

# Monuments Left by Mound Builders



THE GREAT CAHOKIA MOUND.

A Monument of the American Mound Builders, Which is Famous the World Over. Archaeologists Are Trying to Secure Its Preservation for All Time.



HEAVILY TIMBERED MOUND EAST OF CAHOKIA.

**C**AMBRIDGE, Mass., May 23.—(Special Correspondence.)—Mr. D. I. Bushnell, jr., of the Peabody museum at Harvard has completed a plaster model of the so-called Cahokia group of mounds in Illinois, the preservation of which, either by private purchase or a public appropriation, is being earnestly advocated by a number of American archaeologists as a national duty in order that one of the most important of all the relics of the mysterious Mound Builders may be saved for future study and investigation.

This remarkable group of mounds—

would deprive America of what is, in many respects, absolutely its most remarkable native monument, and the archaeologists are not alone in hoping that it will be avoided. Situated near the center of a group of some seventy-five mounds—practically also in the very centre of the Mound Builder's empire, the great American bottom land between the Mississippi and the crescent shaped range of bluffs that begins just opposite the mouth of the Missouri.

Cahokia affords a view of the valley in all directions, overlooking St. Louis, something over five miles to the west. Its gen-

eral structure suggests comparison with the Teocalli, or ruined temples, of Mexico, and its more careful investigation, although neither money nor opportunity has yet made such investigation possible, is considered likely to be of the greatest value in the growing study of American archaeology.

In its own immediate neighborhood Cahokia is best known as "Monk's mound," a name derived from a mistaken tradition that the old Trappist monks once made it their headquarters. As long ago as 1811, however, Mr. H. H. Breckenridge, whose

account of his impressions is still recognizable by anyone who travels over the same path, stated definitely that the monks lived near the mound, but not on it. "When I reached the foot of the principal mound," wrote Mr. Breckenridge, "I was struck with a degree of astonishment, not unlike that which is experienced in contemplating the Egyptian pyramids. What a stupendous pile of earth! To heap up such a mass must have required years, and the labors of thousands. \* \* \* It stands immediately on the bank of the Cahokia, and on the side next to it, is covered with lofty trees. Were it not for the regularity and design

has been used as a kitchen garden by the monks of La Trappe settled near this, and the top is sowed with wheat." This early visitor concluded, after an examination of the other smaller mounds, "that a very populous town had once existed here, similar to those of Mexico described by the first conquerors. The mounds were sites of temples, or monuments to great men." Another later writer, referring to Cahokia, has said: "It is probable that upon this platform was reared a capacious temple, within whose walls the high priests, gathered from different quarters at stated seasons, celebrated their mystic rites, whilst the swarming multitudes below looked up in mute adoration." Modern archaeology discredits the "capacious temple," although it accepts the probability of swarming multitudes and the likelihood that one of the largest human-made piles of earth in the world had a religious purpose. Mr. Bushnell is of this opinion, basing his belief upon the fact that the largest structures raised by humanity have almost invariably proved to have a religious significance.

The age and actual purpose of the Cahokia mound are questions which will perhaps never be definitely answered, although, for all that is known at present, the answer may be patiently awaiting the moment when the mound is carefully tunneled and its contents investigated. Like that of other relics of the Mound Builders, its age was once thought to be undoubtedly several thousand years. According to this belief it might have antedated the ruins that have been discovered in Central America and a theory, has even been put forward that would carry it back to the mythical days of Atlantis, when a great convulsion of nature was supposed to have destroyed communication between the eastern and western continents, before that time united in a single body of land. Modern archaeology has very much reduced, without absolutely disproving, the likelihood of this remote antiquity, and the evidence so far gathered from the almost countless ruins that dot the valley of the Mississippi and its tributaries disproves also the earlier belief that the race which made them must have been materially different from the Indian tribes, who afterward inherited them. The absence of Indian tradition concerning the Mound Builders is, for example, no longer taken as proof of anything more than a comparative antiquity, for a study of the Indian has shown that a few hundred years would have sufficed as readily as a few thou-

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A Unique Member of the Cahokia Group, West of the Great Mound and Unlike Any of the Others. It is One of the Few That Have Never Been Cultivated and Archaeologists Think It Almost an Exact Counterpart of the Large Mound Once Standing On the Site of Modern St. Louis.

among which the big Cahokia mound is famous as the largest structure of its kind in the world—follows the winding course of the Little Cahokia river, near where it empties into the Mississippi, and was once connected, by a line of single tumuli, with the smaller group of mounds from which St. Louis derives its title of the "Mound City." The great mound of St. Louis has now vanished forever, but one mound still remains among the Cahokia group which is believed to be almost its exact counterpart. The age of these mounds antedates any tradition concerning them among the North American Indians. Like others scattered about in different parts of the United States, they have figured prominently in various romantic theories of an early race, differing from the Indians, and was finally either exterminated by them or driven into Central America, there to become the precursors of the civilization discovered and destroyed by the Spaniards. Modern archaeology, unfortunately for the romance of the story, discredits this picturesque theory and attributes the mounds directly to the distant ancestors of the present Indians—an explanation that still leaves sufficient material, however, for the imagination.

However that may be, Cahokia is the king of all American mounds. It covers nearly fourteen acres of land, and stands, as has been said by Professor Putnam of Harvard, in the same relation to other mounds as the "Great Pyramid of Egypt to the monuments of the valley of the Nile." It is perhaps all the more interesting in that no measures have yet been taken for its permanent preservation and it is therefore always in danger of being put to modern utilitarian purposes and so becoming eventually a mere memory, hardly less dim than that of the mysterious nation which originally built it. Such a fate

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which is manifest, the circumstance of its being on alluvial ground and the other mounds scattered around it, we could hardly believe it the work of human hands. \* \* \* The shape is that of a parallelogram, standing from north to south; on the south side there is a broad apron or step, about half way down, and from this another projection into the plain about fifteen feet wide, which was probably intended as an ascent to the mound. By stepping around the base I computed the circumference to be at least 800 yards and the height of the mound about ninety feet. The step or apron



TWO STYLES OF MOUND BUILDING.

One is a Truncated Cone and the Other a Parallelogram. Both Stand South of Cahokia and Represent the Two Mound Types Most Prevalent in the Group.