

Insights into Hopewell Material Culture Derived from the Contemporary Ceremonial Practices of the Shawnee Tribe: A Case Study Supporting the Value of Collaborative Research with Native American Tribes

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Among the remarkable assemblage of more than 5,000 artifacts that Henry Shetrone and Emerson Greenman (1931) recovered from the Burnt Offering at the base of the Seip-Pricer Mound (Figure 1), five engraved steatite spheres stood out for Shetrone as the "most interesting of all" (Shetrone 1947: 110) (Figure 2). Shetrone (1930:103) interpreted these objects as marbles (see also Greenman and Shetrone 1931:424) in spite of the fact that, as he acknowledged, the game of marbles "does not appear in the complex list of games of the native Americans of historic record."

More recently, Christopher Carr (2008:155) and Carr and Troy Case (2005:515) have interpreted these stone spheres as "shamanic paraphernalia" likely used for divination. Although it seems clear that Hopewellian societies included individuals who served a shaman or shaman-like role, the evidence they offer in support of the proposition that the stone spheres recovered from the Seip-Pricer Mound can be identified unambiguously as shamanic paraphernalia is not compelling.

Ben Barnes and I propose instead an alternative interpretation that emerged from a casual conversation about the traditional Shawnee drum at a consultation meeting we both attended at the Eastern Shawnee Bluejacket Complex in 2014. During that conversation, Barnes mentioned to Lepper that the Shawnee Tribe traditionally used spherical, black pebbles obtained from a particular source to attach the leather drumhead to the shell of their ceremonial water-drum (Figure 3). I recalled the, at least superficially similar, steatite spheres from Seip-Pricer Mound and we wondered whether this might not suggest that these Hopewell spheres documented the formerly unsuspected presence of a Hopewell drum.

After months of collaborative research, we both now agree that the five engraved spheres from Seip-Pricer Mound likely are components of a Hopewell water-drum (Barnes and Lepper 2018). If we are right, it is the oldest direct evidence for a drum in eastern North America.

The identification of a possible Middle Woodland water-drum would be a significant contribution to our understanding of the Hopewell culture and, more broadly, to the history of the drum in the ceremonial lives of the indigenous people of eastern North America. Whether or not this interpretation of the Seip stone spheres ultimately is accepted, it certainly stands as the most convincing interpretation of those objects put forward so far; and it is the only proposed explanation to come from an American Indian tribal member with direct personal knowledge of the relevant ceremonial practices.

Ben and I feel strongly that the principal significance of this research is that it is the result of active collaboration between an archaeologist and a leader of the Shawnee Tribe. We do not claim that the Shawnee Tribe represents the only modern descendants of the Hopewell and that therefore the way they do things necessarily must have been the way the Hopewell did things. Nor is our

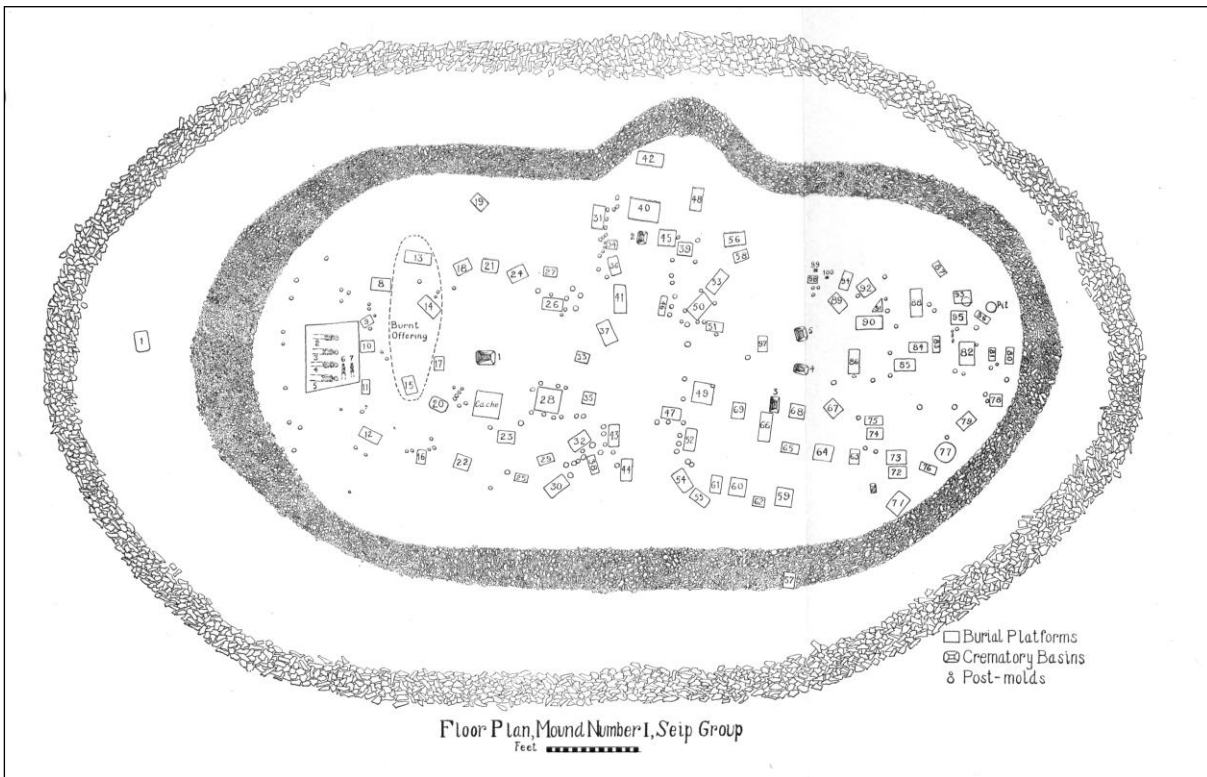


Figure 1. Floor plan of Seip-Pricker Mound from Shetrone and Greenman (1931). The steatite spheres were recovered from the “Burnt Offering,” a large, shallow, oval basin approximately 12 by 4 meters wide and 23 cm deep, which also contained thousands of shell beads, copper breastplates, canine teeth of bears and mountain lions, alligator teeth, shark teeth, flint points, ceramic sherds, fragments of a wooden bowl, charred fabric, and fragments of leather. Courtesy, Ohio History Connection.

argument intended to provide the basis for a claim of cultural affiliation between the Shawnee Tribe and the Hopewell culture. We do claim, however, that ancestors of the Shawnee Tribe, whether directly involved in the ceremonies that took place within the Seip Earthworks 2,000 years ago or not, surely participated to one extent or another in the widespread Hopewell Interaction Sphere, which after all encompassed much of eastern North America (Lepper 2006). Therefore, suggesting that some of the ceremonial practices of the Shawnee Tribe, including the use of the water-drum, might have their roots in the ceremonial practices of the Hopewell culture is hardly an extraordinary claim.

We believe our conclusions demonstrate that archaeologists and American Indians have much to offer one another; and that future collaborations cannot help but lead to new insights into ancient American Indian material culture. Furthermore, we encourage archaeologists and American Indians to engage in similar dialogues in order to create a deeper, shared understanding of the ancient indigenous cultures of North America.



Figure 2. Set of five steatite spheres ranging in size from 18.8 to 19.5 mm in diameter and weighing between 10 and 11 g each. According to Shetrone and Greenman (1931:424), "the five steatite spheres... were found in the Burnt Offering, adjacent to Burial 13, which was the cremation of a child..." They argued that "this coincidence suggests that these engraved spheres were used as marbles and that they had been intended for the remains of the child." Elsewhere in their report, however, they acknowledged that "Burials 13, 14 and 15 rested upon the surface of [the Burnt Offering]... but were not otherwise related to it" (Shetrone and Greenman 1931:378). Therefore, there is no reason to think that the stone spheres had any direct connection with Burial 13. Courtesy, Ohio History Connection.

Ben and I presented the preliminary results of our collaboration at the Ohio Archaeological Council's May 2016 Third Conference on Hopewell Archaeology. We presented an extended version of that paper the following year for the Glenn Black Laboratory of Archaeology and the Mathers Museum of World Cultures and that presentation was videotaped and is available to view at <https://www.indiana.edu/~gbl/thedirt/wordpress/?p=111>. Our research was published online in March 2018 in *Archaeologies*, the journal of the World Archaeological Congress: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11759-018-9334-1>

Acknowledgments

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Figure 3. Shawnee water-drum assembled by Ben Barnes. Each of the bulges around the circumference of the drumhead contains a black, spherical pebble. We suggest that a Hopewell water-drum would have looked similar though the drum shell would have been made of wood or ceramic.

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