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RETHINKING THE RAMEY STATE:
WAS CAHOKIA THE CENTER OF A THEATER STATE?

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Archaeologists often portray Cahokia as the center of a chiefdom. A minority view is that Cahokia was the center of a state. These competing views are considered here, and an alternative model is presented, that Cahokia might be considered the center of a theater state. This model agrees with other models that Cahokia was an economic and political center, but also emphasizes Cahokia's role as a center of ritual. In the theater state model, the power of a state lies more in its ceremonies than in its armies. People came to Cahokia, helping to build it and feed it, not because they were coerced but because they wanted to be part of the drama. This view of Cahokia is not presented in order to replace all other models but, rather, to stimulate archaeologists to rethink what Cahokia might have been like. Geertz's theater state model suggests an alternative, non-Western view of the state that might be useful in reconsidering other archaeological complex societies as well.

Frecuentemente los arqueólogos pintan Cahokia como si fuera un centro de grandes caciques. Una pequeña minoridad dice que era el pueblo central y el asiento del estado. Se consideran ambos puntos de vista, y también se presenta otro modelo, donde se consideraría Cahokia como el centro de un estado teatro. Este modelo como los otros modelos describen Cahokia como un centro económico y político, pero de más importancia, Cahokia era un centro ritual. En el modelo teatro estado, el poder del estado se concentra más en las ceremonias que en los ejércitos. Vino la gente a Cahokia ayundando a construirla y alimentarla, no porque vinieron a fuerza sino porque querían ser parte del drama. No se presenta está interpretación de Cahokia para reemplazar todos los otros modelos, sino para estimular la interpretación arqueológica de lo que podría haber sido Cahokia. El modelo teatro-estado de Geertz sugiere una visión alternativa y no occidental del estado, una visión que podría ser útil al reevaluar otras complejas sociedades arqueológicas también.

The contemporary significance of Cahokia is international in scale: UNESCO has deemed Cahokia a World Heritage Site because of its "outstanding universal value." The site is the largest archaeological site north of Mexico by any measure used. Such measures might include the area of the site, the number of people who lived at the site, the number of earthen mounds built at the site, or the size of Monks Mound, Cahokia's largest mound, which stands at over 30 m tall and covers approximately 17 acres at its base (Dalan et al. 2003; Fowler 1997). If we consider the difficulty in drawing a clear boundary between Cahokia, which had as many as 120 mounds, and the neighboring East St. Louis site, which had approximately 50 mounds, we begin to realize the enormity of this archaeological phenomenon (see Kelly 1994:Figure 1; Milner 1998:Figure 1.1; Pauketat 1994:Figure 1.1, 2004:Figure 4.2; cf.

Fortier 2007). The Mississippi River separated East St. Louis and Cahokia from the Mississippian mound center at St. Louis, which had approximately 25 mounds, but perhaps that site too should be considered part of the same cultural phenomenon (cf. Pauketat 2004). Unfortunately, all the mounds in St. Louis and East St. Louis have been destroyed, at least above ground (see Fortier 2007; Kelly 1994; Pauketat 2005), and we will never fully understand the relationship between these sites. More fortunately, the state of Illinois owns the "downtown" portion of Cahokia and has an active program to purchase more land in its vicinity. The Interpretive Center at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site receives over 300,000 visitors per year, including visitors from 78 foreign countries in 1996 (Dalan et al. 2003:12). This attention clearly demonstrates the international significance of the site in the present.

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The prehistoric significance of Cahokia is less clear. While many models of Cahokia have considered the site to be the center of a chiefdom (e.g., Milner 1990, 1998; Pauketat 1991, 1994), a few archaeologists have suggested that Cahokia was instead the capital of the "Ramey State" (e.g., Gibbon 1974; O'Brien 1989, 1991). At a recent conference on Mississippian polities, common themes of discussion were power and ritual, which often seemed to be presented as opposing theoretical positions (see Butler and Welch 2006). It was also observed at this conference that Cahokia was the "900 pound gorilla" of the Mississippian world. Most Mississippian societies, which were later and significantly smaller than Cahokia in scale, are considered chiefdoms. Is it reasonable to think that the 900 lb gorilla was something more than the simpler, smaller societies that followed it?

An alternative model is offered here, Geertz's (1980) model of a "theatre state." Geertz's analysis of the nineteenth-century Balinese state suggests that "power" and "ritual" are not in opposition; indeed, the power of a state can lie in its ceremonies more so than its armies. The source of Cahokia's power was in its rituals, and that power surely transcended the power of any later Mississippian chiefdom or other native society north of Mexico. Given the scale and nature of Cahokia's power, Cahokia might best be seen as a theater state.

Previous Views of Cahokia

Many researchers have stressed the complexity and far-reaching influence of Cahokia (e.g., Dalan et al. 2003; Emerson 2002; Fowler 1974; Hall 1991; Pauketat 2007), but few have gone so far as to suggest that it was the capital of a state (Gibbon 1974; Kehoe 1998; O'Brien 1989; Sears 1968). The label "Ramey State" was apparently coined by Conrad and Harn (1972) to refer to the area they believed was controlled by Cahokia. Ramey Incised pottery is the ceremonial ware at Cahokia and is found in various amounts throughout the American Bottom, the broad floodplain surrounding Cahokia, and in the uplands adjacent to the American Bottom. Ramey Incised designs are also found at scattered sites in the Mississippi and adjacent river valleys as far north as Wisconsin and Minnesota and as far south as southern Illinois and southern Indiana. The label "Ramey State" implies that the distribu-

tion of Ramey pottery marks the spatial extent of Cahokia's power and influence.

Gibbon (1974) proposes that the Red Wing area of Minnesota became incorporated on some level into the Ramey State, which he suggests was a "theocratic state" borrowing a model proposed by Wheatley (1970, 1971). Within such a state, religious institutions dominate economic institutions; cities are ceremonial, administrative, and political centers "diffusing traditional culture" (Gibbon 1974:132, citing Redfield and Singer 1954). Gibbon briefly examines the development of Cahokia as a center and the spread of influence from Cahokia into the Upper Midwest. Comparing Cahokia to Teotihuacán, Gibbon hypothesizes that the theocratic state centered at Cahokia was extractive and used magico-religious controls within its widespread exchange network. The distant reaches of that exchange network, such as the Red Wing area, "were inhabited by a predominantly hinterland population, although Cahokians may have been instrumental in their administration" (Gibbon 1974:136). Gibbon suggests that disruption at Cahokia, increasing power within distant centers, and climatic change led to the collapse of the Ramey State.

In her analysis of Cahokia's influence, O'Brien (1989) has a very different view of the Ramey State. She finds four common themes in how a "state" is defined:

1. a monopoly of the *threat* of the use of legitimate force
2. the presence of political-economic classes
3. the presence of a hierarchical bureaucracy
4. the presence of hierarchical decision-making (with 3 settlement levels or more being crucial) [1989:278].

O'Brien (1989) finds evidence of all four themes in the archaeological record of Cahokia and its "hinterland." She considers "massive human sacrifice" at Cahokia as evidence of the threat of the use of force. In particular, some 250 people, mostly young women, were sacrificed and interred in Cahokia's Mound 72. Labor specialization (a potter's hamlet, shell bead manufacture, etc.), lower- and middle-class neighborhoods at Cahokia, and a rural supporting population are evidence that political-economic classes existed. Evidence of hierarchical bureaucracy is found in elite burials, monumental construction and public structures, the

skills necessary to plan the layout of Cahokia, and "systematic" garbage collection at Cahokia. As O'Brien states, "Where there are plans, there are planners, and planners are generally bureaucrats" (1989:283). Finally, O'Brien argues that there are five levels in the Mississippian settlement system in the American Bottom, which constitutes evidence of hierarchical decision making.

In subsequent work, O'Brien (1991) examines the economic base of the "Ramey State," looking at Cahokia's subsistence base and labor force, its trading network, and evidence of tribute. Here she argues that a rural supporting population supplied Cahokia with food, and again she argues for evidence of craft specialization. Exotic materials such as shark's teeth, copper, and marine shell were commonly traded to Cahokia, as well as "mundane manufacturing materials" such as Mill Creek chert (which was used to manufacture Mississippian hoes) and salt. Bastions identified during excavation at Cahokia's Tract 15B were for secure storage of trade goods, according to O'Brien. Finally, O'Brien defines tribute as payments made by a subordinate group to a politically dominant group, and she believes that there is evidence of tribute made to Cahokia from places quite distant. She argues that Mississippian "frontier towns," which are typically fortified and strategically located along trade routes, functioned to protect goods during transportation. Examples would include Aztalan, which is found on the Crawfish River in Wisconsin, so placed to protect the trade of copper and other northern products (fish, furs, and lumber); and Dickson Mounds, which is found at the confluence of the Spoon and Illinois rivers, possibly placed to protect the trade of animal products (especially meat and bison hides). These and other Mississippian frontier towns typically have a temple mound; they are seen as colonies of Cahokia because "there is no evidence of a local Mississippian evolution" (O'Brien 1991:160).

Such models of the "Ramey State," in particular O'Brien's, are dismissed by Milner as "mighty Cahokia" scenarios:

> Conventional wisdom about the society centered on Cahokia is a pastiche of solid research findings, field impressions, and outright conjecture. This curiously undifferentiated mix is trotted out in arguments for a society at the high end of the organizational complexity spectrum

[O'Brien [1972], 1989, 1991]. Cahokia is portrayed as a great and powerful place, the premier site in a society that was organized and operated in fundamentally different ways than its Mississippian counterparts elsewhere. It was poised on the brink of becoming a state if it had not already arrived there [1998:10; cf. Muller 1997].

Milner (1998) credits (or blames) work by Fowler (e.g., 1974) on Cahokia's internal structure and on its settlement system for inspiring these models, and he (1990) argues that the settlement system of the American Bottom is not as hierarchical as Fowler suggests. Whereas Fowler (cf. O'Brien 1989) argues that varying numbers of mounds at Mississippian sites indicate hierarchy, Milner (1990) argues that the number of mounds at a site indicates site longevity, competition, and history. Milner (1998) argues that there are three primary problems with labeling Cahokia a state or emerging state. First, finds at Cahokia are essentially similar to finds at other Mississippian chiefdoms, except that the amount of earth moved in building the mounds at Cahokia was greater than elsewhere. Second, fewer people lived at Cahokia than is commonly estimated (Milner estimates that there were only a few thousand inhabitants; more common estimates are 10,000 or 20,000 inhabitants); therefore, extensive taxes, trade, and tribute were not necessary to support them. Finally, while there is evidence of extensive earth movement, craftwork, trade, and elites at Cahokia, this does not indicate that Cahokia was "politically centralized, economically specialized, or aggressively expansionistic" (Milner 1998:13).

Milner concedes that the "achievements" of Cahokia were "impressive," but he believes that they are essentially similar to those of other large/strong chiefdoms elsewhere. He prefers to label Cahokia a "complex chiefdom" (1998:3), and a primary goal of his book, appropriately titled *The Cahokia Chiefdom*, is to argue this point. Milner (1990) suggests that Cahokia, like other mounded Mississippian sites, controlled the territory only within its immediate vicinity and that its population was largely self-sufficient.

These competing models are given historical context by Pauketat (2002). He defines four "generations" of Cahokia archaeology. In the first generation, archaeologists like Griffin (e.g., 1952)

focused on chronology and culture history. In the second-generation synthesis, archaeologists including Fowler, Gibbon, and O'Brien looked at the organization and influence of Cahokia with the general view that Cahokia was internally complex. In the third-generation synthesis, cultural resource management provided a new wealth of comparative data on other sites in the American Bottom. Based on this new view from the "periphery," archaeologists such as Milner began to question earlier claims of Cahokia's complexity and influence. The fourth-generation synthesis has come about since 1990 due to investigations at Cahokia itself, including both new excavations and reanalysis of previously excavated materials. Pauketat points out that these new investigations have made it possible to compare developments at Cahokia and other sites in the American Bottom for the first time. "Theoretically speaking," Pauketat writes, "the fourth-generation view is a return to a historical perspective, but one that now highlights human agency and the two-way 'negotiations' of culture" (2002:150). And so, the pendulum swings.

Pauketat (2002) includes his own work in both the third-generation and the fourth-generation syntheses. In his earlier work (e.g., 1991) he characterizes Cahokia as a chiefdom or "prestate" society. In a more recent publication, Pauketat refers to Cahokia as a "city" that was involved in "state-making," but he suggests that it was *not* "a state in the typical sense of that word" (2004:168). Most recently, Pauketat has declared the chiefdom an "archaeological delusion" and suggests that both "chiefdom" and "state" are evolutionary types that should be discarded—although he refers to Cahokia as "statelike" and seems to prefer the term *civilization* (2007:159, 17). Regardless of the nomenclature used, Pauketat's view of Cahokia is "consistent with Fowler's view of Cahokia's internal complexity and therefore contrary to the 'downsized' views of Milner (1998) and Muller (1997)" (2002:152). He argues that Cahokia became "the preeminent cultural center" in a "Big Bang" around cal A.D. 1050—"Cahokia coalesced in short order around a political leader, a religious movement, or a kin-coalition that rapidly centralized the social relations and political economy of the American Bottom" (2002:152). Agency is the theoretical undercurrent throughout this work. In Pauketat's earlier work (e.g., 1994), a handful of motivated

elites were the movers and shakers behind this coalescence, although more recently he has noted that "Mississippian farmers had agency," too (2003:56).

A new view of Cahokia is presented by Byers (2006), who would seem to take the "downsized" view to a new extreme. Byers sees no centralized hierarchy leading Cahokia, not even that of a chiefdom much less that of a state; instead, he envisions a "heterarchy" at Cahokia. Instead of *"chiefs* and *chiefdoms,"* Byers sees "clans and cults organized into complex settlement arrangements based on mutual alliances and enmities and having social structures based on mutual autonomy of responsible parties who interact through collective consensus rather than zero-sum dominance" (2006:xiii). Byers likens Cahokia to a shopping mall, where clans and cults came to conduct their rituals with the same autonomy that shopping mall merchants and shoppers have today.

Pauketat (2004) would agree with Byers that there is evidence of heterarchy at Cahokia, but he argues that hierarchy and hegemony existed there alongside heterarchy. Indeed, Pauketat and Emerson (1999) argue that community was used at Cahokia to mask hegemony. In contrast to Byers (2006), however, most contemporary archaeologists writing about Cahokia operate under the assumption that it was the center of a chiefdom (e.g., Beck 2006; Dalan et al. 2003; Emerson 1997a; Finney 2000; Kelly 2001; Mehrer 1995; Milner 1998; Pauketat 1994; Schroeder 2004; Trubitt 2000). Of these, probably none is as vociferous as Milner in explicitly arguing against the notion of a "Ramey State."

Mississippian leadership and polities were the topic of the 2003 Visiting Scholar Conference at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (see Butler and Welch 2006). Here, too, the underlying and unquestioned assumption seemed to be that all Mississippian societies were chiefdoms, even though it was acknowledged that Cahokia operated on an entirely different scale than all other Mississippian polities (Welch and Butler 2006; cf. Cobb 2003). As Dalan et al. write, "Cahokia was not just a large Mississippian site; it was both structurally and organizationally different from other Mississippian centers" (2003:197). Similarly, Pauketat and Emerson state that Cahokia was a "political, economic, and social behemoth" (1997:269). Yet they, like most other third- and fourth-generation Cahokia archae-

ologists, refer to Cahokia as a chiefdom, albeit the "granddaddy of Mississippian chiefdoms" (1999:303).

Another theme at the 2003 Visiting Scholar Conference (Butler and Welch 2006) was debate between archaeologists who used words like *power* and *domination* and archaeologists who used words like *ritual* and *myth*. Examples of the former in the Butler and Welch volume might include Beck's (2006) analysis of "persuasive politics and domination" at Cahokia and Moundville; they certainly would include previous works by Emerson and Pauketat (e.g., Emerson 1997a; Emerson and Pauketat 2002; Pauketat and Emerson 1997, 1999). An explicit example of the latter is Brown's (2006) analysis of Mound 72 as the enactment of an episode from the Red Horn myth (Radin 1948; also see Brown 2003); other examples would certainly include pioneering works by Hall (1991, 1996, 1997, etc.) and also Byers's recent book (2006).

Two very different worldviews seemed to be reflected in this debate. As one casual observer at the Visiting Scholar Conference noted, the contrasting views seemed to tell more about the archaeologists than the archaeological record. In any case, we know as anthropologists that it is impossible to separate these aspects of culture; as Bailey notes, "Traditional Osage social, political, and religious institutions were so highly integrated that they constituted a single unified system" (1995:29). It seems we need to be reminded that politics, religion, and other cultural subsystems are integrated, perhaps most obviously in "traditional" cultures. Power and ritual were certainly inseparable in the theater state.

The Theater State

Negara, Geertz explains in his book of the same name, was the classical state of precolonial Indonesia, what Geertz calls a "theatre state":

> *Negara* . . . originally meaning "town," is used in Indonesian languages to mean, more or less simultaneously and interchangeably, "palace," "capital," "state," "realm," and again "town." It is, in its broadest sense, the word for (classical) civilization, for the world of the traditional city, the high culture that city supported, and the system of superordinate political authority centered there. Its opposite is *desa* . . . meaning, with a similar flexibility of ref-

erence, "countryside," "region," "village," "place," and sometimes even "dependency" or "governed area." In its broadest sense *desa* is the word for the world . . . of the rural settlement, of the peasant, the tenant, the political subject, the "people." Between these two poles, *negara* and *desa*, each defined in contrast to the other, the classical polity developed and, within the general context of . . . cosmology, took its distinctive, not to say peculiar, form [1980:4].

It is easy to see the fundamental contrast between "capital" and "countryside" described by Geertz in Cahokia and its "hinterland." Cahokia, East St. Louis, and St. Louis together stretched out more or less continuously from one side of the Mississippi to the other, a string of perhaps some 200 mounds all together. Of the three sites, Cahokia is often seen by archaeologists as the paramount center, even though it might be somewhat arbitrary to determine where one site ends and the next begins—except for where the Mississippi River divides them (see Kelly 1994:Figure 1; Milner 1998:Figure 1.1; Pauketat 1994:Figure 1.1). Together we might say they formed a single center (cf. Fortier 2007; Fowler 1997; Hall 2006), or what Pauketat (1994, 2004) calls a "central political-administrative complex" (also see Emerson 2002), even if their conjoining is to some extent the result of several centuries of prehistoric suburban sprawl.

Smaller mounded sites in the American Bottom, and later Mississippian centers of the Southeast for that matter, might have had more in common with nonmounded villages and farmsteads than they had with Cahokia. Surely, Cahokia was perceived as "town" in contrast to the "countryside," whether one thinks 16,000 people (Pauketat 2003; Pauketat and Lopinot 1997) or only a "few" thousand people lived at Cahokia (Milner 1998). Cahokia was also surely perceived as the "capital" in contrast to the "rural settlement" or "governed area"—given that the population of Cahokia's hinterland surely helped build it and probably helped feed it (e.g., Dalan 1997; Kelly 1997; Lopinot 1997). Cahokia would have been the "capital" of "civilization" and "high culture" in the area, where people came to participate in ceremonies, rituals, and feasts (e.g., Kelly 2001; Pauketat 2002). Cahokia was as surely the center of "political

authority" as outlying settlements were home to the "people" (e.g., Emerson 1997a, 1997b; Pauketat 2003).

It seems there can be only one possible sticking point in this initial comparison between negara and Cahokia—was Cahokia also a "state"? Geertz writes that there were hundreds if not thousands of negaras in Indonesia over time, as "kingdoms of various dimensions and durability rose, intrigued, fought, and fell in a steady, broadening stream" (1980:4). States coalesced and collapsed, "an expanding cloud of localized, fragile, loosely interrelated petty principalities" (Geertz 1980:4). Here, then, is a difference between Cahokia and the negaras of Indonesia: there was only one Cahokia. The "negara" at Cahokia lasted a few centuries. Nothing like it in scale or complexity followed elsewhere in the Mississippian world. Does its uniqueness make the developments at Cahokia less significant? To the contrary, the fact that it stands out in such contrast to the historically observed Mississippian chiefdoms of the Southeast suggests that Cahokia was more than a chiefdom—although perhaps just as localized and fragile as any Indonesian negara.

Geertz suggests that the theater state of Indonesia was not so much about government as it was about spectacle and ceremony: "Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power" (1980:13). We can again see parallels with Cahokia. Archaeologists may debate how much power Cahokia had, but no one debates that powerful ceremonies took place at Cahokia. Dramatic examples would include mass human sacrifice at Mound 72—quite a spectacle even though the sacrifices took place on several occasions, as Milner (1998) points out (cf. Pauketat 2004). Rituals like this signal the great "power a few highly ranked individuals held over the lives of some people," as Milner (1998:136) acknowledges. Geertz's model of the theater state suggests that rituals like this were what gave Cahokia power. Rituals that included mound building and human sacrifice drew people to Cahokia; they did not need to be coerced (cf. Byers 2006; Hall 2006; Pauketat 1998a). They wanted to be part of the spectacle.

The power of the Indonesian theater state was not about how much land was controlled; it was about the loyalty, support, and deference of the state's supporters. Geertz writes, "Political power inhered less in property than in people; was a matter of the accumulation of prestige, not of territory" (1980:24). These people were needed "for state ritual and, what was really the same thing, for warfare" (Geertz 1980:24). Likewise, most archaeologists do not believe that Cahokia directly controlled a huge territory, but the prestige of Cahokia is surely indicated by the presence of artifacts made at Cahokia or in the Cahokia style at sites hundreds of miles away from Cahokia (e.g., see Hall 1991; Kelly 1991). Although the palisade at Cahokia might suggest warfare (Trubitt 2003), there is little if any evidence of actual warfare at Cahokia. Fertility rather than war symbolism seems to dominate Cahokian ideology (e.g., Emerson 1989, 1997c; Emerson et al. 2000; Johannessen 1993; Pauketat and Emerson 1997). However, war symbolism becomes more prominent after A.D. 1200 (see Brown and Kelly 2000), around the time that the palisade was built (Trubitt 2003). The palisade and war symbolism might suggest, therefore, that warfare became important after A.D. 1200. Trubitt (2003) suggests that warfare at Cahokia was about the accumulation of social prestige, as it was in Bali. I would suggest further that warfare at Cahokia may have been ritualized; similarly, Brown and Dye argue that "trophy motifs served not only as a symbol of success at war but as a metaphor for specific mythic narratives" (2007:274; also see Brown 2007). Given the link between warfare and mourning among "all Indian societies in the midcontinental United States" (Hall 1998:57), it would be surprising if ritual warfare were not part of mourning rituals at Cahokia. In any case, there is no evidence at Cahokia of warfare over territory (cf. Trubitt 2003), although Pauketat (2007) suggests that Cahokia could have had a standing army.

The ruling class of the Indonesian theater state was a hereditary elite, but not all elites were eligible to be rulers. The caste system described by Geertz for Bali was complex:

> In Weberian terms, Sudras could achieve the power necessary for the establishment of effective authority, but inevitably lacked the trappings of moral qualification which are also

necessary for such an establishment; whereas Brahmanas had the qualifications in full degree, were in fact the purest embodiments of cultural excellence, but could not achieve the requisite power. Only the Satrias and Wesias were possessed of one and could acquire the other so as to attain genuine authority, substantial legitimacy, and become the pivot upon which the entire system—priests, commoners, and less successful gentry—turned [1980:27].

These various elites had different hereditary claims to power, but Geertz argues that they had to compete with one another—through rituals—to achieve the full potential of their power. Was the class system at Cahokia as complicated as the Indonesian system described by Geertz? The Natchez, a historic Mississippian group of the Southeast, has been used as a model for class structure at Cahokia (e.g., see the Cahokia Mounds Interpretive Center). The Natchez social hierarchy was multitiered and complex, with the "Great Sun" at its apex (Swanton 1911). To extend our ethnographic comparison to the west, Hall (2006) suggests that southern Siouan ranking, both within and between clans, was also multitiered and complex.[1] Clearly there was a social hierarchy at Cahokia (e.g., Emerson 1997a; Emerson, Hargrave, and Hedman 2003; Goldstein 2000; Hall 2006; Pauketat 1994; Wilson et al. 2006), and most archaeologists would agree that Cahokia was ruled by a hereditary elite (e.g., Fowler et al. 1999). That elites used rituals to compete for power could be indicated by the numbers or varying size of mounds found in the American Bottom (e.g., Beck 2006; Milner 1990). Dalan et al. document that mounds closest to Monks Mound were "on the small side, taking no risk at competing with the largest monument at the site" (2003:92). Other mounds at Cahokia, East St. Louis, St. Louis, and other mound centers in the American Bottom were large by Mississippian standards but only a fraction of the size of Monks Mound (cf. Milner 2003). Knight argues that Mississippian platform mounds were "objects of sacred display" (1986:678). If Cahokian mounds were sacred icons (Knight 1986) and Cahokian elites competed through rituals, mound building would have been a likely form of elite competition.

Within the caste system, what were the obligations of peasants to elites in the Indonesian theater state? Geertz writes that there were two basic obligations:

> And those two were but analogues, cultural equivalents: ritual service and military service. Beyond these obligations, which could of course be onerous enough, the kawula was not bound. He was not a tenant, a serf, a servant, or a slave. He was not even . . . a subject. He was stagehand, spear carrier, and *claqueur* in an endless political opera [1980:65].

Peasants in Bali were sometimes tenants, but to a different lord; peasants also paid taxes, but the taxes they paid (husked rice at harvest time, for example) might go to yet another lord. Geertz concludes, "There was no unitary government, weak or powerful, over the whole realm at all. There was merely a knotted web of specific claims usually acknowledged" (1980:68).

There is no way to know with certainty if the web of claims in greater Cahokia was quite so knotted, but otherwise, it is again easy to see parallels. The commoners, the majority of the population in the American Bottom, surely gave ritual service, for example, by providing labor in the construction of mounds and plazas at Cahokia (see Dalan 1997; Dalan et al. 2003). Given the likelihood that the same workers also built the mounds and plazas of East St. Louis (Fortier 2007) and other American Bottom centers, then the claims on their service may indeed have been quite knotted. If ritual warfare was practiced in some form at Cahokia as might be indicated by war imagery found there (Emerson 1982, 1989), it is reasonable to imagine that commoners provided this service also. It is also plausible that the farming commoners of the American Bottom gave a portion of their maize harvest to Cahokia (Pauketat 1991, 1994, 2004).

Hall states that for the Omaha "religion provided a fabric of privileges and obligations that bound society together and countered tendencies toward segmentation" (2006:194). We can hypothesize that similar threads tied Cahokians together and that in return for their services, commoners received both tangible and intangible benefits. Milner (2003) notes that commoners had access to many of the same types of artifacts that elites had, but of lesser quantity and quality. Similarly, Pauketat (2004) finds that farmers in the upland villages east of the American Bottom had access to "elite"

goods, but in smaller amounts than floodplain farmers, who in turn had less access to valuables than residents of Cahokia. Giving commoners access to items such as marine shell beads may have been yet another way of binding society together or of attracting people to the theater at Cahokia. Trubitt's (2000) observation of increasing elite control over shell artifact production through time might suggest that "door prizes" were less necessary to attract participants later in Cahokia's history, or what Beck (2006) interprets as a shift from a "group-building" to a "group-distancing" strategy. Alternatively, if the benefits to commoners did include intangibles, then perhaps through time "door prizes" became less important than benefits (such as blessings or anointing), which do not so readily leave an archaeological signature.

Beyond providing services and taxes, villagers seem to have been fairly autonomous in the Indonesian theater state, and it seems reasonable to assume that Mississippian villagers were too. In Bali, however, there was also a "rice-field cult," a coordination of labor that "enabled the Balinese irrigation system to work and which gave it form and order" (Geertz 1980:77–78). No "intensive applications of coercive power from a centralized state" were necessary (Geertz 1980:82) because labor was organized through a ceremonial system of ritual obligations. In the American Bottom, there was no need for irrigation, but it has been hypothesized that ridged fields were constructed (Fowler 1969, 1992). I have suggested elsewhere that maize was grown in communal fields using communal labor in the American Bottom (Holt 1996; cf. Lopinot 1997). Maize was grown in town fields by historic southeastern Indians, with both men and women contributing labor (Swanton 1946). The presence of maize in "communal" features on American Bottom sites (cf. Hall 1996) and shifts in faunal exploitation might suggest that this was the practice in the late prehistoric American Bottom also (Holt 1996). Coordination of such labor is likely, and whether or not this labor was organized through ritual obligations, there is no evidence that it was coerced.

To reiterate, though, the real power of the Indonesian theater state was in its rituals. "The ceremonial life of the classical negara," Geertz writes, "was as much a form of rhetoric as it was of devotion, a florid, boasting assertion of spiritual power" (1980:102). Geertz continues:

The state ceremonials of classical Bali were metaphysical theatre: theatre designed to express a view of the ultimate nature of reality and, at the same time, to shape the existing conditions of life to be consonant with that reality; that is, theatre to present an ontology and, by presenting it, to make it happen—make it actual [1980:104].

In Bali, state leaders as actors in this theater leapt alive into flames to demonstrate their social rank and spiritual power. The rituals that took place at Cahokia's Mound 72 were surely as powerful and dramatic (e.g., Goldstein 2000; Pauketat 2004; Porubcan 2000). Fowler, who excavated Mound 72, makes an analogy to Natchez mortuary practices, suggesting that the mortuary features in Mound 72 are those of a powerful leader of Cahokia who was buried with multiple retainers, with additional mass sacrifices made at various times thereafter (Fowler et al. 1999). In contrast, Brown (2003) suggests that the primary burial in Mound 72 took place in a ritual reenactment of the Red Horn myth (Radin 1948).

Hall's (1997) description of a historic Skiri Pawnee version of the Mesoamerican arrow sacrifice indicates that it was also dramatic, since it usually entailed shooting a "young maiden" through the heart with an arrow. Hall (personal communication 2007) suggests that the Skiri acquired this ritual from Cahokia, although its ultimate origins are Mesoamerican. The occasions of mass human sacrifice (or "scheduled death," to use Hall's terminology) at Cahokia's Mound 72 would have been even more dramatic, given that these involved the sacrifice of as many as 53 individuals at once. Likewise, the burial of four headless, handless men also suggests dramatic ritual sacrifice. Fowler et al. (1999) suggest that the four sacrificed men represented the four cardinal directions. Hall (2000, 2006) concurs, interpreting these four (and a similar burial at Dickson Mounds) as evidence of the Green Corn ceremony, which was practiced by historic southeastern groups as both a fertility (first fruits) and world-renewal ritual.

Rituals that took place at Cahokia's wood henges were probably also dramatic events. Although these circles of posts are interpreted as astronomical and calendrical devices, these and single posts found at Cahokia may have also served as markers or other functions (Fowler 1996; Hall

2004; Smith 1992; Wittry 1996; Young and Fowler 2000). Hall (1996) notes that Sun Dance lodges, like Cahokia's wood henges, are circular with a central pole (cf. Kehoe 2002). Caddoan speakers of East Texas built circles of poles for ritual purposes, including fall harvest festivals. Sacred poles among historically known groups such as the Omaha were multipurpose; for example, they symbolized the authority of chiefs and were probably used in earlier times in mourning rituals (Hall 1997). An Omaha myth states that the tree cut for the Sacred Pole was attacked like an enemy; the pole was later referred to as a human being, and a scalp was hung from its top to give it hair (Hall 1997). Hudson notes that Creek "slave posts" were also "decorated with the scalps of slain enemies, and prisoners of war were sometimes tied to them. The skulls of slain enemies were sometimes placed on top of these posts" (1976:221). Similarly, an image from Le Moyne's visit to Florida in 1564 shows "Indians" seated in a semicircle facing a semicircle of posts (Lorant 1946:67). In the center of the circle formed by posts and people, a man dances, accompanied by three men playing drum and rattles; from each post hangs a scalp, a leg, or an arm. Le Moyne describes the scene as a ceremony to celebrate a victory over enemies.

Historic evidence such as the Sun Dance ritual, the Omaha myth, and Le Moyne's illustration suggest that rituals undertaken at Cahokia's wood henges and other sacred poles in the past were not necessarily as peaceful or passive as those undertaken by New Agers who gather on solstice mornings at Cahokia today. Evidence of ritual at Cahokia like that depicted by Le Moyne comes from a pit excavated in Cahokia's Tract 15A, located on the edge of Woodhenges III and V (Circles 2 and 3; cf. Wittry 1996). That pit contained human arm and leg bones, probably articulated when deposited and all from different individuals (Pauketat 1998b; Young and Fowler 2000).[2] If scalps decorated the posts, of course they would not be preserved in the archaeological record. Thus, it is likely that solstice rituals took place at Cahokia's wood henges, but these and other posts at Cahokia might have also served functions in mourning, warfare, and other rituals (cf. Hall 1997, 1998). Hall suggests that Cahokia's wood henges served not only as passive astronomical observatories; they also served as symbolic world centers and "active instruments to direct the powers of nature into the heart of the community" (Hall 1996:125). Indeed, such circles may have symbolized nothing less than the cosmos (e.g., Fowler 1996; Hall 1996).

Rituals are also indicated by Mississippian Long-Nosed God masks and Cahokian figurines of red Missouri flint clay. Hall (1991, 1997, 2006) suggests that the Long-Nosed God masks symbolize the Red Horn myth (Radin 1948): Red Horn is also known as He-who-wears-human-heads-as-earrings, and the tiny Mississippian "masks" that look like faces were actually worn as earrings or pendants. Hall believes that these "masks" were used in adoption rituals that functioned to create fictional kinship ties between groups, similar to the historic calumet ceremony. Although Hall (see 1991:Figure 1.7) notes that no Long-Nosed God masks have been found at Cahokia itself, they have been found nearby, and their distribution more or less coincides with the distribution of Ramey pottery. Hall suggests the masks were distributed from Cahokia, noting that hundreds of peace medals were distributed from Washington, D.C., yet none has been found in excavations there. Similarly, figurines carved of red Missouri flint clay are believed to have been made at Cahokia and distributed from there (Emerson 1997a; Emerson and Hughes 2000; Emerson, Hughes, et al. 2003), although none has been found at Cahokia itself; these too may have symbolized scenes from the Red Horn (Morning Star) myth (Reilly 2004). However, whereas Long-Nosed masks have a distribution generally north of Cahokia, the flint clay figurines tend to have a more southerly distribution. Most flint clay figurines have been found in the greater American Bottom around Cahokia, while a number have been found at Spiro, and single specimens have been found at other sites in the Southeast (Emerson and Hughes 2000; Emerson, Hughes, et al. 2003). If Long-Nosed God masks were used in adoption rituals, perhaps Cahokian flint clay figurines were too, since there is convincing evidence that both represent the Morning Star myth. In support of this notion, Reilly (2004) points out that many figurines were reconfigured as pipes (cf. the calumet pipe) and were found far from Cahokia. Like the calumet ceremony, adoption rituals would have been important in integrating the widespread peoples of the Ramey State (cf. Pauketat 2004).

Another ritual that took place in the plazas of

Cahokia is represented by chunkey stones, which are occasional finds at sites in the American Bottom (Koldehoff and Kassly-Kane 1995). An unusually large cache of 15 chunkey stones along with remains of possible chunkey equipment were found in Cahokia's Mound 72 (Brown 2003; Fowler et al. 1999). In addition, Wittry (1996) suggests that some of the posts excavated in Cahokia's Tract 15A were chunkey yard markers. Chunkey was a game played by southeastern Indians, but it is safe to say that it was more than just a game. Hudson suggests that chunkey was "probably bound up with traditional Southeastern beliefs and social alignments" (1976:425). Mississippian gorgets engraved with pictures of chunkey players suggest the ritual importance of the game (e.g., see Brown 2007); the chunkey game was also featured in myths, including the Red Horn myth (Brown 2007; Radin 1948). Hudson mentions that Creek chunkey yards were located in their ceremonial centers and were public places "for games, dances, ritual, and public spectacle" (1976:221). Among southeastern Indians, Hudson states that the stones were "owned" by towns or clans within towns; Bartram (1988 [1791]) notes that for this reason chunkey stones were not buried with an individual when he died.

Given this observation, the burial of 15 chunkey stones in Mound 72 suggests that beliefs surrounding chunkey changed through time. DeBoer (1993) has identified additional evidence of change in the archaeological record of the American Bottom. DeBoer argues that chunkey became popular in the Late Woodland period, during which time chunkey stones are found in varied contexts, including middens and burials of children. Change is apparent in the Mississippian period; chunkey stones were of a more standardized size and tend to be found in elite contexts, suggesting that Mississippian elites appropriated the game (cf. Koldehoff and Kassly-Kane 1995). Historically, chunkey games were high-stakes gambling events; DeBoer argues that Cahokia elites regulated the "game" so that they could control gambling, thereby controlling this type of exchange. Viewing chunkey as a ritual, this also suggests that Cahokia elites took control over popular symbols (see Koldehoff and Kassly-Kane 1995; cf. Beck 2006).

The religious symbols of Bali are "richly polysemic" according to Geertz (1980:105), as are religious symbols anywhere. Those at Cahokia were surely as meaningful in surely as many ways (e.g., Brown and Kelly 2000; Emerson 1989, 1997c; Emerson et al. 2000). The foregoing discussion of rituals at Cahokia illustrates that we can attempt to get at some of these meanings through comparison with ethnohistoric Native American mythology, as Hall (e.g., 1997) and Brown (e.g., 2007), for example, have done quite convincingly. Nevertheless, we will never understand all of the meanings Cahokian rituals and religious symbols held—and we would not know even if we did.

Geertz writes that the Balinese palace was a temple: "The seat of the king was the axis of the world" (1980:109). Similarly, the large structure that stood at the top of Monks Mound was probably both a palace and a temple, and this summit was probably the axis of Cahokia and the Cahokian world (cf. Fowler et al. 1999; Kelly 1996; Rolingson 1996). Geertz also discusses the "sacred-mountain motif" in Indic mythology (1980:114); indeed, mountains are sacred in many mythologies. It is easy to imagine that Cahokians built Monks Mound to be their sacred mountain where otherwise none existed in the relative flatness of the American Bottom. Surely Monks Mound with the palace-temple at its top was the axis of the Cahokian world; moreover, climbing this sacred mountain would have taken participants to the Upper World or at least closer to it. Hall (2006) relates a Cheyenne myth in which a boy travels many miles to a mountain where men of many nations were gathered. Was that mythical mountain Monks Mound?

Finally, we might see another parallel in the model of a Mississippian center that Cahokia became. Geertz writes that the lords of Indonesian theater states strove constantly to conform to their vision of a more perfect past:

> From the most petty to the most high they were continually striving to establish, each at his own level, a more truly exemplary center, an authentic negara, which, if it could not match or even approach Gèlgèl in brilliance . . . could at least seek to imitate it and so re-create, to some degree, the radiant image of civilization that the classic state had embodied and the postclassic degeneration had obscured [1980:18].

Gèlgèl was a legendary court, perhaps similar to

Camelot in its historical-mythical importance. In the same sense Cahokia can be seen as the "authentic negara" of the Mississippian world. Long after Cahokia's demise and hundreds of miles away, other Mississippian societies modeled themselves after Cahokia (cf. Anderson 1997; Knight 1997; Pauketat 2004, 2007). They built mounds as a means of unifying people and building community, and their leaders lived in house-temples atop flat-topped mounds, as they had at Cahokia centuries earlier.[3] Similarly, Brown and Kelly (2000) suggest that the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex had its origins at Cahokia (cf. Emerson, Hughes, et al. 2003). Brown (2004) argues that both the artistic styles and the canon of icons associated with this "cult" are first visible at Cahokia. He suggests that influence from and emulation of Cahokia are most evident at Spiro, Oklahoma, but they are also discernible at Etowah, Georgia, and Moundville, Alabama.

In his conclusion, Geertz (1980:122) sketches four Western views of the state. First, there is the "great beast" view of the state, in which the state uses "parade and ceremony . . . to strike terror"; that is, the power of the state lies in its "threat to harm." Then there is the "great fraud" view of the state, in which elites demand surplus from nonelites, using state ceremony to mystify the extraction of that surplus. Then there are populist views of the state, which see the state as a form of community cooperation; rituals therefore celebrate the nation's will. Finally, there are pluralistic views of the state, which seem to be about rules and political competition of various interest groups; in this view, rituals would seem to give moral legitimacy to the state's rules. Geertz writes, "In all these views, the semiotic aspects of the state . . . remain so much mummery. They exaggerate might, conceal exploitation, inflate authority, or moralize procedure. The one thing they do not do is actuate anything" (1980:123). Geertz admits that it would be very easy to fit Bali into any one or all of these models at once. After all,

> no one remains dominant politically for very long who cannot in some way promise violence to recalcitrants, pry support from producers, portray his actions as collective sentiment, or justify his decisions as ratified practice. Yet to reduce the negara to such tired commonplaces, the worn coin of European

ideological debate, is to allow most of what is most interesting about it to escape our view [Geertz 1980:123].

In Geertz's view, ritual in the theater state is power; ceremony *is* the state.

I contend that Geertz's model of the theater state fits very well with what we know of Cahokia. Dalan et al. (2003) would seem to think so too. While they do not discuss the theater state model itself, they point out that elements of the four "tired" views of the state summarized by Geertz also fit Cahokia, just as Geertz admits that they fit Bali. Dalan et al. conclude, "We believe that Cahokia surpassed other mound centers because the populace wanted to participate in such a great undertaking" (2003:174). That is the essence of the theater state.

Thus, Dalan et al. (2003) see these four different types of states expressed in the monumental constructions Cahokia, and they believe that Cahokia "surpassed other mound centers." However, they do not discuss the possibility that Cahokia was the center of a state; instead, they refer to Geertz's models of the state as models of "power relationships" (2003:173) when they apply them to Cahokia. These models of the state fit Cahokia— the logical conclusion seems to be that Cahokia was a state. I agree with Dalan et al. (2003) and Byers (2006) that people *wanted* to participate—because they wanted to be part of the spectacle and the drama of Cahokia. That is what a theater state is all about: its rulers rule not so much with armies but by drawing the crowd willingly into the theater. The theater state model is similar to the model of the theocratic state suggested by Gibbon (1974). Perhaps the primary difference is that ritual would seem to be more important than religion in the theater state; control and coercion would seem to be less important than an engaging theatrical performance.

Geertz's interpretation of nineteenth-century Bali has been criticized. This is hardly surprising, given that there are many ways to read the past, just as there are many ways to read the present. However, while critics of Geertz's model might debate how much power kings in Bali had, they agree with Geertz that politics and religion were inseparable in precolonial Bali. For example, while Hauser-Schäublin critiques the theater state model, she emphasizes repeatedly that separation of politics and religion is a "European idea" (e.g., 2003:158).

She further suggests that the notion of the state as a bureaucratic institution with "uniform regulations or government," "a monopoly of power," and clearly defined boundaries is also a Western idea (2003:155, 157). Thus, while she may debate the specifics of the role of Balinese kings in controlling irrigation systems, she would concur that the received notion of the state is Eurocentric.[4]

Thus, I suggest that Geertz's model of the theater state has heuristic value in inspiring archaeologists to think about the state differently than we usually do. The model has been applied outside Bali by historians (e.g., Brown 1999), but it seems to have been mostly overlooked by archaeologists: to my knowledge this is the first time it has been applied to the archaeological record. I think Geertz's theater state model might provide a fruitful way to rethink not just Cahokia but also many other archaeological cases that are often uncomfortably referred to as "petty" states, "primitive" states, "archaic" states, and the like.[5] That is, perhaps some societies that do not fit comfortably with either chiefdom models or traditional state models might find a better fit with the theater state model.

The Ramey State as Theater State

Sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, chiefdom models have dominated discussions of Cahokia for the last several decades. Such models may or may not be adequate to capture the diversity of most southeastern Mississippian societies. However, chiefdom models are *not* adequate to capture the scale or complexity of Cahokia, especially when we recognize it as a single entity with sites at East St. Louis and possibly St. Louis. Lately, Pauketat (2004, 2007) has reached the same conclusion. He suggests that greater Cahokia represents

> a singular episode of pre-Columbian *state-making*. This is not to say that Cahokia was a state in the typical sense of that word (e.g., Feinman and Marcus 1998). Perhaps Cahokians would have built a territorial state if they had invented writing or extended their territory through conquest warfare [2004:168; emphasis in original].

The problem that Pauketat is struggling with here is that the "typical sense of that word" is a West-

ern notion of the state, what Geertz refers to as "the worn coin of European ideological debate" (1980:123).

I am suggesting here that Cahokia was a different kind of a state, a theater state, which built its power and attracted its supporters not through warfare, coercion, or even "persuasive politics" (Beck 2006) but by drawing them in to take part in the drama of its ceremonies. Other archaeologists have emphasized the power of elites at Cahokia (e.g., Emerson 1997a; Pauketat 1994), or they have emphasized ritual as something distinct from power (e.g., Brown 2006; Byers 2006). Power and ritual are inseparable in the theater state model; indeed, politics and religion are cultural subsystems that are inseparable in probably all cultures.

There are specific features of the Balinese state that obviously are not found at Cahokia. For example, irrigation was important in Bali, and Bali was a literate society. However, irrigation and writing are by no means central to Geertz's (1980) thesis, unlike other theories of cities and states (e.g., Childe 1950; Wittfogel 1957). At any rate, I certainly do not mean to suggest that Cahokia was just like Bali but, rather, that the theater state model provides a useful way to rethink Cahokia. Geertz's point is that there is more to politics than power. He suggests that equating politics with power is a Eurocentric notion, and I would agree.

Discussions of power, domination, and hegemony have dominated interpretations of Cahokia for the past decade or longer (cf. Brown 2006; Byers 2006). In his earlier works, Pauketat hypothesizes how Cahokian chiefs achieved a "hegemonic transformation," taking control of Cahokia and ultimately building a "Cahokian Leviathan" that politically dominated "greater Cahokia" (e.g., 1994:168, 1998a:50). Similarly, Emerson (e.g., 1997a) hypothesizes how the chiefs of Cahokia gained power and built hegemony. Both Pauketat (1994) and Emerson (1997a) build careful arguments relying on diverse data sets. Both conclude that ideology was a primary means of how the chiefs at Cahokia were able to make their "ascent" and achieve domination over their rural hinterland (e.g., Pauketat and Emerson 1997); Pauketat (1994) even refers to a "divine chiefship."

The emphasis on ritual at Cahokia as something distinct from hierarchical power has been more recent in the archaeological literature (e.g., see But-

ler and Welch 2006). Brown (2003, 2006) argues convincingly that rituals at Cahokia do not necessarily indicate hierarchy or domination (cf. Byers 2006; Goldstein 2000; Milner 2003). Brown has also described Cahokia as a "cosmic theater" (2006:208), describing the rituals that took place at Mound 72 as "a public ceremony for a collective, community-wide purpose" (2003:97). Similarly, Pauketat writes that some of the rituals that took place at Mound 72 were "probably public spectacles" with a "possible theatrical aspect" (2004:90). More forcefully, Emerson and Pauketat characterize Mound 72 as "a palimpsest of theatrical performances" and "Cahokian theater at its best" (2002:115, 117). More broadly, Pauketat writes: "Cahokia, as a Mississippian mecca associated with powerful, supernatural qualities in the eyes of people outside the American Bottom, could have attracted distant visitors, dignitaries, and pilgrims actively seeking to obtain or emulate what Cahokia had to offer" (1998a:49). Clearly, Cahokia was a ceremonial center, or what Kehoe (2002) terms a "theater of power"; I cannot imagine that any archaeologist would dispute that.

Obviously, there is power in ritual. I agree with Pauketat and Emerson (e.g., 1997, 1999) that ideology was used at Cahokia to manipulate people, but I do not assume as they seem to that domination is the primary reason for the elaboration of ritual at Cahokia or that coercion was necessary (cf. Saitta 1999).[6] I agree with Brown (e.g., 2003, 2006) that Cahokia was a theater and that we can interpret burials in Mound 72 as evidence of a cosmic performance. Unlike Brown, however, I see hierarchical power in the ceremonies that took place at Cahokia,[7] and I would point out (as others have) that the scale of human sacrifice at Cahokia goes beyond anything observed among other Native Americans north of Mexico. Brown does not discuss the litter burials that Fowler et al. (1999) interpret as high-status burials or, even more noteworthy, the 157 people (mostly groups of young women) sacrificed and buried in mass graves in Mound 72. While I can imagine ways to fit these burials into Brown's interpretation of the main burial, at the same time it cannot be disproved that some of the Mound 72 burials represent sacrificed retainers (Fowler et al. 1999). The evidence of violence in one of the mass graves could indicate that rituals at Cahokia may have occasionally included coer-

cion, but again other interpretations are possible. Emerson and Pauketat conclude, "Mound 72 is not the reflection of elite power as much as it is the coordination of power and the concomitant construction of Cahokia" (2002:118). Clearly, there was power in Cahokian rituals: they were the foundation of Cahokia.

In short, the archaeological record of Cahokia indicates something more than a chiefdom (cf. Pauketat 2007) and more than a ceremonial center. It was clearly a "theater of power" (Kehoe 2002), but what sort of theater was it?[8] Geertz's theater state model offers an alternative view of the state and in this an alternative way of interpreting the archaeological record of Cahokia. The power and ritual that existed at Cahokia were on a scale unlike that found in any other Mississippian society, supporting the argument that the Ramey State was a theater state. The name "Ramey State" is appropriate here, suggesting that Late Woodland and Mississippian peoples living as far north as Wisconsin and Minnesota were within Cahokia's "hinterland" (e.g., see Stoltman 2000). This is not to suggest that these groups were directly controlled by Cahokians but, rather, that they too were subjects of the theater at Cahokia in the sense that they saw Cahokia as a center.

Cahokia would be considered a state by measures used elsewhere (see O'Brien 1989). Do we question the power of Cahokia because its elites lived in structures made of thatch? Would we question whether Cahokia was the capital of a state if Monks Mound had been built of stone rather than dirt? Would we deny that the leaders of Cahokia were kings if they had left monuments declaring themselves king as Mayan elites did? Kehoe (1998) points out that European chroniclers referred to later Mississippian leaders of the Southeast as *kings* and royalty. If the leaders of those much smaller and simpler polities were seen as kings by contemporary European observers, who were the subjects of kings themselves, surely the leaders of Cahokia would have been considered kings. Similarly, Hall observes,

> The Indian nations among whom de Soto traveled were the most advanced in North America from the standpoint of political organization and much else. They could be compared to city-states governed by all-powerful hereditary rulers who would have

been known as princes had the seats of their authority been located in France or Italy during the same century [1997:145–146].

The leaders of Cahokia would have been more powerful than the leaders encountered by de Soto and his colleagues. Examples of the latter include the "Lady of Cofitachequi," who was carried on a litter covered with a delicate white cloth, and the "Great Sun" of the Natchez, who was accompanied at his death by wives, relatives, attendants, and many others who voluntarily offered themselves for sacrifice (Hudson 1976). Given the loyalty commanded by such leaders, Hudson also suggests that "at the time of de Soto, some of the Southeastern Indians may have had what were either very powerful chiefdoms or perhaps very small primitive states" (1976:203). These hierarchies began to collapse as European diseases spread, and their collapse was made complete when Europeans themselves invaded the land.

The band-tribe-chiefdom-state typology obviously masks significant variation (e.g., see Feinman and Neitzel 1984). As Kehoe points out, its "fourfold categorization obfuscates issues of power" (2002:263). Pauketat (2007) and other critics might like us to discard the typology (which he dismisses as neoevolutionary) altogether. However, these types that we have created give us models to test and a vocabulary with which to communicate our thoughts about the past. What is the difference between a very powerful chief and a king or queen? Can we see the difference in the archaeological record (cf. Patterson 2003)? Both chiefs and heads of state use religion as a tool to manipulate and control people. Both chiefs and (usually) heads of state are supported by a powerful and influential family. What, then, is the difference? A decidedly Western notion might be that the difference is a bureaucracy, or perhaps the difference is the presence of a standing army. I believe that this notion of the state is unnecessarily constraining, with the result that both third- and fourth-generation Cahokian archaeologists hesitate to use it in reference to Cahokia.[9] I would suggest that the most critical difference between chiefdom and state is that power in the chiefdom relies on the chief, whereas power in the state goes beyond the individual to the *institution* of the state—but that institution is not necessarily a bureaucracy in the Western sense. Nor is the insti-

tution *real* unless people perceive it as real (see Pauketat 2007).

In the case of Cahokia, there surely was a bureaucracy—as O'Brien (1989) would say, where there are plans, there are planners. More important in a theater state, however, is the enduring institution of *ceremony*. These ceremonies and rituals are transformed into something larger than an individual, however charismatic, and larger than a kin group.[10] At Cahokia, mound building, feasts, chunkey, and elaborate rituals like those enacted at Mound 72 were perhaps at first a means to an end—a means to gain control by one or a few individuals or perhaps more benignly to integrate people—but in the end they became the institution itself. Perhaps the theater state crystallized sometime around A.D. 1050, when the "Big Bang" ushered in the Mississippian period (Pauketat 1994). A transition of some sort surely occurred within the theater state around A.D. 1200 at the "Moorehead Moment" (Brown 2001), a time that is characterized by significant changes including the construction of the palisade and the elite appropriation of exotic materials and symbolic items (Beck 2006; Trubitt 2000, 2003). Given significant depopulation in the greater American Bottom along with "a significantly diminished and reorganized regional political economy" during this time (Pauketat 2004:150), perhaps Cahokia's heyday as a theater state was already over.

Cahokia survived the deaths of at least several leaders. I would suggest that these leaders might be seen as heads of a theater state rather than chiefs because rituals at Cahokia were more important than any individual or descent group. Surely there were multiple competing descent groups at Cahokia and in the surrounding region. Any one of them could have taken power from another group at Cahokia, and the institution—that is, the ceremony and the rituals—would have endured and did endure. The faces and families at the top of Monks Mound may have changed through time, but still people came to Cahokia to build more mounds, have more feasts, and mourn (or celebrate) the death of their most recent king or queen.

Just Another Label?

In summer 1991, I was hiking through the woods with Rob Beck somewhere on the East Coast—I

think it was South Carolina. It was hot and humid, and we were burdened with shovels, screens, and field kits as we traversed the hills digging shovel tests that yielded little beyond poison ivy. Despite these conditions, Rob was talking about Mississippian chiefdoms with great enthusiasm. I wondered to myself how we could know that these archaeological cultures were chiefdoms. Finally, I muttered, perhaps irritably as I slapped a mosquito, that I hated the word *chiefdom.* Rob's enthusiasm was unabated as he responded, "We have to call them *something.*"

After a decade of teaching, I have come to believe that my colleague was right. Labels are useful because they conjure up a whole body of ideas with a single word or phrase. As a teacher, I find it useful to discuss labels like "band," "tribe," "chiefdom," and "state" because they succinctly refer to idealized models. Of course the models are idealized—no actual case in the real world will perfectly fit the type. The type is a hypothesis we can test with real data, and we can keep the parts that fit and reject or correct the parts that do not fit.

I do not want to debate whether the southeastern cultures of which my colleague spoke were truly chiefdoms. Whether or not they were, the label is entirely inappropriate to capture the magnitude of events that created and occurred at Cahokia. It is commonly recognized among archaeologists that Cahokia operated at a different scale than Mississippian societies of the Southeast. Dalan et al. (2003) point out that all of Moundville, often touted as the second-largest Mississippian center, would fit within the Grand Plaza of Cahokia. All the mounds at Moundville combined contain a fraction of the dirt that went into Monks Mound (see Dalan et al. 2003:Figure 18). Dalan et al. (2003) further suggest that a similar level of effort went into leveling the Grand Plaza—and let us not forget the effort of building 119 more mounds, palisades, wood henges, and so on. Another measure of comparison between Cahokia and Mississippian "chiefdoms" of the Southeast would surely be human sacrifice. I am just guessing here, but all the sacrifices found on all the Mississippian sites in the Southeast would probably number less than those found in Mound 72. We might also compare population levels at these sites: even using conservative population estimates for Cahokia (e.g., Milner

1998), no southeastern Mississippian site had a population close to Cahokia's.

And that is just Cahokia. What was the relationship like between Cahokia and the sites at East St. Louis and St. Louis, which were also as large as or larger than Moundville? Were their inhabitants also considered Cahokians? Pauketat's (e.g., 2003, 2004) work suggests that even inhabitants at rural farming villages in the greater American Bottom might have been considered Cahokians. There was a significant population increase not only at Cahokia but also in the greater American Bottom at the time of Cahokia's "Big Bang." Ceramic evidence indicates that people who emigrated to Cahokia and its rural villages came from distant places including southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas (e.g., Pauketat 2003). Their presence made Cahokia a multiethnic society, a characteristic we do not usually associate with chiefdoms. Surely, something different was happening at Cahokia. To repeat: "Cahokia was not just a large Mississippian site; it was both structurally and organizationally different from other Mississippian centers" (Dalan et al. 2003:197).

Because they are embedded in the notion that Cahokia was a chiefdom, I do not find models by Trubitt (2000) and Beck (2006) entirely convincing as written. However, they are valuable in that they encourage us to think about how interactions may have occurred at Cahokia and about how these systems may have evolved over time. Either model could, in fact, be accommodated within the theater state model. As I have suggested above, "corporate" and "network" strategies (Trubitt 2000) can be employed by leaders of states as well as chiefdoms (cf. Blanton et al. 1996). Likewise, "group-building" and "group-distancing" strategies could be used by elites in either a chiefdom or a state (Beck 2006). We can easily incorporate Trubitt's and Beck's models within the theater state model by looking for shifts in the strategies used by the leaders of the Cahokia theater state.

Pauketat (2007) has also grown frustrated with the chiefdom concept and has recently come to the conclusion that it is an archaeological "delusion." Pauketat's preferred paradigm, agency theory, gives us a way to step outside the band-tribe-chiefdom-state typology entirely. Nevertheless, agency theory and neoevolutionary models are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as previous work by Pauketat

(e.g., 1994) has shown: one can think of agents as chiefs. However, in trying to shake free of one archaeological delusion, Pauketat (2007) has instead fallen back upon another label, "civilization," which in my mind still carries the baggage of nineteenth-century unilineal evolution. I agree with Pauketat that Cahokia was not a chiefdom. However, to rename it a "civilization" is in my mind not a good solution to the problem.

O'Brien (1989, 1991) offered us a solution to the problem nearly 20 years ago. She correctly points out that Cahokia would be considered a state according to criteria used in other parts of the world. Why not here? Again the implication is that archaeologists studying Cahokia have been prejudiced by a Western bias against architecture of earth, logs, and thatch. However, I think that in her critique O'Brien runs into the same problem that Pauketat has encountered in his critique: both O'Brien and Pauketat rely on a Western notion of the state, with its implication of armies and growth by military conquest. Surely, Cahokia had warriors, but there is little evidence of Cahokian armies marching across the land (although perhaps there is some; see Pauketat 2007).

I believe that O'Brien put us on the right track, and I do not think that her ideas have received adequate attention. However, I would suggest the theater state as an alternative model of the state and one that is a better fit for Cahokia. It steps outside the box created by Western scholars: Geertz explicitly rejects their "tired" notions of the state. Yes, the leaders of a theater state manipulate, threaten, and con their constituents as any leaders do. However, the way they do it is not the way Western scholars typically expect in a state. Ritual was the theater state; the state was a theater—and both elites and nonelites played roles in the theater that were meaningful to them. Both were willing participants in the drama.

Why call Cahokia—or Bali, for that matter—a theater state rather than a theater chiefdom? The latter term might fit more comfortably with our preconceived notions about people who live in thatch houses and would certainly inspire less criticism than this article will. However, Geertz created the model, and I am using his term. Moreover, I think this term is absolutely appropriate from an emic point of view in the case of Bali or from an empathetic point of view in the case of Cahokia.

The Balinese considered their leaders kings. European accounts of southeastern cultures upon contact also suggest that they thought of their leaders as kings and queens, since their European observers certainly did. I would suspect that similar notions of leadership were present at Cahokia.

Finally, my point here is not simply to reject old labels by sticking on a new one. My point is to critique existing models and suggest an alternative that I think better describes Cahokia and its relationships with other sites. Archaeologists who work in other parts of the world might also find it useful in reexamining their data. Thus, I offer the theater state model as a hypothesis for further testing. My goal is not to claim that I have climbed Monks Mound and found the truth but, rather, to encourage archaeologists and anyone else who is interested to rethink Cahokia. The chiefdom model is tired at best—at least in reference to Cahokia. I think that the theater state model is a good fit with the archaeological record as I understand it, and I think that it sheds new light on how Cahokia might have worked. The more I have read about Cahokia in writing this article, the more evidence I have found to support the theater state model. Other archaeologists will surely see existing evidence differently and will disagree. Future evidence might support the model, or it might not. That is the way hypothesis testing works. Either way, rethinking will have occurred.

Conclusion

The Rajah of the neighboring State died on the 20th of December 1847; his body was burned with great pomp, three of his concubines sacrificing themselves in the flames. It was a great day for the Balinese. It was some years since they had had the chance of witnessing one of these awful spectacles, a spectacle that meant for them a holiday with an odour of sanctity about it; and all the reigning Rajahs of Bali made a point of being present, either personally or by proxy, and brought large followings.

It was a lovely day, and along the soft and slippery paths by the embankments which divide the lawn-like terraces of an endless succession of paddy-fields, groups of Balinese in festive attire, could be seen wending their way to the place of burning. Their gay dresses stood

out in bright relief against the tender green of the ground over which they passed. They looked little enough like savages, but rather like a kindly festive crowd bent upon some pleasant excursion. The whole surrounding bore an impress of plenty, peace, and happiness, and, in a measure, of civilisation. It was hard to believe that within a few miles of such a scene, three women, guiltless of any crime, were, for their affection's sake, and in the name of religion, to suffer the most horrible of deaths, while thousands of their countrymen looked on [Helms 1882, quoted in Geertz 1980:98].

Add 50 women and replace the paddy fields with maize fields, and we may begin to have an idea of the ceremonies that took place at Cahokia's Mound 72 some 900 years ago. Whether those young women buried in Mound 72 went voluntarily to their deaths for the sake of "affection" or they were simply "surplus wealth" (Porubcan 2000; cf. Pauketat 2004) we cannot know, but we can be sure that they were actors in a cosmic theater (Brown 2003) and that ideology and ritual were primary motivators. The individual or individuals who led the people of Cahokia were surely "agents" of change, most likely supported by an elite kin group (cf. Trocolli 2002), and surely they used religion and ritual as a tool (cf. Pauketat 1994), as did most if not all leaders of early states. In fact, the same could be said of our own political leaders today.

However, Geertz's model suggests that the institution of the state is more important than any individual leader. Charismatic leaders are surely necessary to form a state, but they are less necessary as the state becomes an institution (again, look to our own political leaders). Our usual notion may be that it is a bureaucracy of pencil pushers or an army that forms the basis of the institution, but that is a contemporary Western notion. In a theater state, rituals and ceremonies are the institution and keep the organization going beyond the death of any individual leader.

We might draw a parallel with a contemporary social movement, such as the civil rights movement in the United States. Historians might argue whether or not the civil rights movement would have taken place without Martin Luther King Jr. Clearly King was an important agent of change and highly influential in leading the civil rights

movement—both before and arguably even after his death. However, I think that the movement would have happened without him—it would have been different, but it would have happened. I would make two points. First, social conditions in the United States were ready for King; he would have been less successful in another era. Second, the civil rights movement did not end with his death; the movement was larger than King, and the ball that he helped set in motion continued rolling without him.

Likewise, we might argue that one or more charismatic leaders at Cahokia took charge around the time of the so-called Big Bang of A.D. 1050 (Pauketat 1991, 1994). However, the social conditions of the American Bottom were ready for them—the events of the Emergent Mississippian period prepared the scene; those individuals could not have taken control 300 years earlier. The rituals were already there in one form or another; they simply had to be put to new purpose. Moreover, Cahokia did not die with the death of these individuals. The rituals they used to mobilize and motivate people were institutionalized in the Mississippian period and therefore outlived them—for a few more generations, at least. The rituals became the essence of the Ramey State. The supporters of this state did so not because they were coerced but because they wanted to take part in the drama, a grand cultural experiment unlike anything seen before or after in their world.

The Ramey State collapsed by A.D. 1350 if not sooner. There is convincing evidence that environmental problems, some anthropogenic in origin and others not, were a factor in the demise of Cahokia (e.g., Dalan et al. 2003; but see Hall 2006). This highlights the ultimate flaw in using religion to motivate people: leaders who are supposed to have divine contacts lose support when things go wrong.[11] Despite the collapse of Cahokia, however, the theater lived on. We can see that in the temple mounds of later southeastern Indians, in the Sun Dance of later Plains Indians, and in adoption and other rituals practiced from the Southeast to the Plains. The rituals were undoubtedly transformed with time and space, but they did not end with Cahokia. If later groups like the Natchez indeed formed primitive states, as Hudson (1976) suggests, then we might go so far as to say that the state did not really die, either. In any case,

Cahokia—like Gèlgèl and Camelot—lived on. Indeed, Cahokia lives on still, attracting more attention and more visitors today than ever before.

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Notes

1. Comparison with contact-period groups of the
Southeast like the Natchez is appropriate because, like
Cahokians, they too are considered Mississippian (Hudson
1976). In this sense, we might think of those later southeast-
ern groups as cultural descendants or at least relatives of
Cahokians. However, researchers such as Hall (e.g., 1991,
2006) and Brown (2007) argue that Cahokians were Siouan
speakers, which suggests that their cultural and perhaps
genetic descendants would be found to the west, not the
southeast. Thus many scholars today (e.g., Brown 2006; Hall
2006; Kelly 2006; Welch 2006) believe that it is appropriate
to use the ethnographic record of Siouan groups such as the
Osage, Omaha, and Ponca to interpret the archaeological
record of Cahokia.

2. Excavation of Tract 15A and the adjacent Dunham
Tract revealed a palimpsest of some 800 Emergent
Mississippian and Mississippian features. Pauketat (1998b)
assigned the pit containing human remains (Bu1) to the
Lohmann phase, apparently based on its artifact contents (it
was not radiocarbon dated), whereas Woodhenges III and V
(Circles 2 and 3) were assigned to the Stirling phase based on
radiocarbon dates. This would suggest that pit Bu1 predates
Woodhenges III and V. However, samples from just eight of
the post pits in Tract 15A were radiocarbon dated (Pauketat
1998b:Table 5.1), and although Pauketat identifies all of them
as Stirling phase, in fact they range between A.D. 890 and
1420 when calibrated. Pauketat suggests that 151 post pits not
assigned to a specific phase probably formed additional wood
henges that were undefined by excavators. Pauketat suggests
that these undefined wood henges also date to the Stirling
phase based on radiocarbon dating, although the post pits
contained Emergent Mississippian and Lohmann phase arti-
facts, not Stirling phase artifacts. Thus, based on the radio-
carbon and artifactual evidence, the possibility of one or more
wood henges dating to the Lohmann phase cannot be ruled
out. Alternatively, it is possible that pit Bu1 dates to the
Stirling phase, if we accept Pauketat's argument that

Lohmann phase refuse washed into Stirling phase pits. In
sum, it is possible that pit Bu1 was contemporary with one or
more wood henges.

3. This is not to suggest that the earliest mound and plaza
constructions are found at Cahokia (e.g., see Kidder 1998;
Rolingson 2002) or that any other Mississippian mound cen-
ter attempted to duplicate exactly Cahokia's unique configu-
ration of four plazas surrounding a central mound (e.g., Dalan
et al. 2003; Kelly 1996; Pauketat 2004). Nevertheless,
Cahokia was among the earliest and was clearly the most
powerful of the Mississippian centers. Likewise, Camelot
may not have invented the round table, but Camelot's round
table is the one we remember.

4. Hauser-Schäublin's (2003) interpretation of the
Balinese state differs from Geertz's more in degree than in
kind, I think. She writes,

> This was a state in which the king, in cooperation
> with the priests, organized mass mobilizations *by
> means of rituals* and brought people—as pilgrims—to
> the "center," the state temples. There localities
> emerged in which people experienced a sense of com-
> munity and of belonging to a principality *by partici-
> pating in the same rituals*. There they were able to
> witness not only the basis of the king's divine power
> but also how the many different and competing seg-
> ments of the state—the contest state—were, tem-
> porarily, integrated into a single overarching
> hierarchy. This experience was certainly one of the
> most important constituents of the communication
> and the relationship between the ruler and his people;
> through their—invited—participation it became com-
> prehensible to them why they had to contribute to this
> overarching community (uniting humans and gods as
> well) taxes and corvée labor for a sovereign and his
> priestly counterparts whom they otherwise rarely saw
> [2003:170; emphasis added].

Although Hauser-Schäublin emphasizes the "construc-
tion of 'localities'" (2003:154; sensu Appadurai 1996), we
can see fundamental similarities between her interpretation
and Geertz's theater state model: rituals are critical sources of
power in both views, and in both views participation in ritu-
als was clearly voluntary and not coerced.

5. Some will probably argue that the theater state model
does not *explain* anything. Pauketat writes, "The 'rituality'
explanation . . . suffers from theoretical underdevelopment.
Calling Cahokia a 'ritual center that served to pull people into
its orbit' is non-explanatory (cf. Kelly 2002:145)"
(2004:182). I assume that when he refers to "explanation"
here, Pauketat is looking for origins. Geertz (1980) does not
seem to be concerned with explaining how negara originated;
instead, he offers his interpretation of how the theater state
functioned in Bali. That is not to suggest that he makes any
effort to show that the functioning of the theater state was
somehow "rational."

6. For example, while acknowledging that members of a
community might provide labor or surplus freely because
they are members of that community, Pauketat and Emerson
write that "it is inappropriate to ignore hegemonic processes
as if they were nullified by communal principles. The process

may *appear* intentionless, lacking exploiters or exploited, but it does not lack power resident in representation of community" (1999:305; emphasis in original). Their view here seems essentially similar to what Geertz critically refers to as the "great fraud" view of the state (1980:122), which would seem to suggest that Pauketat and Emerson believe that the people of the American Bottom who provided labor and surplus were dupes rather than agents. However, elsewhere Emerson and Pauketat suggest that elites are not alone in having power; they find evidence that upland farmers "resisted" Cahokia by building their homes and organizing their villages in pre-Mississippian styles. Here, Emerson and Pauketat argue that power "was enacted and embodied by all people" (2002:119). In both views, there is an emphasis on power, which apparently is hegemonic in the hands of elites and resistant in the hands of nonelites. Both views suggest underlying themes of conflict and coercion.

7. Brown states that there were people at Cahokia "who set and controlled the agenda" but that "their authority derived from structural power, not from domination" (2006:210). Structural power is defined (after Wolf 1990, 1999) as the power to "set the agenda." This distinction between structural power and hierarchical power is not clear to me, since in my view hierarchy does not necessarily involve domination. Brown cites Goldstein: "That the people or group represented in Mound 72 have status in the community is not under question—they would not have access to these rituals and to this place otherwise" (2003:88, citing Goldstein 2000:203). Thus Brown like Goldstein does not deny the existence of status and authority at Cahokia. His point is that the remains in Mound 72 are not mortuary remains reflecting the status in life or "power" of the individuals buried there; instead, the remains are evidence of ritual that is essentially nonmortuary. Elsewhere Brown refers to "chiefly power" at Cahokia (Brown and Kelly 2000:484), which would imply that there were chiefs at Cahokia. This is in contrast with Byers (2006), who apparently sees no hierarchy and no chiefs at Cahokia.

8. Kehoe (1998) suggests that Cahokia was the capital of a state, and she includes it along with Tiwanaku, Teotihuacán, Tikal, Rome, Versailles, Beijing, Constantinople, and Chichén Itzá as examples of "awesomely grand central places, in-your-face centralized authority" (2002:266).

9. We might also see in this hesitancy a degree of ethnocentrism, the lingering traces of nineteenth-century Moundbuilder Myths that held that Native Americans were not capable of building mounds, much less states of any kind (Pauketat 2004, 2007).

10. Knight suggests that Mississippian "esoteric knowledge and ritual manipulation" were passed down within clan-based or lineage-based cults (1986:680); similarly, Trocolli (2002) suggests that Mississippian leadership positions were restricted to particular lineages. Among Siouan groups, ritual knowledge was purchased and sold (e.g., see Hall 1997). This transference ordinarily occurred within kin groups; for example, Bailey (1995) notes that there were tribal priesthoods and clan priesthoods among the Osage. Clan priesthoods initiated new priests from within the clan, whereas "any man, regardless of clan or moiety affiliation," could be invited for initiation into a tribal priesthood (Bailey 1995:53). The very fact

that ethnographers could "purchase" rituals demonstrates that such knowledge was not always restricted to particular kin groups; however, Bailey notes that "Osage priests would not, under normal conditions, have allowed an uninitiated outsider . . . to record the most sacred and secret religious knowledge" (1995:18). Someone who had the right to teach such rituals might "adopt" an initiate that he deemed worthy, although his actions were open to retribution from those who might disagree (e.g., see Hall 1997). Hall's discussion of adoption ceremonies suggests that kin groups themselves were fluid entities. We might conclude that motivated individuals might find the means to acquire sacred knowledge if they did not inherit the right to it. Kelly (2006) points out that ritual knowledge among the Osage was shared; for example, different clans would contribute different parts of a single ritual item. Kelly demonstrates that production of ritual items at Cahokia was probably similar; for example, marine shell beads appear to have been manufactured in stages at multiple locations, with different groups presumably undertaking the different stages. Welch also writes of the Osage, "Because most of the priesthoods were restricted to specific clans or subclans and many of the ceremonies required participation of all the priesthoods, the religious life of the community could not be dominated by any single lineage or clan" (2006:221). Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that ceremonies and rituals at Cahokia were not restricted to a particular kin group (cf. Kelly [1994], who posits the "retirement" of lineages). The fact that many rituals were shared by different groups of Native Americans, albeit in varying forms, is further evidence that ritual knowledge was not necessarily restricted to particular kin groups.

11. Geertz (1980) does not seem to be any more interested in the collapse of the theater state than he is interested in its origins. However, he writes that the king ensured the prosperity of his realm: "the productiveness of its land; the fertility of its women; the health of its inhabitants; its freedom from droughts, earthquakes, floods, weevils, or volcanic eruption" (1980:129). Surely a king who was unable to maintain prosperity would potentially face an early curtain call.

There can be little doubt that Cahokia faced environmental problems. For example, Ollendorf (1993) provides evidence of drought in the American Bottom around A.D. 1200. Lopinot and Woods (1993) provide evidence that the floodplain around Cahokia was ultimately deforested; this would have resulted in erosion, as well as made obtaining wood for construction and fuel difficult. Dalan et al. (2003) suggest that alterations of the regional hydrology (through deforestation, erosion, etc.) led to crop failures. Growing maize (which is nitrogen depleting) without beans (which are nitrogen fixing) would have also resulted in declining yields; furthermore, a diet dominated by maize without beans is deficient in protein. The deer herd probably also declined due to the number of hunters living in the American Bottom during the Mississippian period (e.g., see Holt 1996; Kelly 1997).

Although Pauketat argues that environmental problems alone would have been insufficient to cause the collapse of Cahokia, he does suggest that "a great earthquake centered in New Madrid, Missouri, of the sort that rocked the midcontinent in 1811–12" would have been an event "sufficient to throw the legitimating ideology of the ruling elite . . . into

doubt" (2004:152). Pauketat cites Woods (2001), who believes that evidence of slumping in Monks Mound indicates that a significant earthquake hit Cahokia in the late thirteenth century. At sites farther south, geologists and archaeologists have compiled overwhelming evidence that an earthquake or series of earthquakes comparable to those of 1811–1812 occurred in the New Madrid zone at A.D. 1450 ± 150 (e.g., Tuttle et al. 2002). The earthquakes of 1811–1812 were powerful enough to reverse the course of the Mississippi River, sink some areas of land while raising others, and flatten forests (Penick 1981). Between flooding and earth movement, such violent events probably would have devastated Mississippian agricultural systems and especially following a period of other environmental problems, would have been dramatic enough to shake anyone's faith.

Thus, Cahokia may have ended as well as started with a Big Bang. Beyond Cahokia, I would point out that the area affected by the 1811–1812 earthquakes is also consistent with the Vacant Quarter (e.g., compare Cobb and Butler 2002:Figure 1 with the map in Kerr 1981). Anyone who denies that environmental change can stimulate cultural change might note that some governments are taking action now to mitigate possible impacts of global warming in the future. Those who remain skeptical about the impact of the environment on culture might wait and see what changes take place in the future in those societies currently ignoring evidence of global warming.