

THE MACE AND THE SPIRIT BIRD: EXPLORING IMAGES AND REFERENTS WITHIN MISSISSIPPIAN ICONOGRAPHY

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The Mississippian Mace, currently classified as a ceremonial war club, is a common theme in the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (SECC), more recently described as the Mississippian Ideological Interaction Sphere (MIIIS), and seems to be a favored accoutrement of the Morning Star deity. Countless representations exist in shell carvings, petroglyphs, and as three-dimensional stone forms. Despite the proliferation of this motif, scholars have struggled to assign it ideological meaning. Now, investigations into the relationship between maces and birds, along with examinations of surviving folklore and the historical record, provide insight into this enigmatic symbol of power. Iconographic associations, substitutions, and transformations combine with legend to relate the visual imagery of the Mississippian mace to the spirit birds.

This work explores mace symbolism in Mississippian imagery by examining shell engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma and relating those symbols to surviving legends and images. By following iconographic principles laid out by Vernon Knight (2013), I will attempt to identify relationships between the feather and mace motifs by examining engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma (Phillips and Brown 1978, 1984). I will end this discussion by proposing an investigation into the shift in war club imagery as a continuation of the close relationship between the bird and war club concepts. While the Mississippian mace was a symbolic weapon of the elite, at the heart of the mace beat the power of the spirit birds.

I begin this discussion with a brief introduction to the Mississippian mace and then explore the roles of maces and feathers as objects of power by discussing the oral traditions of people residing around Cahokia and Spiro. Though Spiro is within the northern border of Caddo territory, material from the site was selected for study because it contains the largest known collection of objects in the Classic Braden style (Reilly 2013:82), which originated around Cahokia, Illinois (Diaz-Granados 2004:147) and served as a predecessor to the Craig style (Brown 2007b:214). Spiro may have been

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a multiethnic pilgrimage destination (Girard et al. 2014:133), and its vast collection was probably amassed as a means of establishing this otherwise remote location as the center of the universe (Brown 2012). Brown (2011:37–63) shows that the Braden style best fits with the Dhegihan Sioux and surrounding tribes of the eastern Great Plains.

The Mississippian Mace

The ceremonial mace is a major theme in Mississippian imagery. It is associated with elite regalia and ritual, and, because of its frequent depictions with warriors or priests in aggressive stances, the mace is commonly allied with warfare (Brown 1996:470; Dye 2004:190–191). The Birdman, also identified as the character Morning Star (Brown 2007a), often holds a mace aloft in his hand or attached to his belt. Frequently seen in association with birds, severed heads, and dancing figures, the mace also stands alone as an independent motif throughout the Mississippian world (Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000; Wagner and Swedlund 2009). The most common representations are two-dimensional varieties, engraved in stone and shell, or painted and carved into rock walls and ceramics (Diaz-Granados 2004:145–148; Henson 1986; Muller 1986:36–80; Wagner and Swedlund 2009:126). Maces from the famous copper Rogan Plates, found in Mound C of Georgia's Etowah site, are often held as prime examples of Classic Braden representations (Brown 2007b:226).

Three-dimensional maces are usually fashioned from a single stone, frequently a type of chert (Giles and Knapp 2015). These forms are generally thought to be non-utilitarian versions of functional weapons (Brown 1996:469). Stone maces have been found in mortuaries, caches, and singularly in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. The Craig Mound at Spiro contained six unbroken stone maces. This mound also contained a variety of shattered stone maces and numerous examples of Braden and Craig style shell engravings. The Duck River Cache, found in Tennessee in 1894, contained 46 flint bifaces, including three of the five styles of maces identified by Brown (1996:475). These bifaces vary slightly in shape with the exception of Type 5, which is very distinctive; it is much smaller than the other forms and could serve as an intermediary with the Sword-Form bifaces (Brown 1996:474–476). The mace is currently classified as a symbolic weapon or war club (Brown 1996:474). It resembles Mesoamerican depictions of twin finger loop atlatls, but Robert Hall (1997:109–111) notes that after the introduction of the bow and arrow around A.D. 500, all references to the atlatl seem to have been replaced by the bow and arrow in North American oral traditions and folktales.

The Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (SECC), more recently known as the Mississippian Ideological Interaction Sphere (MIIS) (Reilly and Garber 2007:3), refers to the ideological interactions of a number of regions in the United States, typically ranging from the Great Lakes to Florida, and from Oklahoma to the Atlantic coast. Though stylistic differences and specific subjects for figurative expression varied among regions, evidence demonstrates the widespread exchange of ideological and cultural materials during the Mississippian period, ca. A.D. 1050–1500. The SECC/ MIIS included a

variety of symbols that evolved from the Greater Braden Style, which originated around Cahokia (Brown 2007b:214; Diaz-Granados 2004:147; Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2004:191). The earliest known expressions of the Braden style are found in Picture Cave along the lower Missouri River and the mound sites of Mound City, East St. Louis, and Cahokia (Duncan 2013:198–199). These images date to around A.D. 1050 (Diaz-Granados 2011:74). Several motifs are associated with elite regalia and ritual, including the bi-lobed arrow, ogee, falcon imagery, and the ceremonial mace.

Feathers, Maces, and War

The object of this section is to demonstrate how feathers were respected weapons and talismans in battle. I begin by revealing the close association of feathers and war in the rituals of surviving lore. I will then discuss the association of the Mississippian Birdman with the mace motif and the concept of how the mace itself could function as a bundle. I will close this section by examining iconographic relationships between maces and birds in Mississippian rock art. Though direct connections to historic Native American groups have not been conclusively demonstrated, the Dhegiha Siouan groups are the most likely sources for ethnohistoric research into possible interpretations of Braden imagery (Brown 2011:37; Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000:245–255; Duncan and Diaz-Granados 2000:2; Hall 2004; Kelly 2010:2). However, because of Spiro's location at the northern edge of Caddo territory, it is also important to consult Caddo oral traditions when interpreting the native Craig style images.

Shepard Krech (2009:195) discusses the relationships between people and birds during the Mississippian era, “when war was endemic and birds with notable strengths and aggressive tendencies were associated with the elite.” Birds of prey, and particularly the falcon, were a prominent theme in the images and ritual of the time (Kelly 2010:8). Feathers are often employed in contacting the spirit birds and are a frequent theme in surviving Native American lore as warriors' companions during battle. The Shawnee (an Algonquian speaking group of the nearby Ohio River valley) refer to the Thunderers as the Gate Keepers of Heaven (Howard 1981:206). They are the patrons of war and constantly at battle with the creatures of the underworld. An eagle feather can serve as a symbol for the thunderbirds and can divert magic arrows and protect the carrier (Howard 1981:222). War clubs often incorporate sun and falcon symbolism and may be manifestations of the Thunder deity, who was able to transform himself into a falcon (Van Horne 1993:5).

Carrying these powerful feathers would seem to be a good idea, but it requires bravery and strength to obtain one. An Osage narrative, recorded by La Flesche (1939:9–11), tells of a man who discovers a battle between a hawk and an owl in that moment before dawn, when the morning star appears. The hawk asks the man to protect him until morning, when his powers are strongest. The man agrees and with the dawn the hawk attacks, “like an arrow released from a strong bow,” and the owl is defeated. As a reward, the hawk gives the man a feather to carry into battle, providing him with great strength

and courage with which he can vanquish his foes. The man returns home saying, "Thus the power of day overcomes the power of night."

So, to the Osage and Shawnee, feathers can grant the bearer supernatural powers. Moreover, the Caddoan hero Medicine-Screech-Owl uses an eagle feather to defeat Snow-and-Cold (Dorsey 1905:42–43). However, feathers were not the only way to access the spirit birds. The preternatural origins of the Osage sacred bundle Wa-xo'-be, the symbolic hawk, is referred to in the words of three songs belonging to the ritual of the Wa-xo'-be of the Tho'-xe gens. The songs are called Little Songs of the Sun (La Flesche 1921:63). These Wa-xo'-be were made of hawk skins and symbolized the courage of the warriors of each fireplace.

The choice of the hawk to symbolize the courage and combative nature of the warrior proved satisfactory to all of the people, for the courage of the hawk was considered as equal to that of the eagle, while the swift and decisive manner in which the smaller bird always attacked its prey ever excited the admiration of the warrior [La Flesche 1995:50].

When attempting to unlock the secrets of the Mississippian spirit birds, one must eventually face the Birdman. He is found worked in copper at Etowah (Brown 2007b:230; Power 2004:81), etched into shell at Spiro (Phillips and Brown 1978–1984), carved into stone tablets at Cahokia (Power 2004:73), and decorating cave walls in Illinois, Tennessee, and Missouri (Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000; Simek et al. 2001; Wagner and Swedlund 2009). Many discussions exist involving the origins and interpretations of the Birdman (Brown: 2004; Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2004:14). Brown (2007a:71) writes of the Birdman's association with Morning Star and as a representative of the battle of life and death. An avatar for this ultimate struggle is the falcon. "In the pre-dawn light the Morning Star beats back the darkness to make way for the life-sustaining sun." (Brown 2007a:71) The Morning Star arrives before dawn and conquers the powers of the night to usher in a new day. To the Caddo, Morning Star would rise early, every morning, to wake the people of the camps, so that the enemy would not find them. He also freed the earth from bad animals. (Dorsey 1905:15).

Morning Star has also been linked with the Winnebago hero Red Horn, or He Who Is Hit with Deer Lungs (Radin 1948:42). This mythological hero's close companion is the thunderbird, Storms-As-He-Walks. After a great many escapades, the friends must part. Storms-As-He-Walks returns home with the other thunderbirds after delivering their war-bundle (a mighty war club) to earth (Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2004:146). According to Radin (1948:136), "The war-bundle received from the thunderbirds was kept on earth by the people and that is how we now have a thunderbird war-bundle. It was always used in war and it is still used for that purpose to the present day. This is the origin of the war weapons of Red Horn." Both Harrington (1920:27) and Speck (1993:64) describe how a warrior's weapon is suffused with all of the magic of a bundle, and that alone is sufficient in battle.

The mace is an essential part of Dhegiha Sioux war bundles, which allow warriors to communicate with Morning Star, Hawk, or the Great Star that sits in the daytime sky

(Diaz-Granados 2004:145). The Prairie Potawatomi, of Kansas, tell of two boys who were given a war club from Wi'sakä's sacred bundle. They were to use this club if they ever needed something from the powers underground. Skinner (1924:334) writes, "This war club will vanquish or break anything from beneath, it comes from the Thunder." Feathers are another common feature in bundles, allowing the people to communicate with the spirit birds. The grandson of the Shawnee Female Deity gave to the Kishpoko a bundle that originally contained thunderbird feathers (Howard 1981:187), perhaps a bundle similar to that of Storms-As-He-Walks. The Potawatomi also have a wartime Thunder bundle containing bird skins, which is used to access the guardian Thunder-rain-bird (Skinner 1924:105–110).

So, war clubs could possess the power of bundles and, as an icon of authority and power, the Birdman often brandishes a mace while poised for battle. However, associations among maces, birds, and heroes extend beyond rough displays of strength. Excavations at both the Etowah and Lake Jackson sites revealed individuals buried with headdresses that were composed of small copper maces, arrowheads, and feathers arranged like a crown (Scarry 2007:142). Cobb and Giles (2009:105) write, "The copper headdresses seem to re-emphasize the metaphorical ties of mace:bird:warrior and chiefly power." It has been discussed that the inclusion of falcon symbolism in the mace's design reinforces the interpretation of the ceremonial mace as a symbol that exhibited a chief's cosmological affiliation and celestially derived authority (Cobb and Giles 2009:98; Giles and Knapp 2015:11; Van Horne 1993:146). To better understand mace imagery, I look to Colin Renfrew's (1994:51–52) discussion of the archaeology of religion, where he discusses the presence of a deity and how:

(7) The association with a deity or deities may be reflected in the use of a cult image or a representation of the deity in abstract form.

(8) The ritualistic symbols will often relate iconographically to the deities worshipped and to their associated myth. Animal symbolism (of real or mythic animal) may often be used, with particular animals relating to specific deities or powers.

So, deities are often shown in abstract form and Morning Star is commonly seen wielding a mace. The mace could be an identifying marker for that deity, or perhaps it is, itself, an abstract form of another power. Maybe even an animal power. It has been discussed that war clubs contain falcon symbolism (Van Horne 1993:5), and these points raised by Renfrew could be applied not only to Morning Star but to his weapon as well.

Iconography testifies to a relationship between maces and birds. Diaz-Granados and Duncan (2000:153) discuss the predominance of the thunderbird motif in rock art near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. The importance of the avian motif to the Native American groups of the Missouri area is apparent by the repeated use of this symbol (Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000:62). The mace is another common motif in the area, often occurring in association with birds. The Painting Site of Monroe County in Illinois shows the mace in association with above-world themes like the rayed sunburst and birds (Wagner and Swedlund 2009:134–143). Petroglyphs

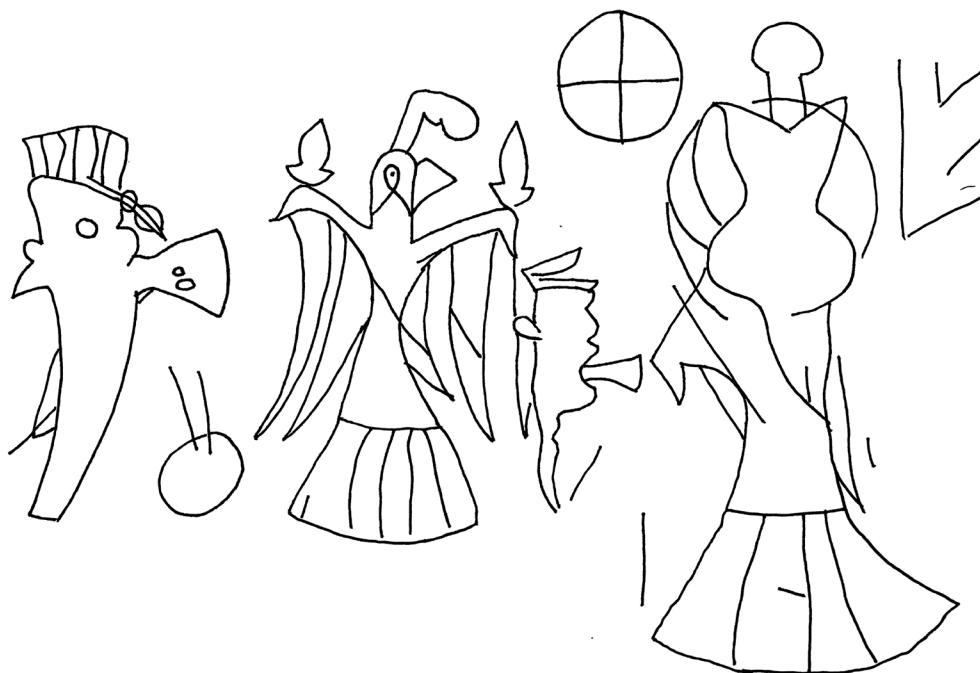


Figure 1. Mace transforming into a bird, 11th Unnamed Cave, Tennessee. (drawn by the author from Simek et al. 2001:Figure 3).

(Figure 1) from the principle panel in the 11th Unnamed Cave in Tennessee include a monolithic axe with a woodpecker's crest and human face, an anthropomorphic bird effigy holding maces aloft in both hands, and "a mace image that appears to be changing into a bird" (Simek et al. 2001:144).

Analysis of Mace Associations

A brief introduction to the Braden and Craig styles is required to better place the following discussion in the proper geographical and temporal contexts. The Classic Braden style emerged from the American Bottom, particularly around Cahokia, at approximately A.D. 1200 from the previously existing thematic material of the Generalized Braden (Brown 2007b). Craig styles, on the other hand, are Caddoan in origin and are derived from Classic Braden themes (Brown 2004:108–109, 119). Before I begin the analysis of individual shell engravings, I would like to mention the numerous occurrences of the feather and mace motifs within the shell corpus at Spiro using the Phillips and Brown (1978, 1984) compilations. For this exercise, I was interested only in their presentation as individual motifs, not in their incorporation with regalia, as hand-held objects, or as part of a creature (e.g., birds). I considered the motifs as being independent

Table 1. Instances of Independent Mace and Feather Motifs.

	Occurrences	Plate Number
Feathers/ arrows		
Braden A	8	11, 17, 18, 19
Braden B	24	53, 57, 64, 65, 66, 67, 80
Braden C	35	101, 102, 106, 107, 108, 113, 114, 116, 123
Craig A	3	163, 176
Craig B	13	196, 270
Mace		
Braden B	23	64, 65, 66, 80
Braden C	18	106

Note: Plate Numbers from Phillips and Brown (1978, 1984).

even if they were part of a larger composition with other motifs as long as they were in no way visibly in contact with other motifs. Independent feather/arrow motifs occur 8 times in Braden A, 24 times in Braden B, and 35 times in Braden C (Table 1). The Craig schools have relatively few examples, with only 3 in Craig A and an estimated 13 in Craig B. The independent mace motif is absent from Braden A; however, it occurs as an independent design 23 times in Braden B and 18 times in Braden C. It does not exist independently in the Craig schools. I would argue that the numerous occurrences of these as independent motifs mirror each other closely, as can be seen in Figure 2. In fact, specific mention has been made of the broken arrow occurring “so consistently in association with the mace that it might be asked whether they are independent of each other...So far as the association with the mace is concerned, the two phases are about even” (Phillips and Brown 1978:xiv).

Keeping in mind the similar rates of expression, the two motifs will be examined more closely. Structural analysis involves the examination of different components or elements that make up motifs and themes. By investigating the individual elements of a design, we can identify motifs and determine how placements and organizations of those concepts evoke relationships between them. The specific combination of these motifs presents a tableau that speaks of an underlying connection between the mace and bird motifs. As Renfrew (1994:53) examined incised schemata in Ireland’s Boyne Valley, he noticed that, “although the precise significance of these designs is not yet clear ... there is strong intuition, not yet made formally explicit, that there is in operation here some coherent system, consistently used.” Maces have been associated with birds in a variety of ways, from petroglyphs to engravings in pottery and shell. Using the Phillips and Brown (1978, 1984) catalog of shell engravings from Spiro, I will attempt to establish the themes in the story of the mace. This particular volume is useful for interpretation

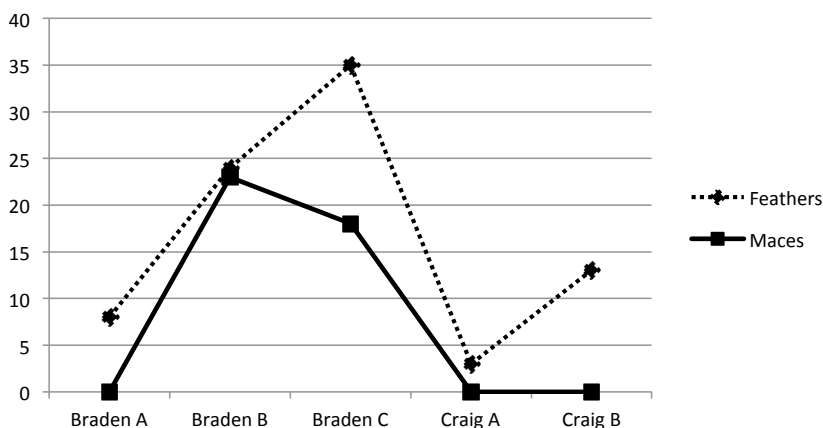


Figure 2. Independent mace and feather motifs found in Phillips and Brown (1978, 1984).

not only because of the large number of available images, but also because it is arranged by style, which is an essential beginning step to iconography (Knight 2013:23).

Iconographic Examinations

In this example (Figure 3), the individual elements of in Phillips and Brown 1978:Plate 66 are discussed and compared to identify similarities of design between the mace and feather motifs. The mace itself is the “common” (see Brown 1996:475) style and it incorporates the SECC/ MIIS cross-and-circle motif that not only provides the mace’s center cross, but also its protruding tip. The cross and circle represent the sacred axis of connection between the sun, in the Above World, and the four-log fire, of the Middle World (Giles and Knapp 2015:11; Lankford 2004, 2007; Reilly 2004:127; Van Horne 1993:132). The mace has a rounded head with protruding wings on either side, at an angle of approximately 45° from the center shaft. This arrangement is termed the “crown.” The mace also has a triangular handle.

The arrow motif contains several elements. Feather markings, or vanes, appear on one side of the feather. These are common feather markings on two-dimensional representations and on sculpture. Bird effigies found at Spiro were described as having plumage indicated by incised parallel diagonal lines (Brown 1996:531). The feather contains a center shaft, or rachis, extending up in two protrusions. (It is interesting to note the similarities in the center shaft and split tip of these feathers to the mace held by the Willenberg Shelter figure [Figure 4].) Opposite the vanes, the feather frays at its bottom. The bottom itself projects on either side of the feather at an angle, which is also approximately 45° from the center shaft. The last element is a broken arrow with a triangular point. The remaining motif incorporates each of the arrow elements discussed above, yet is distinct from it because of the addition of the drawn bow. Together, the

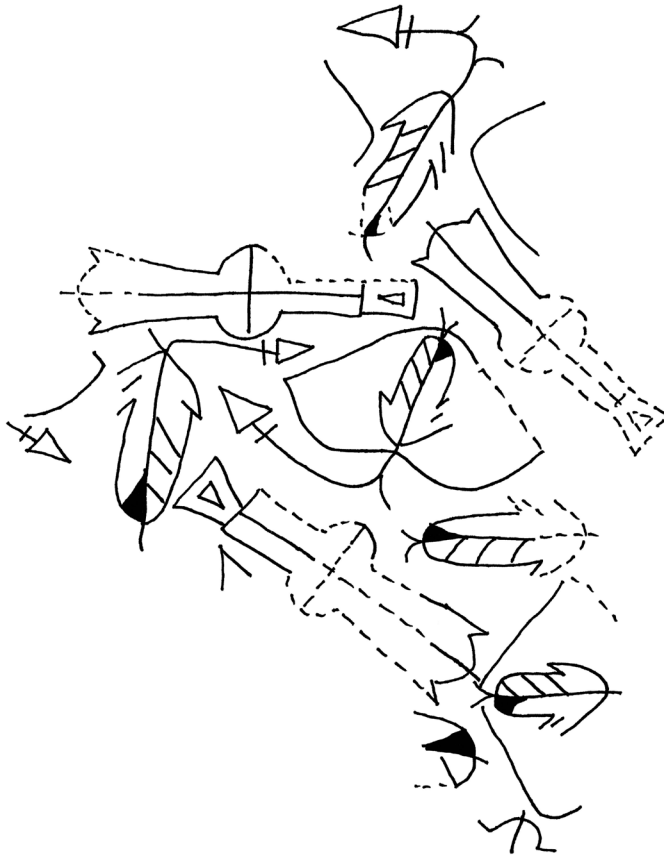


Figure 3. Feather and mace association (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1978:Plate 66).

maces and feathers of Plate 66 share the common characteristics of central dividing lines, protruding tips, curved heads, projecting angles, and triangular ends.

The individual elements of Phillips and Brown (1978:Plate 64) (Figure 5) will now be examined and compared to identify similarities of design and axial relationships between the mace and feather motifs. The feathers contained within Plate 64 are very distinctive in appearance. Of special interest are the dashed lines down one side. The other elements involved with these feathers are similar to those previously mentioned for Plate 66. These feathers contain a center shaft with a split, protruding end, vanes, and a frayed edge. The frayed edges correspond to the keyed sides of the maces, maintaining the relationship even after the objects switch places, both vertically and horizontally.

The Key Sided Mace is uncommon in the shell corpus at Spiro (Phillips and Brown 1978:153). These maces incorporate step-fret designs into the sides of the mace between the cross-in-circle and the crown. These frets are indicative of the symbolism of the Upper World (Van Horne 1993:134). The center mace is wrapped with an upward-

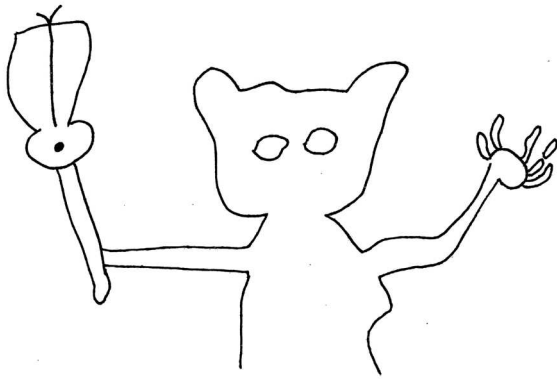


Figure 4. Willenberg Shelter figure (drawn by the author from Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000:Figure 5.51b).

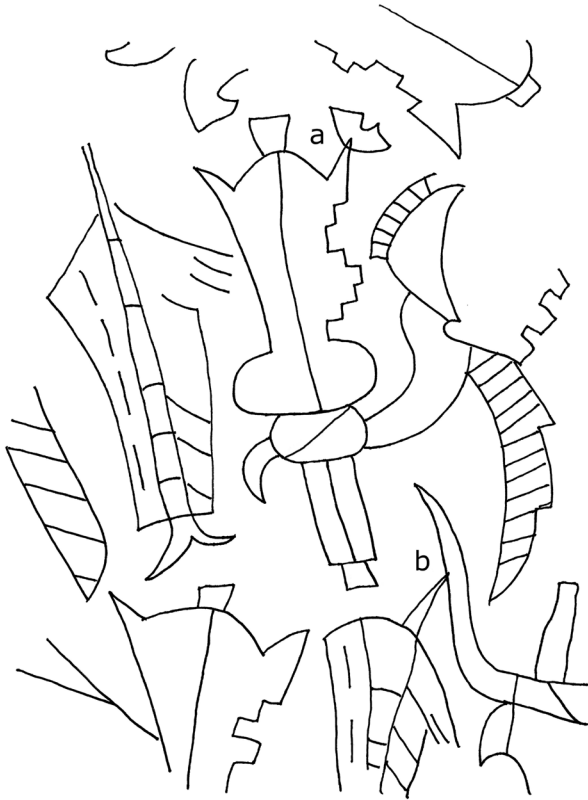


Figure 5. Feather and mace alignments; (a) mace and ogee, (b) feather and pipe (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1978:Plate 64).

gazing, faceless human head. This mace also contacts an open ogee at its upper right tip (Figure 5a). Below this mace is a feather that touches a pipe object (Figure 5b) in a similar way to that of the mace and ogee above (Figure 5a). The angles and points of contact between the “mace and ogee” and the “feather and pipe” are comparable and arranged in a vertical line. These conditions provide a juxtaposition that is highly indicative of artist intent. Such positioning suggests a strong relationship between the mace and feather concepts.

Associations of maces and birds, feathers, or arrows are nothing new to the world of Mississippian research (Diaz-Granados 2004; Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000, 2004; Henson 1986; Wagner and Swedlund 2009). At Washington State Park, Missouri, the bird is the most frequently depicted motif (Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000:226). The mace is another frequent occurrence at this site, often seen with bird images. Phillips and Brown (1978:153) acknowledge the many instances of convergence of the mace and feathering motifs, especially in the Craig B and C styles. Spiro engravings contain numerous other examples of feather or arrow maces (Figure 6) (Phillips and Brown 1984:Plates 163F, 165, 168, 210Cb, 219G, 278, 286a, 288B, 288D, 308.1, 335A). The birdmen of plates 200 and 201 (Figure 7) each hold conflated feather-maces aloft, as does the figure at the center of Plate 201 (Phillips and Brown 1984:Plates 200 [left], 201 [right]) (Figures 6 and 7). Plate 81 depicts a coiled snake and a tasseled mace (Phillips and Brown 1978:Plate 81). This mace contains a set of dashed lines down one side (Figure 8), dashes like those of the feathers in the previously discussed Plate 64. The feathers in Plates 65 and 107, as well as the mace in Plate 279, bear similarly dashed lines (Phillips and Brown 1978:Plates 65, 107, 1984:Plate 279). With so many examples of the feather-marked mace, it is possible that these ideas do not involve conflation but rather recapitulation.

In Reilly's (1993) discussion on iconographic substitution, he argues that, if symbolic elements replace each other in a similar iconographic context, then they probably carry similar, if not exact, meanings. Substitutions between maces and feathers occur in a variety of ways. Plate 62 contains severed heads, open ogees, and maces, while Plate 101 contains severed heads, open ogees, and feathers (Phillips and Brown 1978:Plates 62, 101). Ear pendants are often substituted in the human-headed serpent (Figure 9). Plates 220, 282, and 308 each have mace ear pendants, while 221 and 224 have feathers (Phillips and Brown 1984). When referring to the instances of the ear spools, Phillips and Brown (1984:Plate 219.G) write that, “[o]ne might suppose that macelike forms and feathers were interchangeable.”

The Court Card Birds

Examinations of the court-card birds reveal clear links between birds and maces. Plate 88 (Phillips and Brown 1978) (Figure 10) consists of exquisitely depicted spirit birds with overlying maces. Similar overlapping can be seen on a stone tablet (Figure 11) retrieved from Petersburg, Kentucky (Vesper 1979), on a Walls engraved water bottle from Mississippi County, Arkansas (Vesper 2011), and on the Oneota Utz (Bray

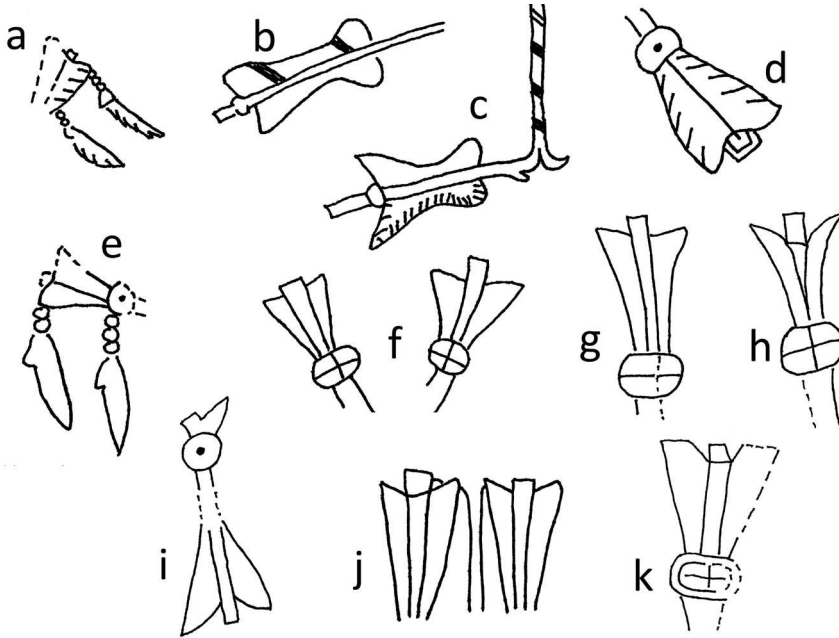


Figure 6. Feather/ arrow maces (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1984: Plates (a) 163F; (b) 165; (c) 168; (d) 210Cb; (e) 219G; (f) 278; (g) 286a; (h) 288B; (i) 288D; (j) 308.1; (k) 335A).

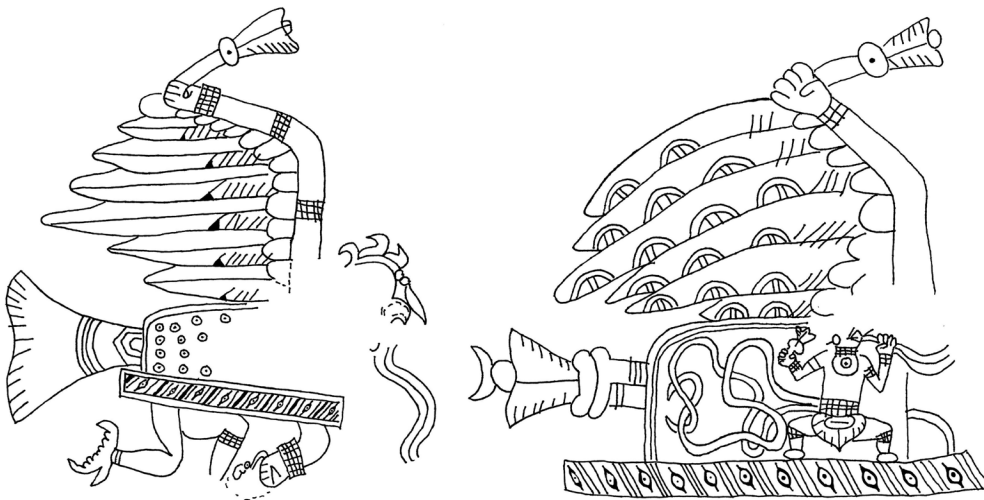


Figure 7. Birdmen with feathered maces (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1984: Plates 200 [left] and 201 [right]).

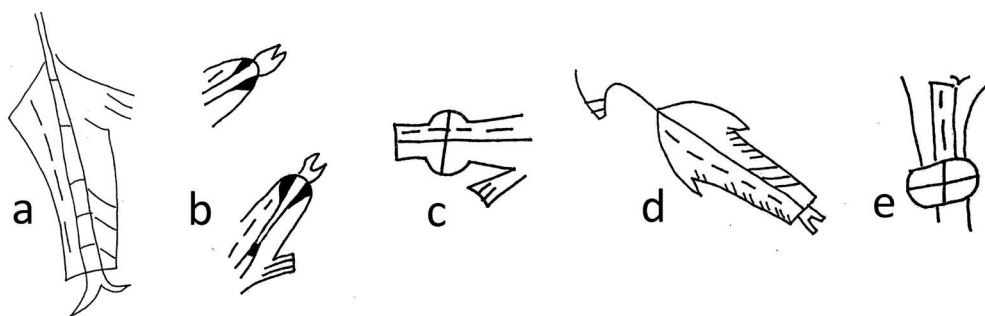


Figure 8. Dashed feathers and maces (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1978: Plates (a) 64; (b) 65; (c) 81; (d) 107; (e) 279).

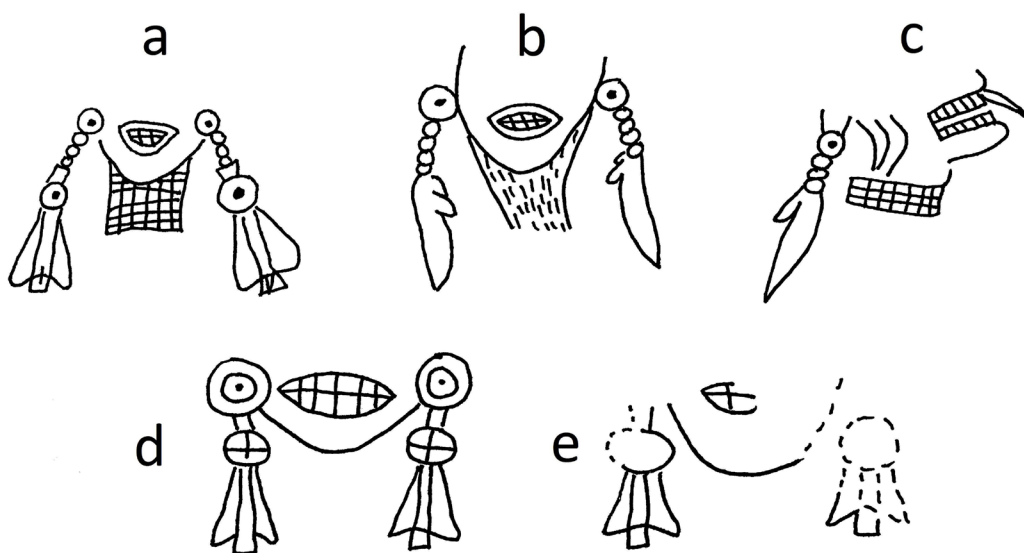


Figure 9. Ear pendant substitutions (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1984: Plates (a) 220; (b) 221; (c) 224; (d.) 282; (e) 308).



Figure 10. Birds with mace overlays (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1978:Plate 88).

1963:3; Chapman and Chapman 1983:94) and Irvine (Bray 1963:12) inscribed tablets found along the Missouri River. Diaz-Granados and Duncan (2000:133) describe the importance of redundancy in communication theory, saying that the repetition of a particular motif is probably significant and gives it weight. This thematic redundancy of the bird/mace overlay was likely intended to communicate an intimate relationship between the two concepts.

I argue that Plate 121 (Phillips and Brown 1978) (Figure 12) illustrates a process that reveals the true nature of the mace. Though described as having no discernible arrangement (Phillips and Brown 1978: Plate 121), an order will be proposed, revealing a transformation. This welter of images has, at its center, a pair of spirit birds containing their own ogee. The most distinctive features of these birds are their heads and tails.

Beginning in the upper right corner above the spirit birds, and proceeding in a counter-clockwise direction, a remarkable change takes place. The birds combine into a

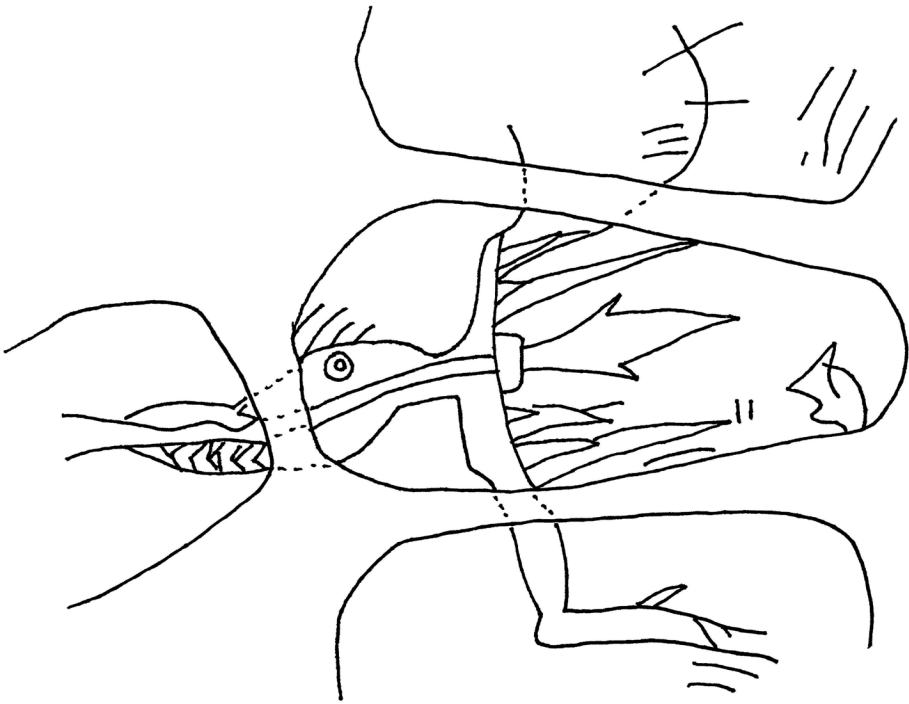


Figure 11. Bird and mace overlay (drawn by the author from Vesper 1979:Figure 3).

single bird (Figure 12a), with a distinct head and tail. Then the bird begins to transform. Its head becomes unrecognizable, while the tail remains intact (Figure 12b). After that, the body alters completely, leaving behind only the feathers to convey the identity of the bird (Figure 12c). Moving down the left side of the figure, the form again becomes recognizable and the necessary feathers begin to fade (Figure 12d). Following the circle around under the birds, the form is identifiable as a mace with faint traces of feather markings (Figure 12e). The final step of the process is a mace with a feather's center shaft, the *pars pro toto* feather of the ogee-bearing spirit bird (Figure 12f).

It must be mentioned that the striking similarities in Plate 121 between the maces and birds have been noted before. Cobb and Giles (2009:104) note "maces are commonly depicted with avian characteristics, such as feather tassels, or the head of the mace [in Plate 121] is painted to resemble a falcon's tail," and Van Horne (1993:148) says Plate 121, "clearly shows these maces interspersed with nearly identical stylized raptor tails." I argue that the likenesses are so remarkable because they are consecutive stages in the transformation of the same animistic power.



Figure 12. Bird transforming into a mace (drawn by the author from Phillips and Brown 1978:Plate 121).

Following the Evolution of Thought: Continuing Research

The ceremonial mace enjoyed a prominent position in the ideology of the ancient Mississippians. Brown's (1996:470) descriptions of the three club forms portrayed in the engravings at Spiro include the mace, the thin-edged biface, and the axe. "Although common archaeologically, [the mace] is unrepresented among clubs used in the historic period. For this reason, it was supposed that the mace really represented something quite different, such as an atlatl" (Brown 1996:470; Hall 1997:4). Gillespie (2002:5) says that in phenomena that are concrete and enduring one can trace the changes in meaning over time by investigating how long-lived phenomena were used and transformed. The mace is the dominant symbolic club in Braden B and C as well as in Craig A. Craig B contains fewer occurrences, with possible transitioning ideology (Phillips and Brown 1984:Plate 204 Ab) into the bird-headed club of Craig C (Brown 1996:470; Phillips and Brown 1984:Plates 280, 286, and 290). These bird-headed clubs greatly resemble woodpecker-effigy copper axes found at Spiro and a club held by the left-most figure on the Thruston Tablet (Steponaitis et al. 2011) of Sumner County, Tennessee. Other axes are known to have avian characteristics. The 11th Unnamed Cave in Tennessee (see Figure 1 above) includes a woodpecker axe, and the Maddin Creek site contains an axe with a petaloid surround (Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000:171–172; Simek et al. 2001:144).

Of further interest are the interred goods from Moundville II and Etowah's Early Wilbanks phase (A.D. 1250–1400). Stone maces are absent from the burials dating from this time. Craig C engravings from Spiro contain a circular frontlet scalp of a style contemporary to the Early Wilbanks phase. As the mace is replaced by an avian axe in the shell corpus, so too is it replaced by an avian axe in grave goods (Brown 2007c:54). Similarities in use are also suggested in historic record. Both war clubs and tomahawks (axes) were used in historic peace treaties (Giles and Knapp 2015:16; Van Horne 1993:168–173).

As Cahokian influence lessened, this shift in representation would seem reasonable, if indeed the mace embodied a spirit bird. Gillespie (2002:5) says, "When symbolic connections are made via metaphor, the grammar or symbolic armatures are slow to change, even as the formal symbols that manifest the organizing principles rapidly shift through time and space." Lankford (2004:209) uses Cox Mound gorgets to interpret the crested woodpeckers as the thunderers and notes that the images of the thunderers in southeastern art are more varied than are the depictions of the standard thunderbird of other sections of North America.

Woodpeckers also functioned as symbols of war in surviving folklore. According to the Osage, the pileated woodpecker is the symbol of life for the Tsi'-zhu Wa-non (Elder Tsi'-zhu) who are the primary war gens of the Tsi'-zhu tribal division. This bird symbolizes the sun, moon, and morning and evening stars. The stars are responsible for granting trophies and spoils of war to the warriors (La Flesche 1921:116–134). The woodpecker spirit seems to have operated very similarly to the previously discussed hawk

spirit. Further investigation is required to develop a more complete understanding of the possible links between these expressions. Over time, ideological representation may have shifted from the symbolic feather to the spirit bird itself, as mandated by regional and local needs.

Conclusions

As local conditions alter belief systems, so have we seen an alteration in the ideology behind the mace. Hall (1997:4) tracked its path from atlatl, to mace, to calumet pipe. I have attempted to demonstrate an interchangeability between mace and feather motifs in Mississippian art. In this article, associations, substitutions, and transformations were proposed to illustrate the ritual nature of the Mississippian mace. "In essence, the mace appears to have become a symbolic prosthesis and metonym, an extension of the warrior-become-raptor" (Cobb and Giles 2009:104). I then put forth the possibility of extending our understanding of the mace into that of the avian axe. The mace is a magical feather wand, the pars pro toto power of the spirit birds. Who better to challenge an enemy, or guide the sun? This is a weapon to be feared and a power to be respected. The ceremonial mace can at last take its place amongst the power of the spirits.

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