interior red slip</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Horizontal bundle</td>
<td>Small bottle with polychrome red and orange exterior slips</td>
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<td>Vertical Bundle</td>
<td>Small quartzite hammerstone</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>2 bowls (unknown type) stacked one inside the other; Bell plain bottle with strongly flaring neck, raised annual base, and incised stepped &quot;cloud&quot; decoration on rim</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>Horizontal bundle</td>
<td>Expanding-neck Bell plain bottle with raise, annual base; Vernon Paul everted-rim bowl with entwined applique strips at neck-body juncture and interior red slip</td>
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<td>Horizontal bundle</td>
<td>Neeley's Ferry plain bottle with slightly flaring neck; Neeley's Ferry plain bowl with an animal-effigy rim rider</td>
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<td>Neeley's Ferry plain bottle with owl-effigy head and tail rim riders</td>
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<td>Rhodes incised bottle with strongly flaring neck and annular base; 4 brown-chert adzes</td>
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<td>67</td>
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<td>Three coarse-paste pottery disks</td>
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<td>Bell plain bottle with exterior reddish-brown slip (typed as red-slipped); Campbell punctuated bottle with vertical applique strips below lip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Rhodes incised bottle; everted-rim bowl (type unknown) with 4 stepped &quot;cloud&quot; cutouts around rim; 2 thin 4 cm, -diameter copper disks with wooden backings (located on parietal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Burial Inclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Restricted-orifice bowl with nicked rim (missing from collection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Horizontal bundle</td>
<td>Bell plain bottle molded into body of a turtle, with head, tail, and 4 legs protruding; Parkin punctuated jar; bowl with interior red slip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Area K**

| UB 14  | ?                          | Bell plain bottle with incised line at neck-body juncture                        |
| 11     | Cremation                 | None                                                                            |
| 14     | ?                          | None                                                                            |
| 17     | Cremation                 | 2 drilled conch-shell beads; pipe bowl with human-face; miniature polychrome bottle with exterior orange slip with black banding over slip |
| 18     | Vertical bundle           | Bones smeared with red ochre                                                    |
| 19     | Cremation                 | Fortune noded jar with 2 noded handles; vessel of unknown type and form; fragment of fine-paste bottle exhibiting bird wing modeled in relief |
| 23     | ?                          | 8 conch-shell beads                                                             |

**Area L**

<p>| 1      | Horizontal bundle        | Bell plain flat-base bottle                                                     |
| 2      | Horizontal bundle        | Small Walls engraved, coarse-paste jar with engraved weeping-eye motifs, circles, and cross-hatched bands on exterior |
| 3      | ?                          | None                                                                            |
| 4      | ?                          | Bottle of unknown type and form                                                 |
| 9      | Horizontal bundle        | Neeley's Ferry plain bowl with (fragmentary) animal-effigy rim rider            |
| 10     | Horizontal bundle        | Bell plain bottle with short, straight neck                                    |
| 12     | Horizontal bundle        | Neeley's Ferry plain everted-rim bottle; miniature Neeley's Ferry plain bottle |
| 21     | Extended                 | Coarse-shell-tempered elbow pipe; vessel of unknown type and form              |</p>
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<th>Type</th>
<th>Burial Inclusions</th>
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<td>Walls engraved bottle with cross-hatched bands and concentric circles on the body</td>
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<td>Bell plain bottle with medium-height, slightly everted neck; small Neeley's Ferry plain bowl with two pairs of holes near lip</td>
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<td>Horizontal bundle</td>
<td>Small Neeley's Ferry plain jar with opposing loop handles and crude appliqued medallions on the exterior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Neeley's Ferry plain bowl with (missing) effigy rim rider; Neeley's Ferry plain jar with loop handles</td>
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<td>64</td>
<td>Urn</td>
<td>Large Neeley's Ferry plan jar (urn) with a row of punctations around the lip and another row at the neck-body juncture and 4 strap handles; small Neeley's Ferry plain conjoined bottles</td>
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<td>Walls engraved bottle with stepped and eccentric designs on the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11B</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Walls engraved bottle with cross-hatched area outlining serpent form</td>
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**Area:** Necker

**Areas:**
- Head
- Neck
- Shoulders
- Groin
- Armpit
- Rib
- Spinal
- Nape of neck
- Hand
- Breasts
- Knees
- Feet
- Spine
- Hair
- Eyes
- Nails
- Navel
- Ora media
- Armpit

**Yes**
- Head
- Spinal
- Groin
- Armpit
- Rib
- Nape of neck
- Hand
- Breasts
- Knees
- Nails
- Navel
- Ora media
- Armpit

**No**
- Neck
- Shoulders
- Spine
- Hair
- Eyes
- Nails
- Ora media
- Armpit

**Don't Know**
- Groin
- Armpit
- Nape of neck
- Hand
- Breasts
- Knees
- Navel
- Ora media
- Armpit

**Unknown**
- Neck
- Shoulders
- Hair
- Eyes
- Nails
- Ora media
- Armpit

**Not Applicable**
- Neck
- Shoulders
- Hair
- Eyes
- Nails
- Ora media
- Armpit