

Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science

Volume 82 | Number 3-4

Article 8

1976

The Effigy Mound Manifestation in Iowa

R. Clark Mallam
Luther College

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1976 Iowa Academy of Science, Inc.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias>

Recommended Citation

Mallam, R. Clark (1976) "The Effigy Mound Manifestation in Iowa," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 82(3-4), 166-170.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias/vol82/iss3/8>

This Research is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa Academy of Science at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science by an authorized editor of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

The Effigy Mound Manifestation in Iowa

R. CLARK MALLAM¹

MALLAM, R. CLARK (Archaeological Research Center, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa 52101). The Effigy Mound manifestation in Iowa. *Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci.* 82(3-4): 166-170, 1976.

The Effigy Mound manifestation ranks as one of the most poorly documented and understood prehistoric cultural phenomena in Iowa. As employed in this paper, the term Effigy Mound refers to the animal-shaped earthen mounds and the cultural activities of the prehistoric societies who constructed them. Although three major archaeological surveys have been conducted in northeastern Iowa, none has specifically emphasized the Effigy Mound

manifestation. Consequently, there is a definite lack of mound data necessary for the construction of distribution patterns and cultural models relating to this manifestation. The Luther College Effigy Mound Survey of 1973 was undertaken for the purpose of defining a spatial distribution pattern for the Effigy Mound manifestation in Iowa and correlating this pattern with environmental factors, both constituting significant steps in the development of cultural models demonstrating process and function.

INDEX DESCRIPTORS: Archaeology, Iowa Prehistory, Effigy Mound Manifestation.

The Effigy Mound manifestation in Iowa is one of the state's most unusual and distinctive prehistoric features but, paradoxically, it is among the least understood. Although recognized as early as the first half of the 19th century (Squier and Davis, 1848), it has never been thoroughly researched, nor have there emerged from the few limited studies any concrete archaeological interpretations. In a sense, the problems of the Effigy Mound manifestation in Iowa directly reflect problems related to the entire Effigy Mound manifestation throughout the four-state region of its occurrence.

The most pressing and obvious problem impeding archaeological interpretations of this manifestation is that the mound data base has never been secured. Mound explorations undertaken in 1881 by the Northwestern Archaeological Survey (Lewis, 1898) and the Bureau of Ethnology Division of Mound Exploration (Thomas, 1894) were never completed. Consequently, within the delineated Effigy Mound region (Figure 1), the total number of mounds and mound complex locations is unknown.

Present figures are only gross estimates varying between 15,000 and 20,000 for the densely concentrated Wisconsin area (Stout, 1911; Shetrone, 1930). Numerical data for adjacent states are also poorly tabulated. Keyes (1928) suggested that approximately 10,000 mounds of several different forms would not be an unreasonable figure for Iowa, and Lothson (1967) indicates a highly arbitrary estimate of 25,000 for Minnesota. No separate data exist for the Effigy Mound manifestation in any of the four states. Compounding this shortcoming is the fact that no percentage calculations of mound distribution and mound forms within and among mound groups have been compiled. Nor have the effigy forms been classified into analytical units other than those embraced by resemblances to certain animal forms such as "bear, bird, panther, turtle, etc." In effect, an accurate body of data, a prerequisite step in archaeological research, does not exist for the Effigy Mound manifestation.

A second problem of related importance is that all previous research undertaken during the 20th century has either involved description, recording or establishing cultural-histori-

cal sequences for Effigy Mound. In recent years, this manifestation has been defined as an archaeological tradition (Hurley, 1970) which persisted for approximately 1,300 years, or from A.D. 300 to A.D. 1642. While the tradition concept may be valid, there is a problem inherent in its usage, that being that tradition only documents and does not explain continuity in archaeological configurations.

The above-cited problems well illustrate why this entire manifestation has been labeled "enigmatic" (Jennings, 1968: 209). Presently, Effigy Mound and its associated interment and habitation site artifacts are viewed as shared attributes of a specific cultural tradition. The members of this tradition are categorized as semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers who periodically constructed mounds for the singular purpose of interring their dead (McKern, 1930:456; Jennings, 1947:6, 10; Rowe, 1956:89; Hurley, 1970). Furthermore, it is assumed that the cultural center of this tradition was located in Wisconsin and the effigy complexes occurring in Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota simply represent extensions. Because these states have been consigned a status of marginality, especially Iowa (Orr, 1935:44; Beaubien, 1953:56; Logan, 1958:308; McKusick, 1964:108-109), they have stimulated only moderate research interest, in contrast to the densely populated Effigy Mound region of Wisconsin.

The tradition interpretation, while valuable for establishing the temporal and spatial dimensions of Effigy Mound, has not taken into consideration mound form variance; mound complex distribution; or social, political, religious and economic factors; nor does it promote explanation of culture function and process. In addition, Effigy Mound interaction with Middle Woodland, Late Woodland and Middle and Upper Mississippian cultures has been documented (Bennett, 1945; Maxwell, 1950; Bastian, 1962; Baerreis, 1953, 1966; Hurley, 1970; Storck, 1972) but the dynamics of this interaction have not been explained within the framework of the tradition concept.

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant factors accounting for the present lack of understanding of the Effigy Mound manifestation is the failure of researchers to construct cultural models explaining function and process. Instead, most researchers have employed an inductive approach to data collection based on the assumption that when sufficient data have been obtained the "enigmatic" nature of Effigy Mound will be clarified.

Clarification, however, can only begin when the mound

¹ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa 52101.

EFFIGY MOUNDS IN IOWA



Figure 1. Boundaries of the Effigy Mound manifestation.

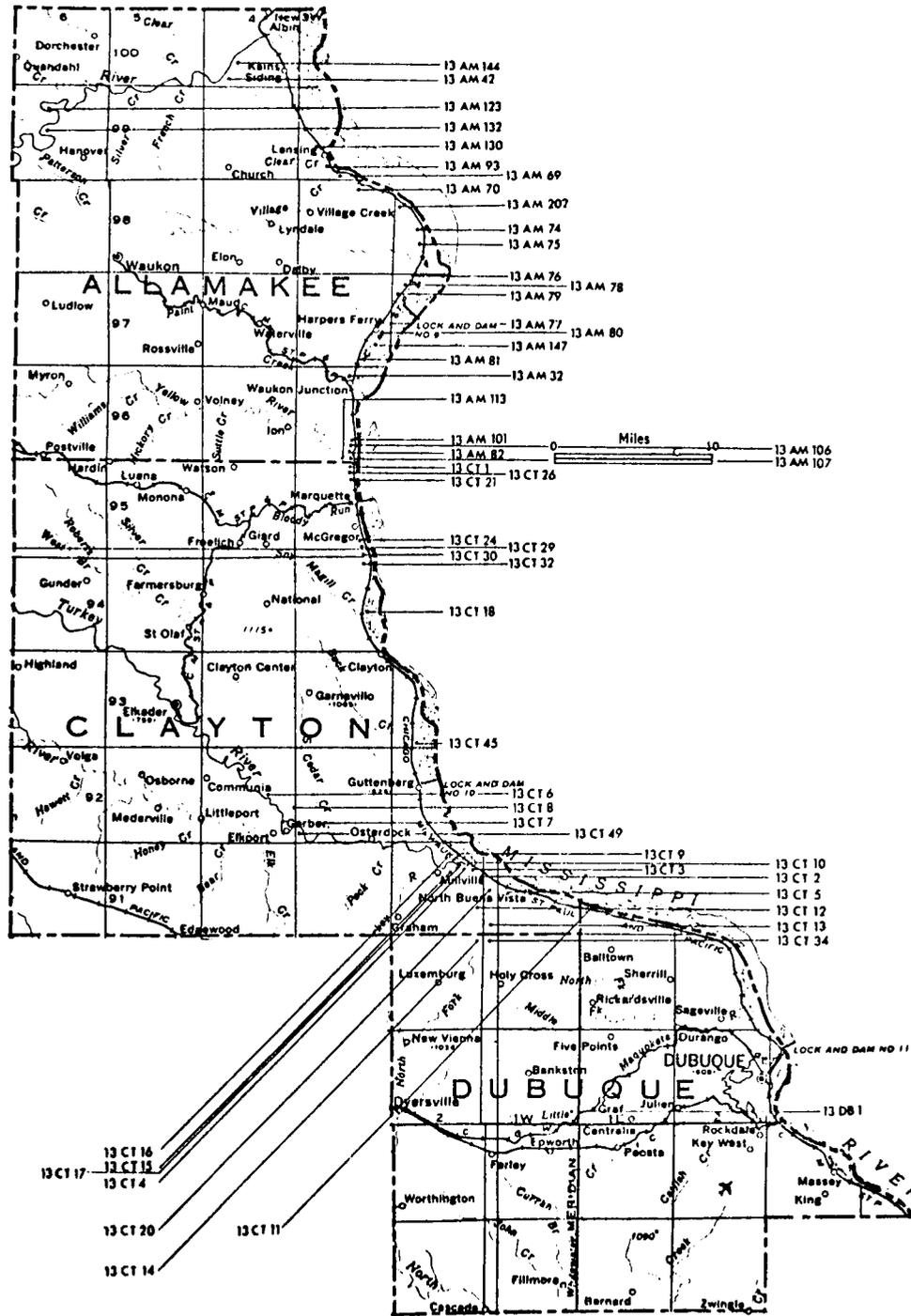


Figure 2. Distribution of Iowa Effigy Mound complexes.

data base has been established. In order to establish a secure mound data base for this manifestation from which cultural models may be derived, it will be necessary to determine the distribution patterns of the effigy complexes throughout the Effigy Mound region. These distribution patterns may then be analyzed with respect to environmental data, a preparatory step in the construction of cultural models explaining function and process.

Beginning in 1971, a research project sponsored by the Luther College Archaeological Research Center was undertaken for the express purpose of establishing a defined mound data base for the Effigy Mound manifestation in Iowa. The first phase of this project involved a check of the previous mound surveys. For Iowa, only three primary sources of Effigy Mound data were available: the report by Thomas of the activities of the Bureau of Ethnology Division of Mound Exploration, the records of the Northwestern Archaeological Survey and Orr's several volumes of research concerning the archaeology of northeastern Iowa.

The latter two studies constituted the most valuable sources of information. Both contained plats of Iowa Effigy Mound complexes and in some instances, especially in Orr's work, detailed site descriptions. Analysis and comparison of these sources revealed the existence of 51 Effigy Mound complexes located within the three extreme northeastern counties of Iowa: Allamakee, Clayton and Dubuque. Disconcertingly, many of these complexes had not been properly recorded, and in several cases site numbers and designations had been duplicated. Compounding these difficulties was the fact that many of the sites had been destroyed since the early surveys and some areas of the three counties had never been fully surveyed.

The ambiguous status of Iowa Effigy Mound was presented to Adrian Anderson, Liaison Officer for the Iowa State Historic Preservation Program, in the spring of 1973. Anderson, concerned that the remaining Effigy Mound complexes might be in danger of destruction, authorized the allocation of funds to the Luther College Archaeological Research Center for a specific survey of the Iowa Effigy Mound region.

The Iowa Effigy Mound Survey, consisting of Luther College personnel, began in May, 1973, and focused on Allamakee, Clayton and Dubuque counties. Specifically, the bluff-line along the Mississippi River and the major tributaries of the Mississippi, the Upper Iowa, Yellow and Turkey rivers, were selected for intensive exploration. All of the previously recorded effigy complexes were visited by the survey party, and in each case the respective landowner or tenant upon whose property the mounds were located was personally interviewed.

After completion of the fieldwork phase, the data were compiled and analyzed. Discovery of two previously unreported effigy complexes, the Lawrence Adams Mound Group No. 1 (13CT34) and the Pritchard Mound Group (13CT-49), increased the former total to 53 mound complexes for the Iowa Effigy Mound manifestation. Tabulation of the mound forms contained within the 53 complexes revealed a total of 1,426 mounds. According to prevailing mound terminology, this total was divided into a series of categories producing the following figures: 374 effigies, 795 conicals, 241 linears, 12 compounds and two undetermined. Of this total only 46 effigies and 240 non-effigy or associated mounds currently exist. Of the effigy complexes, 17 were found to be in a good state of preservation, 30 have been completely de-

stroyed and the remaining six have incurred partial destruction.

Several inherent error factors do exist, however, which slightly affect these figures. One error is partially attributable to the data-collecting processes employed by previous researchers. Two effigy complexes mentioned by Thomas (1894:108)—the Elkport, Iowa, effigy and an unnamed complex near Clayton, Iowa—were excluded from the overall mound total due to the absence of plats, proper site designations and precise mound figures.

Another significant error factor relates to the destructive nature of agricultural practices. Expansion of tillable land to bluff-line edges along the Mississippi River and its major tributaries in northeastern Iowa has resulted in the destruction of many known complexes. Undoubtedly, some remaining unreported complexes have been eliminated by this process in recent years. An example illustrating this situation pertains to an effigy complex located along the bluff-line of the Little Cedar River near Charles City, Iowa. Purportedly containing one bird effigy and 23 conicals, it was destroyed by land-leveling operations in 1971. This complex has also been excluded from the mound total owing to the unavailability of professional corroboration.

Taking into consideration these error factors, the present data provide the foundation for the construction of the distribution pattern of the Effigy Mound manifestation in Iowa (Figure 2). The range of these 53 verified complexes, in relationship to the eastern boundary of northeastern Iowa, the Mississippi River, encompasses a region 69 miles north-south by 17 miles east-west. Significantly, this distribution pattern falls entirely within the Iowa Driftless Area and, moreover, 44 of the 53 complexes are located along or near the Mississippi River. Of the nine complexes outside the Mississippi River area, four are located along the Upper Iowa River, four along the Turkey River and one near Kidder Creek.

For the most part, the effigy complexes are relatively evenly distributed from below the Upper Iowa River to McGregor-Pike's Peak State Park. South beyond this point, the distribution pattern becomes irregular. Near the mouth of the Turkey River a concentration of complexes occurs. After this concentration there is a 16-mile void which is terminated by the single mound complex in Dubuque County. It is possible that other effigy complexes may once have existed along the Mississippi River in Dubuque County but were destroyed before any of the surveys covered this area. This situation seems unlikely because Lewis surveyed the lone effigy complex in the area, and if any others were present at that time along the Mississippi River, he would undoubtedly have recorded them.

Appraisal of these numerical data and the resultant distribution pattern establishes the mound data base for the Effigy Mound manifestation in Iowa. By themselves, these data are meaningless, for they represent only a stage in a systematic program of data collection and analysis which should be expanded into the adjacent states of Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin. In order for the data to have meaning, they must be analyzed in correlation with environmental data. In turn, all of these data must be integrated into a model which treats culture systemically and seeks to explain the intricate relationships between the distribution pattern of the mound complexes, mound forms and the subsistence-settlement patterns of the social units participating in this cultural manifestation. When this occurs, Effigy Mound may lose some of its enigmatic characterization.

LITERATURE CITED

- BAERREIS, DAVID A. 1953. The Blackhawk Village Site, (DA 5) Dane County, Wisconsin. *Journal of the Iowa Archaeological Society* 2(4):5-20.
- . 1966. Early Salvage Excavations in the Madison Area, Dane County, Wisconsin. *The Wisconsin Archaeologist* 47(3): 101-31.
- BASTIAN, TYLER. 1962. Some Additional Data on the Beloit College Mound Group. *The Wisconsin Archaeologist* 43(3):57-64.
- BEAUBIEN, PAUL L. 1953. Cultural Variation Within Two Woodland Mound Groups of Northeastern Iowa. *American Antiquity* 19(1):56-66.
- BENNETT, J. W. 1945. Archaeological Explorations in Jo Daviess County, Illinois. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- HURLEY, WILLIAM. 1970. The Wisconsin Effigy Mound Tradition. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- JENNINGS, JESSE D. 1947. A Summary of the Culture of the Effigy Mound Builders. Prepared as a guide to research in conjunction with the development of the Effigy Mounds National Monument. Copy on file at Effigy Mounds National Monument, Marquette, Iowa.
- . 1968. *Prehistory of North America*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- KEYES, CHARLES R. 1928. The Hill-Lewis Survey. *Minnesota History* 9(2):96-108.
- LEWIS, THEODORE H. 1898. *The Northwestern Archaeological Survey*. St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company.
- LOGAN, WILFRED D. 1958. Analysis of Woodland Complexes in Northeastern Iowa. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan.
- LOTHSON, GORDON A. 1967. The Distribution of Burial Mounds in Minnesota. *Minnesota Archaeologist* 29(2):29-47.
- MAXWELL, MOREAU S. 1950. A Change in the Interpretation of Wisconsin's Prehistory. *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 33(4): 427-43.
- McKERN, WILLIAM C. 1930. The Kletzien and Nitschke Mound Groups. *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee* 3(4):417-572.
- McKUSICK, MARSHALL. 1964. *Men of Ancient Iowa*. Ames: The Iowa State University Press.
- ORR, ELLISON. 1935. Sundry Archaeological Papers and Memoranda. In Vol. 4: Iowa Archaeological Reports 1934 to 1939. Evaluation and index by Marshall McKusick. In *Archives of Archaeology*. Society for American Archaeology, Microcard Series. Edited by David Baerreis. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- ROWE, CHANDLER W. 1956. *The Effigy Mound Culture of Wisconsin*. Milwaukee Public Museum Publications in Anthropology, No. 3. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: North American Press.
- SHETRONE, HENRY C. 1930. *The Mound Builders*. New York: D. Appleton and Company.
- SQUIER, E. G., and E. H. DAVIS. 1848. *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*. Vol. 1: Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- STORCK, PETER L. 1972. *The Archaeology of Mayland Cave*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- STOUT, A. B. 1911. Prehistoric Earthworks in Wisconsin. *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 20(1):1-31.
- THOMAS, CYRUS. 1894. Report on the Mound Exploration of the Bureau of Ethnology. Bureau of American Ethnology, 12th Annual Report, 1890-1891. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.