

CENTRAL PLAINS TRADITION IMMIGRANTS

The developments of the Mississippian tradition that led to the origin of the Initial Middle Missouri gardening peoples who eventually found their way to the Missouri River of South Dakota also led to the development of other cultural offshoots in the south and southeastern parts of the United States. Many of the southern Mississippian tradition peoples spread their influences toward the Great Plains but from a southeasterly direction. Much of the influence on the southern and central Great Plains was transmitted along the Arkansas River drainage system. Many of the traits have had their origin at a large Mississippian site in northeastern Oklahoma called Spiro Mound. The people who lived near the Spiro Mound complex may have been ancestors of the Caddoan peoples of Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma.

Archaeologists recognize at least three different Central Plains tradition complexes. One of these is along the Smoky Hill River, another is located along the Upper Republican River drainage system, and the third is the so-called Nebraska aspect of eastern Nebraska, western Iowa, and northeastern Kansas. The Caddoan influences from Spiro Mound were most apparent in the Smoky Hill drainage area. Some archaeologists have suggested that the Central Plains tradition peoples were influenced by the Spiro Mound peoples long after the formal development of the Central Plains tradition. The well developed trade networks of the Mississippian peoples probably transmitted many goods and ideas out to the Central Plains tradition peoples.

While each of the three Central Plains tradition complexes had unique characteristics of their own, a number of traits were shared by all three groups. The groups had a subsistence economy divided about equally between maize horticulture and hunting. The items hunted included the whole range of animals that were taken by the Woodland groups from which the Central Plains peoples developed. The primary animal, in all likelihood, was bison, with deer, antelope, and other large animals being taken to provide variety. Smaller animals including rabbit, ground squirrel, prairie dog, pocket gopher, kangaroo rat, beaver and others supplemented the diet. Fish and shell fish (like clams) were taken from the local streams. Crops of corn, beans, squash and sunflowers were grown in gardens near the lodges or villages of the people. The land was cultivated by using digging sticks and scapula hoes.

Central Plains tradition peoples, much like the Initial Middle Missouri groups, built lodges either on the surface of the ground or dug down a foot-and-a-half or so under the surface. The lodges differed from the Initial Middle Missouri lodges in that they did not have a central ridge. The Central Plains earthlodge had four primary roof supports arranged around a central fireplace. Rather than be-

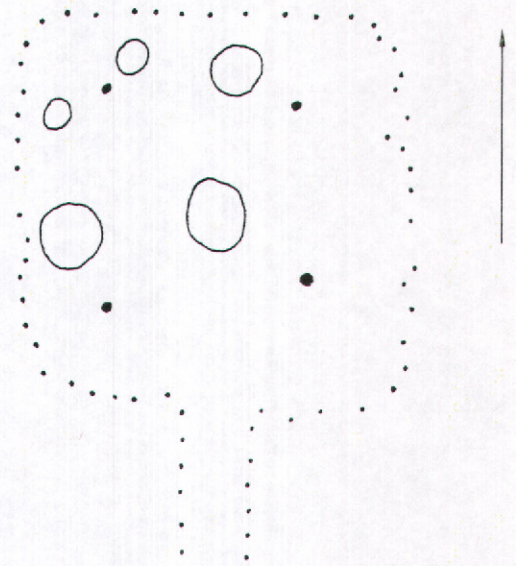


Fig. 1 Central Plains lodges were covered with earth. Square floor plans with four central support posts were the rule. Solid circles are post holes; open circles are cache pits.

ing long and rectangular, the lodge was usually square, perhaps 20 feet on a side. The corners of the lodge were rounded. Occasionally there was an interior bench of earth around the perimeter of the lodge. The walls of the lodge were made of equally spaced posts, the posts being perhaps as much as 3-4 inches in diameter. The roof was composed of light-weight, wooden stringers coming from the central support structure to the outside walls. These stringers were interwoven with materials like willow saplings and were covered on the top by tightly interwoven grass mats. The inside of the roof and walls may well have been covered by clay pressed over the matting and saplings. The entire outside was covered over with earth. This earthlodge structure was a very efficient structure to meet the demands of the harsh Plains environment. As a sort of dome structure it offered very little resistance to the wind and therefore would not have easily been blown down nor would it have cooled too rapidly during winter. The earth covering provided a kind of insulation which would have kept the interior of the lodge structure at relatively comfortable temperatures year round. Just as the Initial Middle Missouri peoples used cache pits for storing food and the later disposal of garbage, the Central Plains tradition peoples built bell-shaped and cylindrical cache pits in the floors of the houses and between the houses of their villages.

The Central Plains tradition peoples resemble the Great Oasis peoples in their settlement pattern to a great degree;

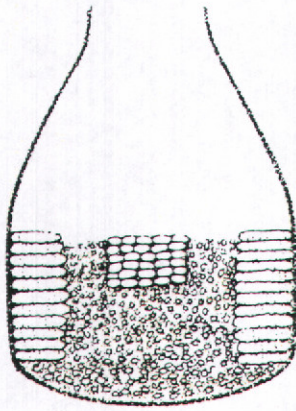


Fig. 2 Cache pits of different types were used to store food.

they lived in semi-permanent villages that were perhaps seasonal in nature. These villages were small, unfortified, and arranged in no apparent order. On occasion, especially in the Nebraska complex, the lodges appear as isolated structures on ridge lines. Villages tended to be located along the larger streams and, about as often, on the lesser creeks adjacent to water, wood and arable land.

The people buried their dead by primary single interment, that is, one individual in a grave, but on occasion in communal ossuaries or places where many skeletons were brought and buried after they had been defleshed. The more eastern groups of the Central Plains tradition also practiced cremation.

The people of the Central Plains tradition made great quantities of high quality pottery. The pottery was in many ways like the pottery of the Initial Middle Missouri tradi-

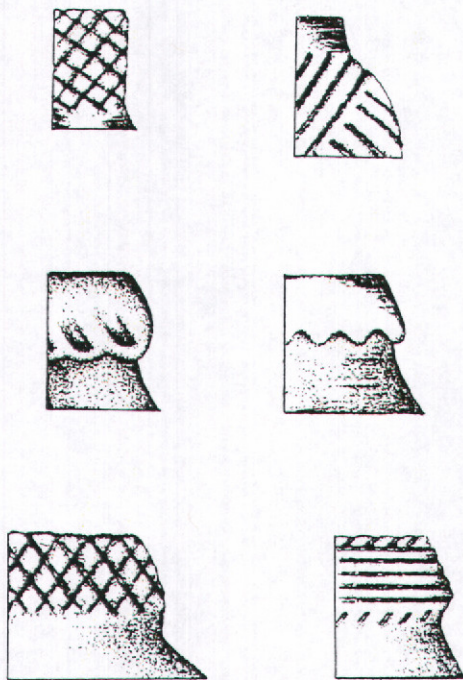


Fig. 3 Typical styles of rim shape and decoration of Central Plains pottery.

tion. Jars were grit tempered and the surfaces were cord roughened and occasionally the cord roughening was smoothed over. Simple vertical-to-flared rims were common and a collared rim type was also made. A collar is a kind of wedge-shaped rim. These collared rims were occasionally decorated with incised or cord impressed designs. Some of the eastern Central Plains groups also made pottery with an S-shaped rim. These S-shaped rims also had cord impressed designs and occasionally were cross-hatched. In some of the eastern sites, as in the Glenwood locality of western Iowa, exotic pottery has occasionally been found. This pottery appears to be pottery that came from other groups. In some instances Great Oasis pottery has been found; in other instances high necked bottles covered with a bright red slip have been found. These bottles may well have been directly

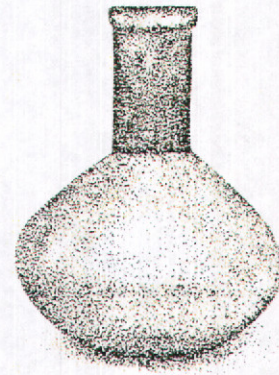


Fig. 4 A high necked bottle covered with a red clay "slip," probably of Caddoan origin, showing the ancestry of many Central Plains peoples.

traded from the Caddoan groups to the south. Other designs that have shown up, such as the hand and eye motif, may have been directly transmitted from sites like Cahokia.

A number of different sorts of stone tools were made. Chipped stone tools included projectile points that were very small. These projectile points were either unnotched, side notched, or side and base notched on a generally triangular form. One of the most distinctive chipped stone artifacts from the Central Plains tradition was the diamond shaped knife with bevels along the cutting edges. Other chipped stone artifacts included chipped endscrapers, bifaces, axes, and hoes. Ground stone implements included such things as milling stones, celts, adzes, and a variety of other small items.



Fig. 5 Diamond shaped knife with beveled edges.

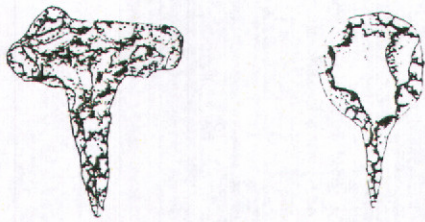


Fig. 6 Stone drills had a T-shape and were used to work bones, wood, and perhaps soft stone.

A variety of bone tools were made. These included, among other sorts of tools, such things as bone awls made from a split deer cannon bone, arrow shaft wrenches of bone and antler, bone fish hooks, squash knives, and smooth bladed fleshing tools of mammal leg bones. Clam shells were occasionally worked into a variety of shapes with very simple designs. Shells were often used as digging implements or as spoons.

Some of the more exotic objects from the Central Plains tradition were made of pottery. These were bent tubular pipes sometimes made into effigy forms. Occasionally, pipes made of stone were also found. In many respects the lifeways of the Central Plains tradition peoples were much like those of the Initial Middle Missouri peoples. Many of the differences reflect changing environmental pressures and influences from groups to the southeast.

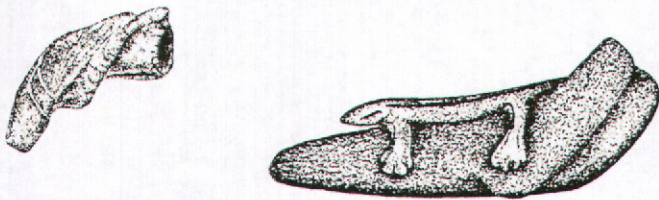


Fig. 7. Clay and stone pipes were common. The pipe on the right has a lizard effigy; pipe on left has a snake wrapped around the bowl. Charred seeds indicate tobacco was probably grown.

There is little direct evidence of Central Plains tradition peoples in South Dakota except along the southern tier of counties. The east-west line formed by the Niobrara River as it flows into the Missouri seems to be the northern boundary of the Central Plains tradition. The importance of this Central Plains tradition to South Dakota occurred at the time period around 1150 to 1250 A.D.

Climatologists suggest that during this time the Pacific Climatic Episode began. The Pacific Climatic Episode was an influx of much warmer, dryer, westerly air. Drought became a problem for the Central Plains tradition groups because they were so dependent on abundant moisture for growing their crops. Because of drought, Central Plains groups were faced with a dilemma. They had very few options. They could starve to death, not a very pleasant choice, they could change their technology, which is extremely dif-

ficult to do, or they could move, the option they eventually chose. Some archaeologists suggest that the Central Plains area peoples "cleared out" by moving to the peripheral areas of the Great Plains, that is to the south, to the north, to the east and to the west. Many of the groups apparently chose to move into the southern part of South Dakota along the Missouri River. The best evidence for this Central Plains tradition movement is found along the White River in Tripp County, South Dakota. Some have also suggested that there were intrusions in the southeastern part of the state in the area of present day Union, Clay and Yankton counties. The primary reason for this suggestion is that there is a major complex of the late Central Plains tradition across the river from these three counties in northeastern Nebraska. This complex has been labeled St. Helena. The important matter relating to the Central Plains tradition is not that it appears as a distinct entity in South Dakota, but that it became extremely important for the development of a later culture which is called the Initial Coalescent. The Central Plains tradition peoples who moved into South Dakota came into direct contact and probably, in some instances, direct competition with the Initial Middle Missouri peoples who were already living along the Missouri River. Out of this contact, caused by climatic fluctuation and migration into South Dakota, a blending of cultures was begun which led to a number of later cultural manifestations in the state.

Larry J. Zimmerman
 Illustrations by Marianne Schuld
 Series Editor: Lucille Stewart

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