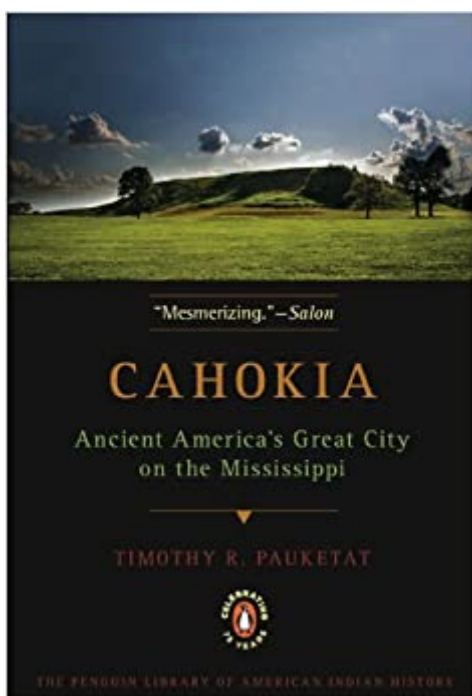


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# Cahokia: Ancient America's Great City On The Mississippi (Penguin Library Of American Indian History)



## Synopsis

The fascinating story of a lost city and an unprecedented American civilization. While Mayan and Aztec civilizations are widely known and documented, relatively few people are familiar with the largest prehistoric Native American city north of Mexico—a site that expert Timothy Pauketat brings vividly to life in this groundbreaking book. Almost a thousand years ago, a city flourished along the Mississippi River near what is now St. Louis. Built around a sprawling central plaza and known as Cahokia, the site has drawn the attention of generations of archaeologists, whose work produced evidence of complex celestial timepieces, feasts big enough to feed thousands, and disturbing signs of human sacrifice. Drawing on these fascinating finds, Cahokia presents a lively and astonishing narrative of prehistoric America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Author and anthropologist Pauketat (*Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*) locates a civilizational "big bang" in the Mississippi River valley of 1050 CE, where "social life, political organization, religious belief, art, and culture were radically transformed" by a highly ambitious group of American Indians and their capital city, Cahokia, located east of what is now St. Louis. In this illuminating text, Pauketat examines the life, death, and rediscovery of this vast urban population and their game-changing cultural innovations (ranging from innocuous but influential sports like "chunkey" to large-scale reenactments of mythical stories, featuring bloody

human sacrifice). Page by page, Pauketat compiles the fascinating details of a complex archeological puzzle; explaining the study of cross-cultural goddess worship, cave art, hand tools and games, this volume doubles as a crash-course in the archeological method. Pauketat's academic approach responsibly invites opposing viewpoints, and his writing is rich in you-are-there detail, making this an archeological adventure suitable for pre-Columbian enthusiasts as well as inquisitive laymen. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"This informative book about Cahokia is also a rich source for theories and techniques applicable to archaeological and historical records elsewhere."--William Gustav Gartner, "Historical Geography," "This is an excellent volume. It is well organized and edited, and the individual contributions provide lots of data and provocative ideas. The book will serve as an important springboard for future research on Cahokian social history."--"American Anthropologist," "The book consists of thirteen essays that together constitute a complex and superbly crafted social history of Cahokia. . . . The contributors have written provocative and, for the most part, accessible essays that are both refreshing in their propositions and important in their conclusions."--"Journal of Southern History,"

Cahokia: Ancient America's Great City on the Mississippi (Penguin's Library of American Indian History) I am a lay reader and know very little of archeology, but I have a special affinity for Cahokia. In 1967 my friend and I camped at what was then Cahokia Mounds State Park and were able to observe close-up a dig then in progress, with helpful explanations provided by the lone archeologist on-site. It seemed so painstaking, performed with fine instruments and brushes and, in so far as we could see at the time, it uncovered only shards and fragments. Back then archeologists still had not grasped much of the significance of the site as it is now understood. At one time they believed it to be a ritual center, occupied only briefly by a few inhabitants. It is now known to have been a major eleventh- and twelfth-century populous urban center supported by surrounding farms, an early example of a government-sponsored urban renewal, a culture that marked a radical transformation in the history of indigenous Americans. Well-told non-fiction accounts of archeological enterprises can draw in readers much like a good mystery, and Timothy Pauketat displays something of a novelist's touch here (although do not expect "Indiana Jones"). He recounts dozens of discoveries, generally in sufficient detail for readers to evaluate for themselves the evidence the archeologists were accumulating. Pauketat, himself a noted archeologist of the Cahokia site, clearly admires many of his predecessors and he gives us enough information about several to add an appealing

human element to the narrative. What most fascinates me is the breadth and detail of what archeologists are able to infer from what they find. Consider some of the more remarkable findings from Cahokia, the skeletal remains of females buried in groups in mounds and showing signs of violence (one such sign being clenched hands and feet, indicating spasms at the time of death). Many of these women seem to have been from someplace else, not Cahokia, based on their dental morphology and bone characteristics. Via isotope studies bioarcheologists can tell something about the women's diet (generally different than that of Cahokians), and they even venture judgments about the women's beauty based on their bone characteristics. These findings form one large piece of a body of evidence that enables the archeologists to conclude that notable features of Cahokian society included human sacrifice, political theater, and social inequality. Sometimes the inferences can go too far, beyond the evidence. It seems to me, for example, that Pauketat is not on very solid ground in some of his speculations about the purposes or effects of the ritual sacrifices (although he is careful to present them only as possibilities, not certainties). Of course not all of the mysteries of Cahokia are solved, including such major ones as where the people came from, why they disbanded (around the end of the twelfth century), and where they went. Pauketat says that most archeologists believe the Mississippian phenomenon, including Cahokia, was home-grown independent of Mesoamerican culture, but he seems to leave open the possibility of connections. I was left wondering, for example, whether advances in skeletal DNA technology might help answer some of the remaining questions about the origins and destiny of the Cahokian people. The story is likely to have further chapters.

Brilliant introduction and narrative to the evolving and fascinating story that is Cahokia. I particularly enjoyed the chapter in which Mr. Pauketat took the reader for a walk through Cahokia. This is a historical narrative at its best and I found it hard to put down. Pauketat is not only a phenomenal and respected expert archaeologist, but he is a very talented writer as well.

Pauketat has embraced and accepted the oral tradition of Native People's and forever transformed anthropology forever, for the better. From this important work, one can see the imprint of history onto the modern Indigenous. The legacy of Meso-America is evident in the North American institutions of the Ancient Earthen Works and the long buried cosmology of First Man, Mother Corn, the Thunder Twins, and the Upper and Lower Realms.

Reading at present, so far I am intrigued and am reading on every moment I get.

A taut little documentary about a mystery. I can't be alone among the millions of well-informed contemporary Americans who never knew about this sprawling, rich, strange city that flourished in mid-continent around the 10th century. Pauketat tells the reader what's known about Cahokia, what's unknown, and what probably never will be known. He assembles clues: bones, petroglyphs, geography. He lays them out without sentiment (and pointing out, at times, that lack of sentiment, particularly as it touches on American's romanticization of the gentle, Gaia-friendly, peaceable folk of the current stereotype). Cahokia was a vital, brutal place, full of imperialist tendencies and what may have been history's most enthusiastic sports fans (in games that cost people's lives and fortunes). The grassy hills near St. Louis hide rows and stacks of gorgeously butchered corpses, fastidiously arrayed after their slaughter, and their dead magnificence will keep archaeologists guessing for centuries to come.

Pauketat does an amazing job of bringing Cahokia to life. As a historian, it's hard to find historical accounts - of any time period - that are both informative and engaging. I actually brought this book with me on my honeymoon, and couldn't put it down!! He uses the information they've learned from digs, and relating Cahokia to other cultures, in a very informative, yet never dull, way. He also makes great analysis of what else was going on in the region/world during that time, which really helps you gain perspective at how significant Cahokia was in its heyday. Great read for anyone looking for a bit of history, mystery, and truth!

Very good. Thank you.

I have a strong interest in archaeology of the Americas. I had been to Cahokia IL State Park many years ago, but wanted to visit it again, now that I knew much more about American archaeology. I bought and read this book prior to my visit and it gave me a very good overview of the history and archaeological finds and theories related to Cahokia. Many books about archaeology are narrow, dense, and hard for non-specialists to appreciate. I found this book easy to read and entertaining. I made my visit to the Cahokia park and found it much improved since my earlier visit. This book made my understanding of the site much deeper during my visit.

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