

LOUISIANA MOUNDS A.D. 750-1500

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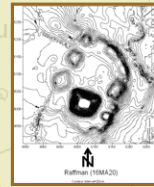
COLES CREEK

By the Coles Creek period (A.D. 750-1200), ceremonial sites often contained three or four tall, pyramidal-based, flat-topped mounds around a central plaza. Some sites, such as the Raffan site, were even larger. Mounds functioned as substructures supporting temples or houses for chiefs or principal men. Unlike in Marksville mounds, only high status individuals were buried in these "temple" mounds.

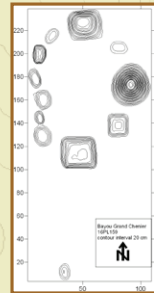
The Bayou Grande Cheniere Mound site, also constructed by Coles Creek peoples, is somewhat different from the norm. That site contains three platform mounds, a 24 foot-tall conical mound, and seven low domed mounds. A twelfth mound was built 75 meters south of the main complex. Excavations in 2001 and 2002 by Museum personnel and students revealed multiple burials in all of the mounds tested. It may be that this was a mortuary site for a number of different lineages, each represented by one or more mounds. Families may have come together at certain times of the year for feasting and mortuary ritual, perhaps analogous to the Mexican "Day of the Dead."

MISSISSIPPIAN

Beginning around A.D. 800, an influential culture called "Mississippian" arose in the area around St. Louis. This new culture is associated with a shift from a hunting and gathering to an agricultural subsistence economy, shell-tempered pottery, and a more rigid and complex political hierarchy. The Mississippian culture spawned a new politico-religious movement that, like the Hopewell and Poverty Point cultures, involved long distance trade in exquisitely-wrought exotic artifacts. In this instance, the motifs emphasized fertility, warfare, and personal status. Mississippian influence was felt in northern Louisiana as early as A.D. 1000 but Mississippian peoples did not settle in Louisiana until quite late, around A.D. 1400, and Mississippian sites are restricted to the extreme northeast and southeast portions of the state. The Transylvania site, with twelve mounds arranged around two plazas, is similar to Mississippian sites outside of Louisiana.



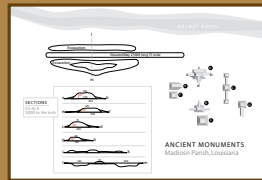
The Raffan Mound site. Image courtesy of Dr. T.R. Kidder, Department of Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis.



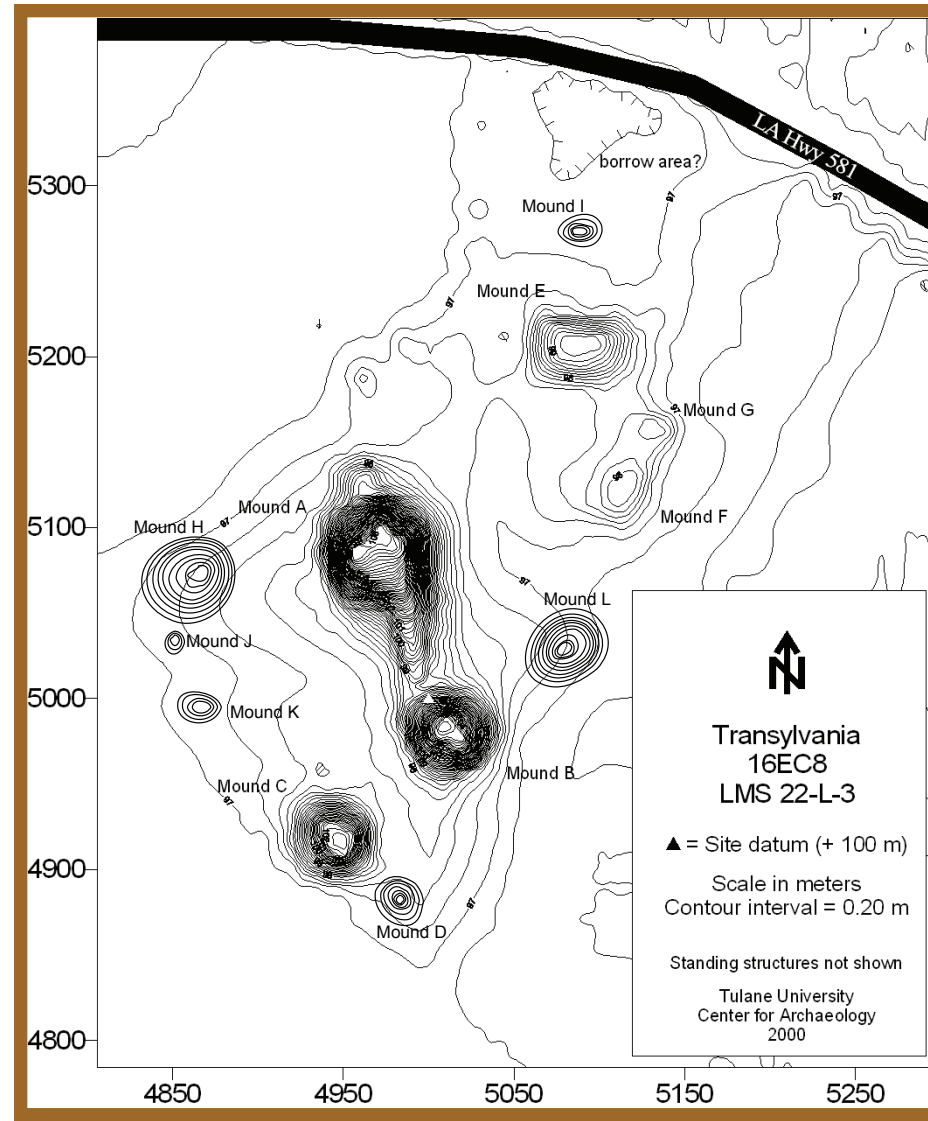
The Bayou Grande Cheniere Mound site. Image based on a sketch map provided by Dr. Chip McGimsey, Regional Archaeology Program, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

PLAQUEMINE

Between A.D. 1000 and 1200, Coles Creek cultures began to be influenced by "Mississippian" cultures to the north and east. By A.D. 1200, a new cultural designation, "Plaquemine" is used to describe local cultures influenced but not taken over by Mississippian ideals. Plaquemine mound sites are generally larger than Coles Creek sites. The Fitzhugh site, for instance, had seven mounds and a 75-foot-wide elevated roadway half a mile in length. In southern Louisiana, where Mississippian ideas were less influential, Plaquemine sites tend to be much smaller. Occasionally artifacts are found that reflect the Mississippian obsessions with warfare and status, but these are rare. Whether Plaquemine culture would become more Mississippian will never be known, as the cultural trajectory was cut off by the arrival of Europeans in 1543.



The Fitzhugh site. Image redrawn from Map in Squier and Davis's "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley" (1848:114-117), surveyed by James Hoogh, 1885.

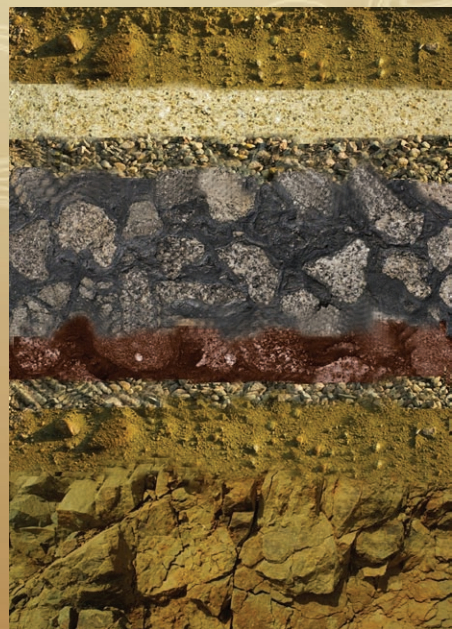


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CONTACT

Most mound building ceased across the Southeast after the Contact period, when Europeans inadvertently brought deadly diseases that decimated Native American cultures—especially those along major transportation routes like the Mississippi River. However, Native Americans have regrouped and are actively engaged in conserving mounds and other sites that reflect their durable past.



In stratigraphy that has not been disturbed by prehistoric, historic, or modern activities, the residue of earlier cultures is lower than that of more recent cultures. This follows a geological principle called "The Law of Superposition."

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