

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WILL COUNTY

BY

FRED EGGAN

University of Chicago, Chicago.

ABSTRACT

Will county, in northeastern Illinois, may be placed by reference to its county seat, Joliet. Our knowledge of the archaeology of Will county is confined largely to the western portion, where the Desplaines, DuPage, and Kankakee rivers unite to form the Illinois. In this limited area we find one of the most important group of archaeological sites in Illinois.

Our knowledge of this area is due almost entirely to the efforts of Mr. George Langford, supplemented by the work of the University of Chicago archaeological survey. This survey has revealed approximately thirty mounds and about twenty-five camp or village sites. Excavation of three sites has yielded results which are significant in determining a relative chronology for northern Illinois. This paper is concerned primarily with a brief analysis of these three sites in terms of their interrelations with one another, both cultural and chronological, plus some indication of their cultural affiliations.

At the Kankakee River refuse site, located on the north bank of Kankakee River a short distance above its junction with the Desplaines, Mr. Langford found surface indications of three "cultures" which were distinguishable in regard to content and geographical distribution: (1) A "culture" characterized by large notched or stemmed projectile points and grit-tempered pottery; not localized on this site but widespread in region. (2) A "culture" characterized by small triangular projectile points accompanied by both shell- and grit-tempered potsherds, the latter predominating; sharply localized on this site. (3) A "culture" represented by a small mound containing disintegrated burials associated with shell-tempered pottery having a characteristic "trailed" decoration. The significance of this site did not become clear until the investigation of the Fisher site by Mr. Langford.

The Fisher site², on the south bank of Desplaines River about a mile above the Illinois, consists of two large mounds and several smaller ones, surrounded by about fifty "saucer-like" depressions containing fire-hearths, camp refuse, and storage pits. About six hundred skeletons have been removed from this site. The significance of the site, however, does not lie in its size but in the information which it furnishes in regard to cultural-complexes and chronology. While several important problems are as yet unsolved, it is clear that there are three levels of occupancy in the two larger mounds as indicated by mound stratification, physical type, mode of burial, and associated artifacts. These three levels may be summarized as follows:

(1) The *lower level* contained dolicocephalic flexed burials occurring deep in the underlying glacial gravel and accompanied by practically no artifacts. These burials seem to represent a rather ancient period since all signs of intrusion have disappeared.

¹ G. Langford: "The Kankakee River Refuse Heap", *Amer. Anth.*, N. S., V, 21, 1919, pp. 287-91.

² G. Langford: "The Fisher Mound Group", *Amer. Anth.*, N. S. V. 29, 1927, pp. 151-206.

TABLE 1. Sequence of Cultures in the Des plaines Kankakee Region.

Sequence of Cultures	Fisher	Kankakee	Adler	Other Sites in Will County	Tentative Affiliations
1	<i>Lower Level</i>				"Black Sand" Men (?) (Fulton Co.)
2			Adler Primary	Long Run campsite Bird Bridge campsite "Fire Hearths" campsite (Based on pottery)	"Hopewell"— "Adena"—(Ill.— Wis.—Iowa—Ohio)
3	Zone I <i>Middle Level</i> Zone II	Mound "Restricted" Area	Intrusive burials		"Grand River" (McKern) "Fort Ancient" "Upper Mississippi" Uluka Blue Island (Huber Site)
4	Zone I (Pre-European) <i>Upper Level</i> Zone II (Post-European)	"Extended" area	Intrusive burial	Most campsites in region	Historic tribes

(2) The *middle level* is represented by two zones which are associated with the mounds proper. The lower zone is characterized by brachycephalic, extended burials accompanied by shell-tempered pottery having a characteristic "trailed" decoration. This pottery is also found in the surrounding pits associated with antler harpoon heads, worked antler tips, and a few crude flints. The upper zone contained extended brachycephalic skeletons associated with grit-tempered pottery with a barklike decoration, a rich bone culture, stone celts, triangular projectile points, and a few copper celts, beads, and flat ear-disks.

(3) The *upper level* contained brachycephalic burials partially flexed on their sides, stemmed or notched projectile points, long stone celts, undecorated grit-tempered pottery, and a few small shell-tempered pots with knobbed shoulders. One or two child burials in this level contained post-European artifacts.

On the basis of cultural similarity, the materials found in the smaller mounds and depressions (house-pits) may be allocated to the above levels. Likewise it is possible to correlate the material found at the Kankakee River refuse site with these levels, the first mentioned "culture" belonging to Fisher's upper level and the second and third "cultures" with the upper and lower zones, respectively, of the middle level at Fisher's.

The Adler site³ consists of a group of eight low mounds extending along the right bank of Desplaines River a short distance below Joliet. In these mounds were found rectangular burial pits containing extended burials and secondary bundle-burials with a wide range of head forms. The associated artifacts consisted of a "Hopewell" type of pottery, a platform pipe of Ohio pipestone, pointed bone awls, a bone covered with sheet mica, a turtle carapace, a few bone tubes, and some notched projectile points. A few burials showed signs of red ochre. Intrusive into one mound, over the central chamber, were three extended burials associated with a shell-tempered pot. Intrusive into another mound was an extended burial with a brass buckle of European manufacture.

The primary Adler "culture", which shows certain affinities with Hopewell and Adena, is not represented at the Fisher site but the intrusive burials may be duplicated in the middle and upper levels, respectively. From a cultural standpoint there is at present no basis for placing the Adler "culture" in reference to the lower level at Fisher's. On the basis of physical type and mode of burial, however, it is likely that the Fisher lower level burials are the older.

On the basis of these sites it is possible to offer a relative chronology for the "cultures" of this region which attaches to the historic period and extends to a rather early period (Table 1). It is important that this outline should be filled in and its wider affiliations determined. Certain of these wider affiliations are suggested on the accompanying chart.

Although this report has merely summarized the available material, much of which is still in manuscript, it has perhaps shown the importance of stratified sites in correlating cultures chronologically. It is fortunate for Illinois archaeology that these sites have been excavated so as to yield this information.

³ Based on unpublished material on the excavation of the Adler mounds by G. Langford and the University of Chicago Archaeological Survey.