

## Middle Woodland Indian Life

If a visitor from the Old World had traveled across the Midwest about the year 1 A.D., he probably would not have been impressed by the villages he saw, but he might well have described the earthworks and the ceremonial paraphernalia and ritual with much enthusiasm. The Middle Woodland Indians were excellent craftsmen, producing some of the most beautiful implements, pipes, figurines and ornaments found in the New World.

The Indians lived in small villages scattered here and there along the minor streams and rivers. In Illinois the villages were often on the flood plain, while the mounds were grouped above them on the bluff. The villages were perhaps one to three acres in area and contained possibly five to fifteen houses.

Three kinds of houses have been reported from sites in Illinois. Long oval houses were found under two mounds in Fulton (Cole and Thorne Deuel 1937: figs. 31, 32) and Mason (John C. McGregor in Deuel 1952: p1. XVI) counties. In Pike County in central Illinois a circular house some 40 feet in diameter was uncovered. The walls of the house were supported by posts which

had been set in the ground and wedged with stones. Inside the house was a central firepit and a number of storage and/or refuse pits (McGregor 1958). In northern Illinois near Rock Island and in Wisconsin (Freeman 1969) smaller oval houses averaging about fifteen feet in length have been excavated. These houses had interior refuse pits and some had firepits as well. Walls of these structures were also supported by posts set in the ground. There is no direct evidence of the superstructure of any of the houses, but presumably they were covered with some type of matting or bark, or perhaps wattle and daub.

The people supported themselves by gardening or farming—raising such cultivated plants as corn, beans and squash, and perhaps varieties of wild plants such as pig weed. Charred remains of food plants have been recovered from archaeological sites as well as hoes of large mussel shells and chert which were used in tilling the soil. The women probably did much of the caring for the gardens and also collected wild nuts, fruits, berries and roots in season to augment the cultivated food supply.

The men hunted for deer, smaller game, ducks, geese, swans and turkeys. The abundance of animal bone in the middens provides evidence of the kinds of animals and birds which were hunted and the importance of deer in the diet. The projectile points of chert (impure flint-like rock),

bone or antler, and the spear and spear-thrower, or *atlatl*, appear to have been the weapons. We know that fish and shellfish also were important dietary items. Fishhooks of bone have been found at some sites and the Indians probably also used spears and traps as well.

It is quite possible that the population of the village varied from season to season. The Middle Woodland Indians, like their later historic counterparts in the Midwest, may have gathered in spring to prepare fields and plant crops and participate in some kind of spring planting ceremonies. In summer the able-bodied men and women may have gone on hunting expeditions from time to time while the young and elderly remained behind to watch and care for the crops. There may have been times when much of the village camped along the stream or river and collected mussels, throwing the shells down and slowly contributing to the formation which archaeologists would one day describe as a shell midden.

Undoubtedly in the fall, at harvest time, there was another gathering of the group in the village. Certainly there would have been some singing, dancing, and thanksgiving, along with the work of harvesting the crops. The squash had to be cut and dried and the corn shelled and stored for food during the winter months ahead. Some corn and squash seeds had to be saved for seed for the following spring. The Indians were aware of the

need for selection of the best seed and in time improved the crops they were growing.

In winter the village may have been abandoned or occupied by only a few of the old and infirm, the remainder going off to hunt in order to support themselves until the next spring. On these seasonal movements away from the village to hunt and fish and collect, the group may very well have occupied the same locations several years in succession thereby creating the accumulations of refuse which archaeologists today identify as campsites.

Each Middle Woodland community had to be quite self-sufficient. Not only did the inhabitants produce their own food supplies, but they also made their own tools and utensils. The men were good flint-knappers and stone-carvers. The many well-made projectile points and knives, scrapers and parallel-sided blades of local and imported chert testify to that. From selected river pebbles they shaped stone celts and axes.

The stone objects which evoke the most enthusiastic comments by people today are those which we classify as ceremonial—well-made knives and blades which were chipped from obsidian and beautiful platform pipes which were fashioned from Ohio pipestone and other fine-grained stone. These pipes with straight or curved bases had plain bowls or bowls carved to represent native birds, animals and rarely human

forms. Sometimes the eyes of the birds or animals were set with river pearls or copper. In most cases only the bowl of the pipe is carved but an unusual specimen is shown (Fig. 1) which represents a duck sitting on the back of a fish. Most of the pipes and rings and earspools are found in the mounds with the burials and cremations. The largest quantity of these artifacts have been found in Ohio but they do occur in sites in other states.

We may guess that the men also produced the sophisticated geometric ornaments cut from sheets of mica (Fig. 2). In their book, *Indians Before Columbus*, Martin, Quimby, and Collier, have said that the Hopewellian Indians in Ohio were the finest metal workers in North America before the coming of Columbus. The metal ornaments and tools were made by beating and annealing copper. Very rarely were ornaments made of meteoric iron or silver. Most of the metal was utilized for ceremonial objects—headdresses (Fig. 3), breast-plates, bracelets, beads and earspools. Utilitarian objects included awls, celts and chisels of copper.

There were also implements and ornaments of wood. Because of the nature of the material only a few charred fragments have been preserved, but they provide some indication of the skill of the wood-carvers. The quantity of woodworking tools—adzes, axes, celts, chisels, drills and knives also indicate the importance of the craft.

We assume that the women were the potters as

they were in historic communities. The locally produced utilitarian ceramics were usually rather plain and varied from area to area. Some had smooth surfaces, others were cordmarked and others had what resembled fabric impressions. Most utilitarian pottery developed out of the Woodland which preceded Hopewell in the area.

The local utilitarian pottery in the Illinois River Valley is called Havana Ware by archaeologists. In terms of its construction, it also seems to have developed out of the earlier local Woodland ceramics. The pottery is decorated with stamped designs, rouletted lines and areas of geometric patterning. These design techniques may have been the forerunners of what seems to be regarded as typical of the Hopewellian ceremonial ware.

The ceremonial ceramics, known as Hopewell Ware, are found throughout the eastern United States, and have a greater similarity in design motif and appearance than the utilitarian. Many are low jars or bowls with rounded or flattened bottoms. They have cross-hatched bands along the rims and are decorated with smooth areas and areas of rocker or dentate stamping. Some designs are geometric but the stylized bird-serpent motif (Fig. 4) is the hallmark of the Hopewellian cult.

The women probably also did the weaving and manufactured the clothing. Examples of plain woven, looped, and twined textiles have been

found. Often they are preserved because they have been wrapped around or placed near copper objects. Some of the plain weaving may have been done on simple looms or frames, although there is no direct evidence of this. Occasional pieces of fabric were decorated with painted designs. In addition to weaving, the women may have tanned the skins to make clothing, robes and moccasins.

A number of clay figurines have been recovered from Hopewellian mounds in Illinois and Ohio. Both men and women are modeled in a realistic manner and often they are painted to show details of dress and body ornamentation. Some depict people in every-day attitudes, while others show individuals in more ritualistic activities. Those illustrated (Fig. 5) came from the Knight Mounds in Calhoun County, Illinois. One shows a mother nursing a child, another has a child on her back. The third female has her hands in front of her, and the one male is holding a spear-thrower or atlatl.

From the figurines and the burials we get a picture of the dress of the Indians. Women wore wrap-around skirts of red or black. Their hair was parted in the center and pulled back into a knot on the back of the head or put into a long braid or twist and allowed to fall down the back or over the shoulder. Ears were exposed and often decorated with earspools. They wore sandals or moccasins on their feet. When dressed for special

occasions they wore necklaces of beads, arm bands and beaded ornamentation on skirts and sandals.

The men wore breech cloths and moccasins. They had their hair pulled into a knot above the middle of the forehead or most of the head was shaved leaving a ridge of hair down the crest of the head. Men also wore necklaces of shells or bear teeth and earspools. Ceremonial paraphernalia included antler headdresses, cut human and animal jaws, and copper breastplates.

Although many Middle Woodland villages were small and probably self-sufficient as far as their daily economic activities were concerned, they were not completely independent and isolated. There was a widespread trade network which brought in raw materials from great distances and saw the dispersal of goods throughout the area. Obsidian was imported from the Rocky Mountains to the west, marine shells and sharks teeth came from the Gulf of Mexico and the southern Atlantic coast. Copper from Upper Michigan was traded to the south. Mica from the Appalachian Mountains in the south moved north and west. How these goods were transported is not known. Perhaps they were moved from village to village, or they may have been spread by a special group who did little but trade and spread the ideas of the Hopewellian ceremonial cult. Actual finished items of the ceremonial cult like the pipes, copper celts and ornaments, and some

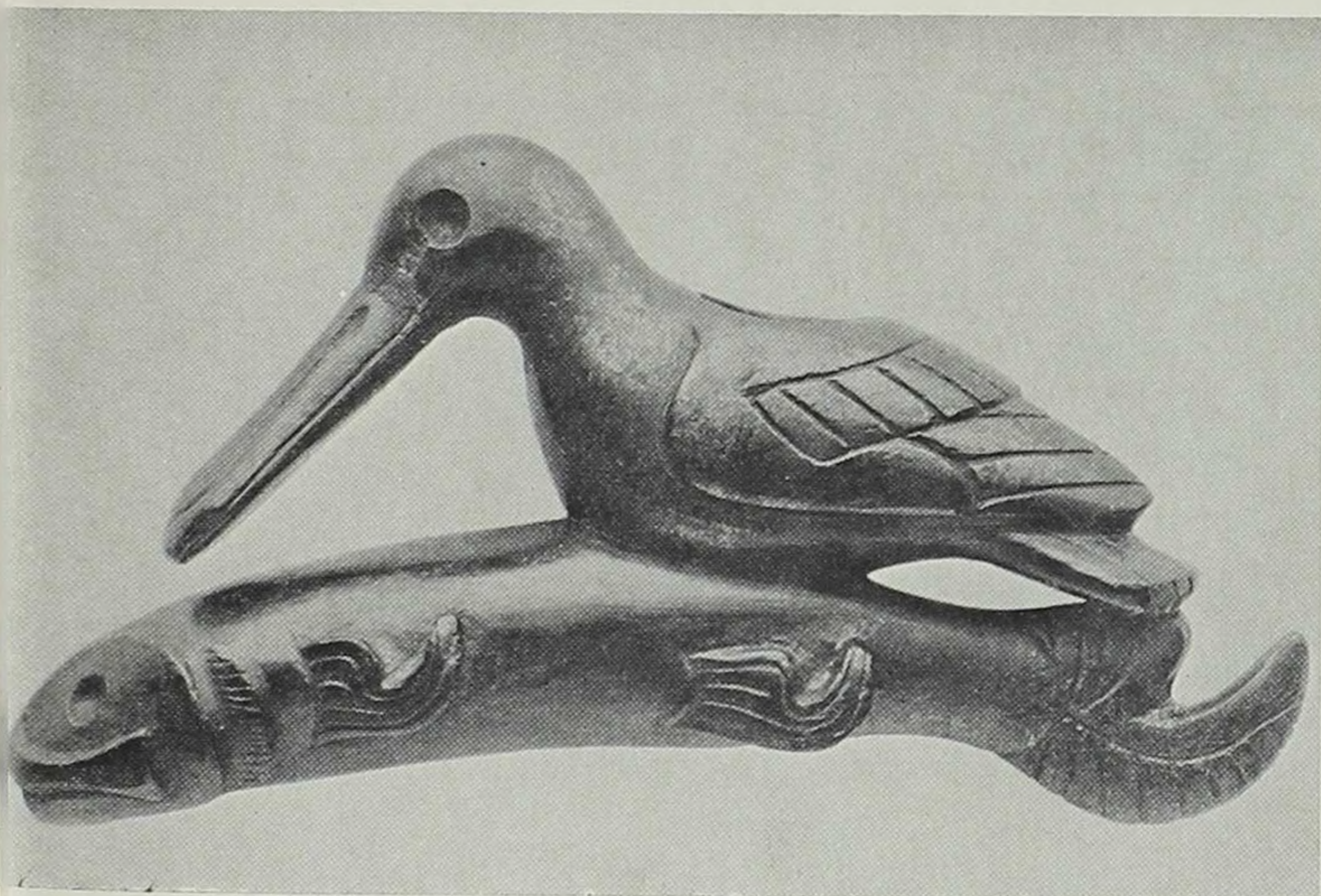


of the pottery, may have been traded as well as the raw materials.

Another facet of the Middle Woodland Indian life which must have required the cooperation of a number of people was the building of the large mounds and earthworks. In Ohio there were large geometric enclosures consisting of rectangular, round or octagonal areas enclosed by walls with openings or "gateways." In some cases the enclosures were connected by walled passageways. Some were several hundred feet across and the area included varied from a few acres to over one hundred. The largest, according to Prufer, covered four square miles at Newark. Those located on hilltops have been designated as "forts." Others were located in valleys. Most of them were built for ceremonial reasons. Burial mounds are often located inside of the enclosures.

The burial mounds ranged in size from small subconical mounds thirty or more feet in diameter to large elongated mounds. Apparently in Ohio the Indians first built rounded or elongated structures with walls supported by posts. Some were roofed, others were not; the larger ones were divided into sections which may have been covered. The floors were covered with sand.

In some of these structures individual bodies, dressed in finest clothing and jewelry, were placed on their backs on rectangular platforms on the floor around which a log tomb was constructed.



*Photo courtesy Field Museum of Natural History*

Figure 1

Effigy pipe representing a duck on the back of a fish from Hopewellian mounds in Ohio.



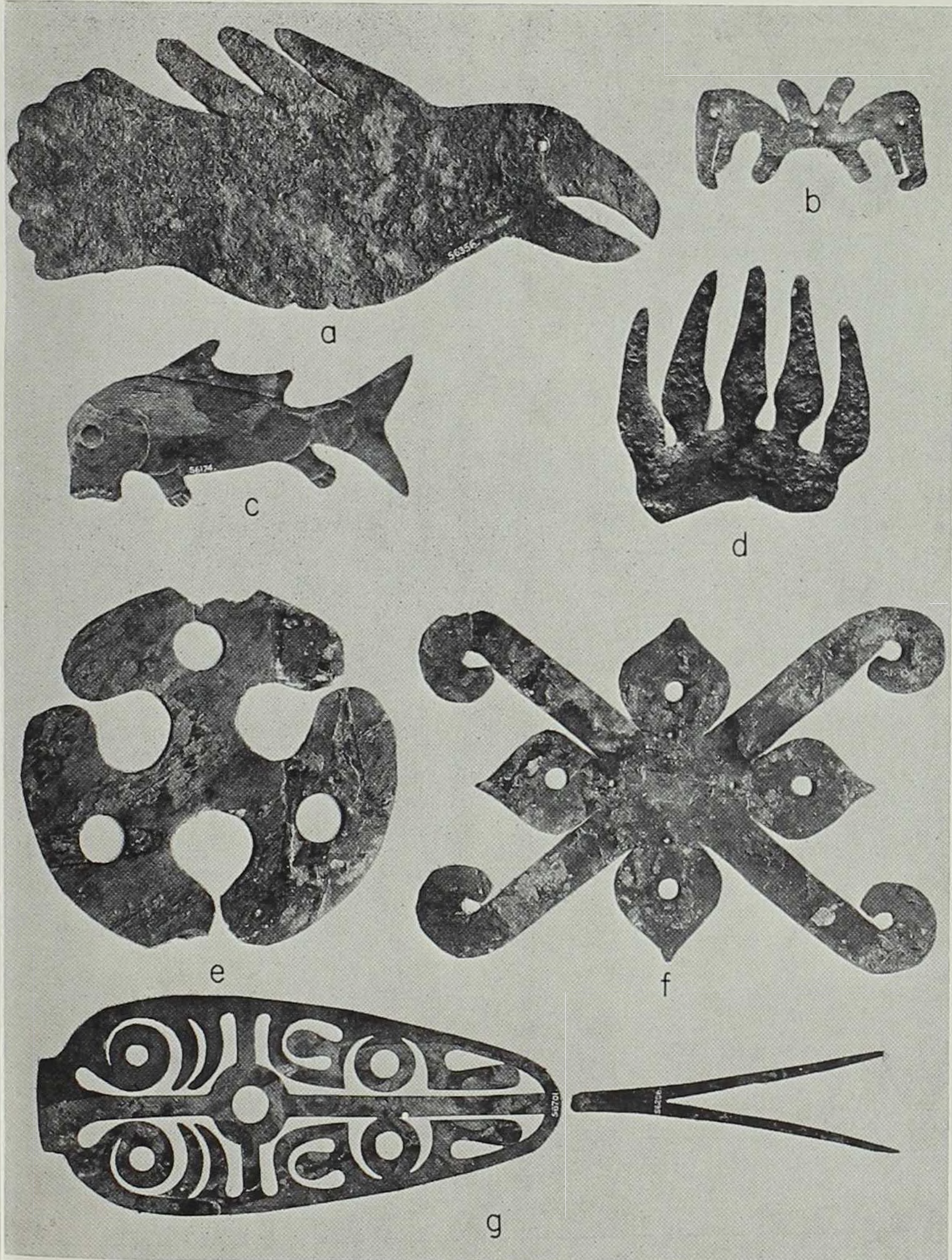
Effigy pipes of stone were found in the Cook Farm and Toolesboro Mounds. Effigy pipes were not as abundant in Iowa as in Ohio. Pictured are, left to right: Wood Duck, Lynx, and Prairie Chicken.



*Photo courtesy Field Museum of Natural History*

Figure 2

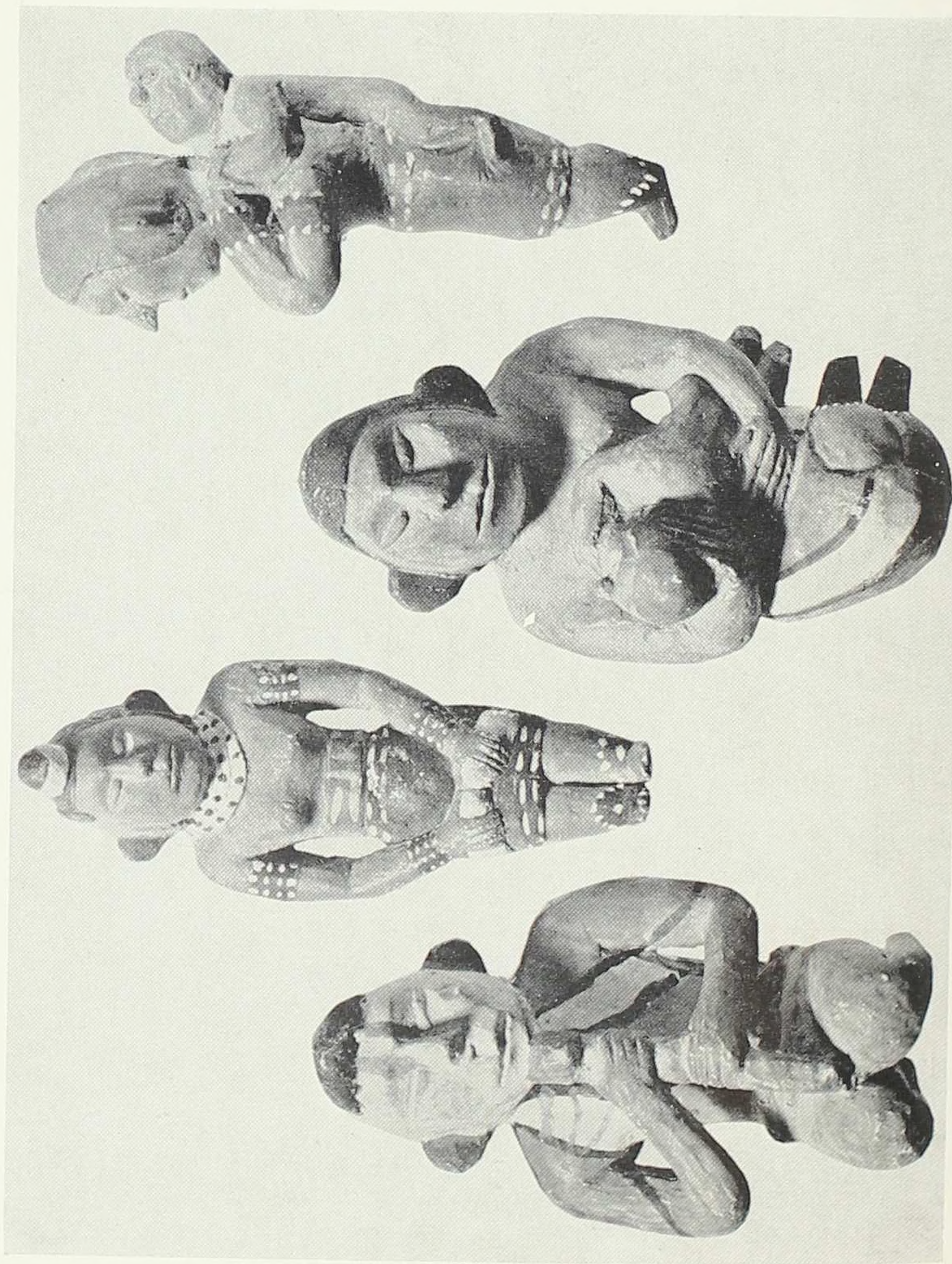
Ornaments cut from mica taken from Hopewellian mounds in Ohio. (Left to right, top row): human hand, bird talon, bear tooth; (bottom row): bird claw, headless human.



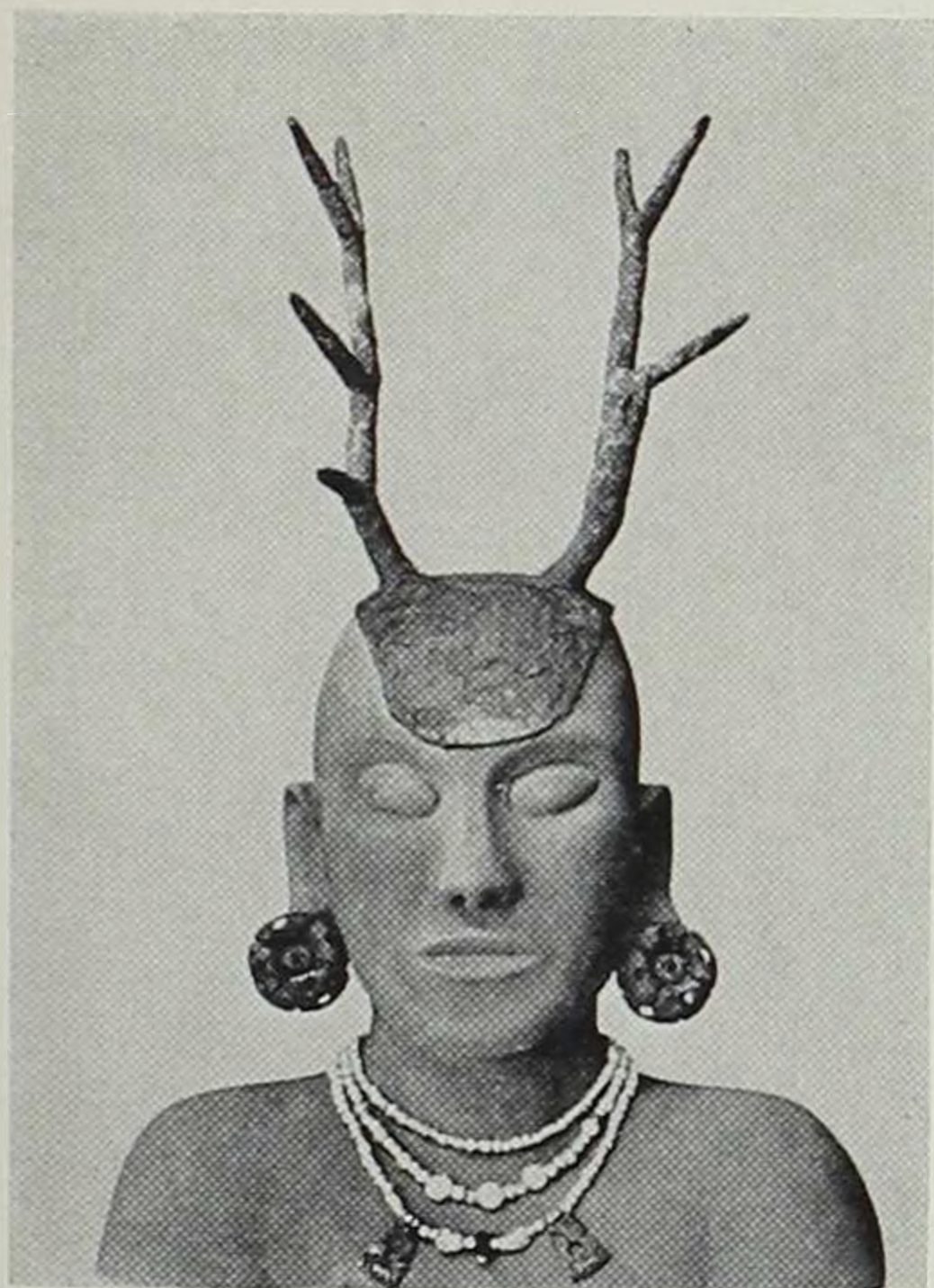
*Photo courtesy Field Museum of Natural History*

Figure 4

Ornaments of sheet copper taken from Hopewellian mounds in Ohio. (Left to right): a. bird with pearl eye; b. double eagle; c. fish; d. bear claw; e., f. ornaments once attached to robes; g. ornament, probably representing the head of a serpent. The stylized bird-serpent motif is the hallmark of the Hopewellian cult.



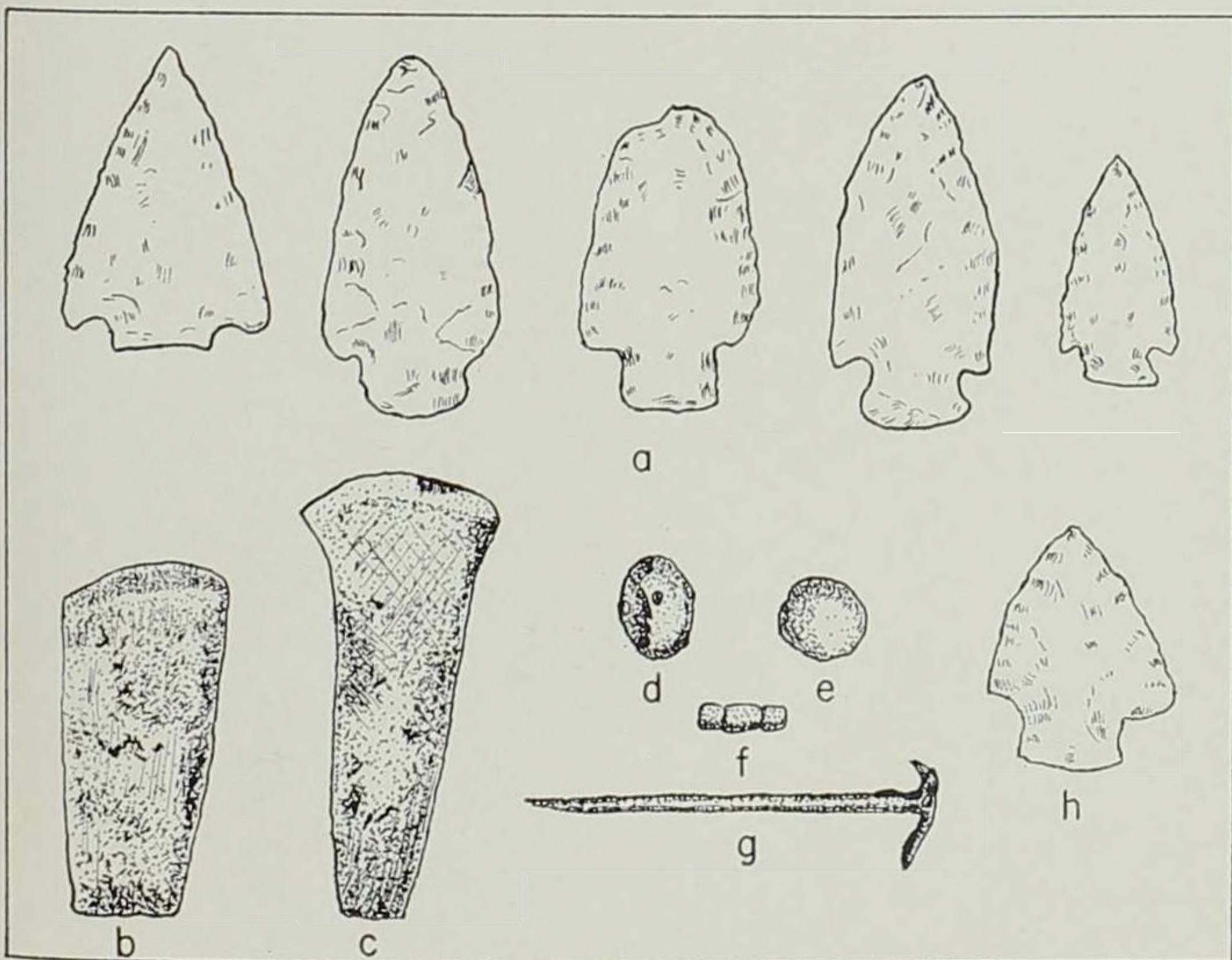
These clay figurines come from the collection of the Illinois State Museum. Photo courtesy Illinois State Museum



A figure of a Hopewell man. The head was enlarged from a figurine and dressed in antler headdress of copper, copper ear ornaments and pearl necklace from a mound in Ohio.

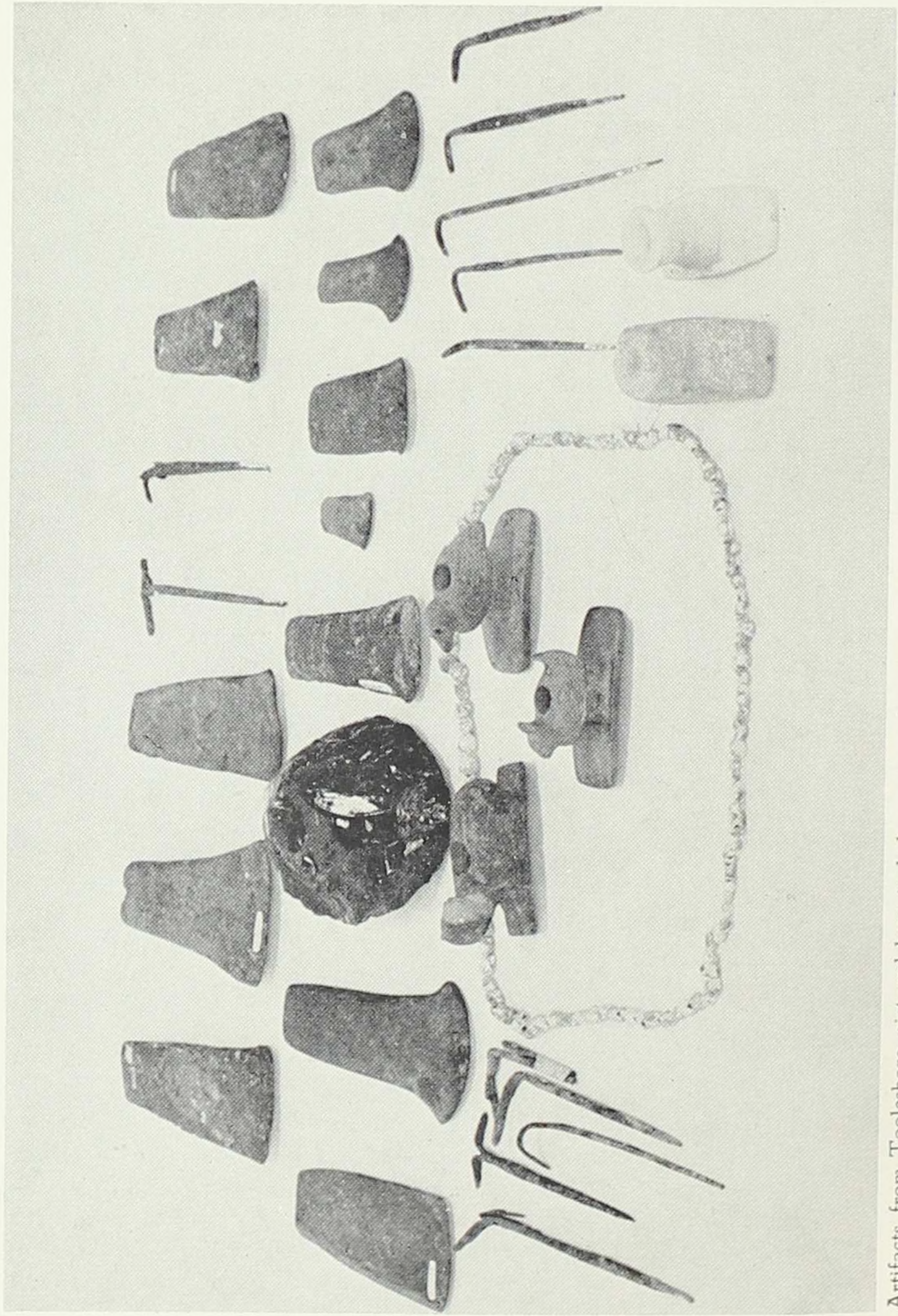
Courtesy Field Museum

Figure 3



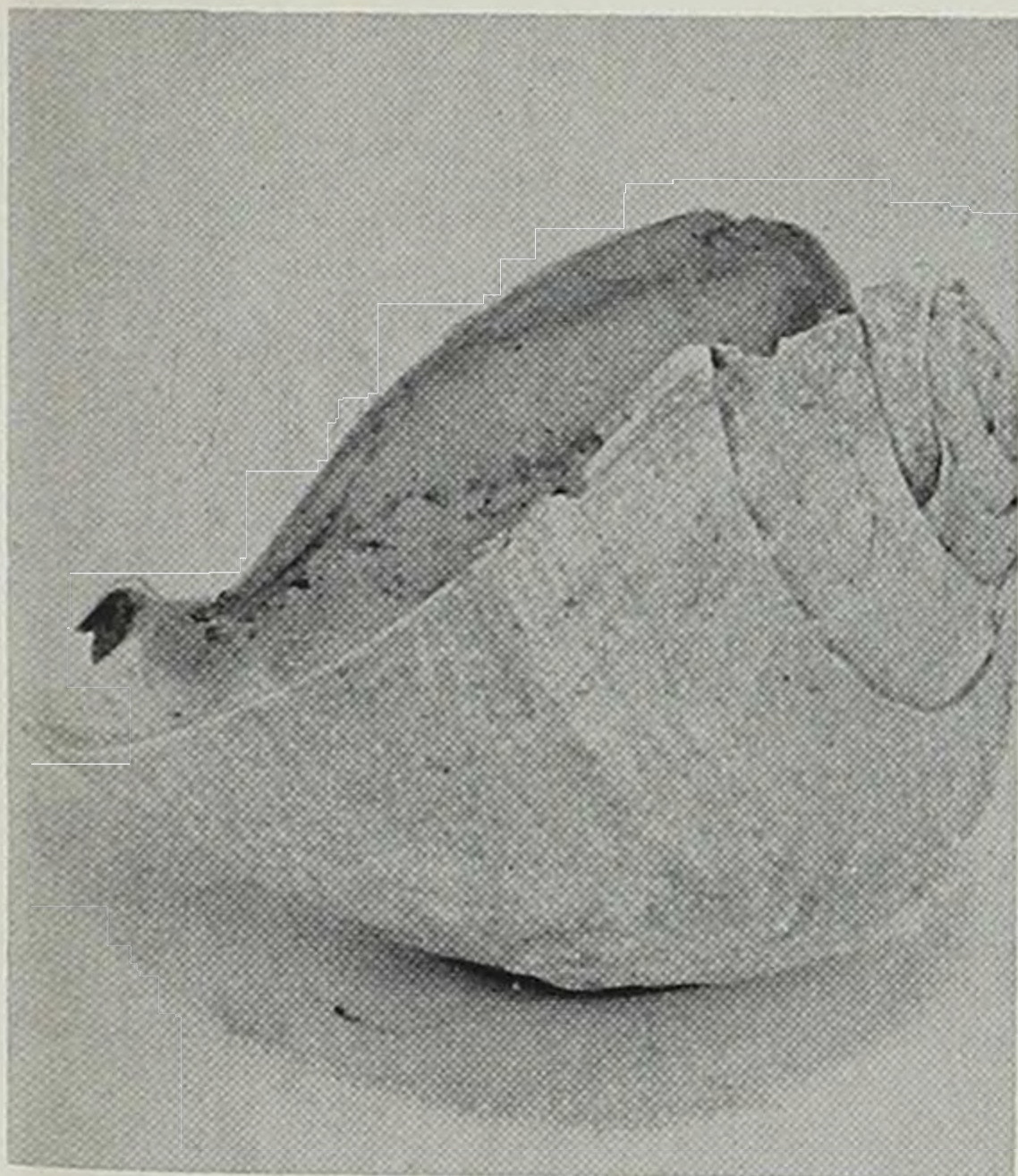
Artifacts from Hopewellian mounds in Iowa: a. projectile points from Cook Farm; b. copper celt from Cook Farm; c. copper celt from Toolesboro; d. copper hemisphere, Cook Farm; e. silver hemisphere, Cook Farm; f. copper beads, Cook Farm; g. copper awl, Toolesboro; h. obsidian projectile point, Cook Farm. (Drawn from Pls. V, VI, *Proceedings of Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences, Vol. I.*)

These clay figurines came from the Knight Mounds in Calhoun County, Illinois.

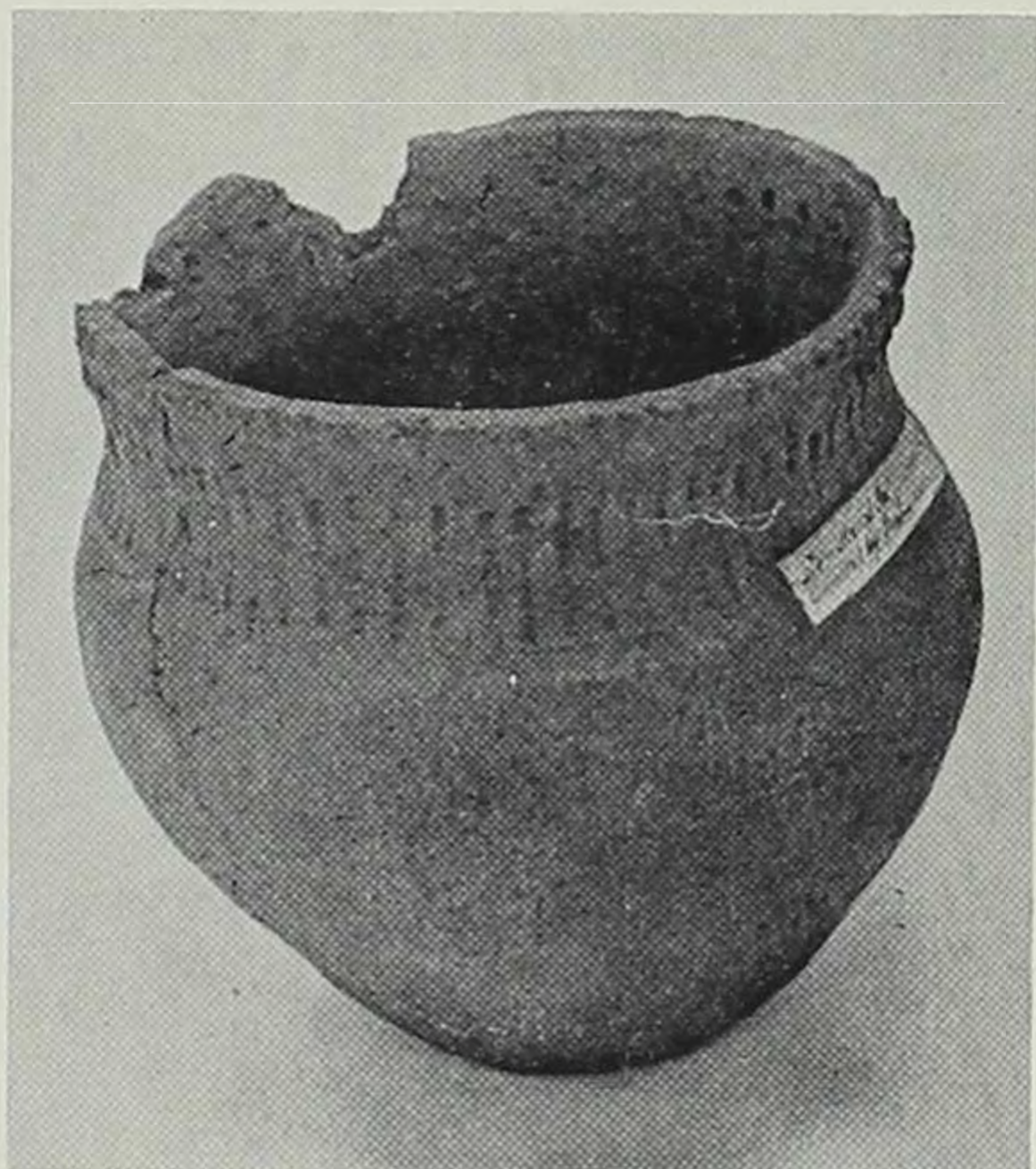


Artifacts from Toolesboro pictured here include copper celts, copper awls, obsidian core, effigy pipes and plain mound builders pipes, and a string of shell beads.

pipes, and a series of small beads.



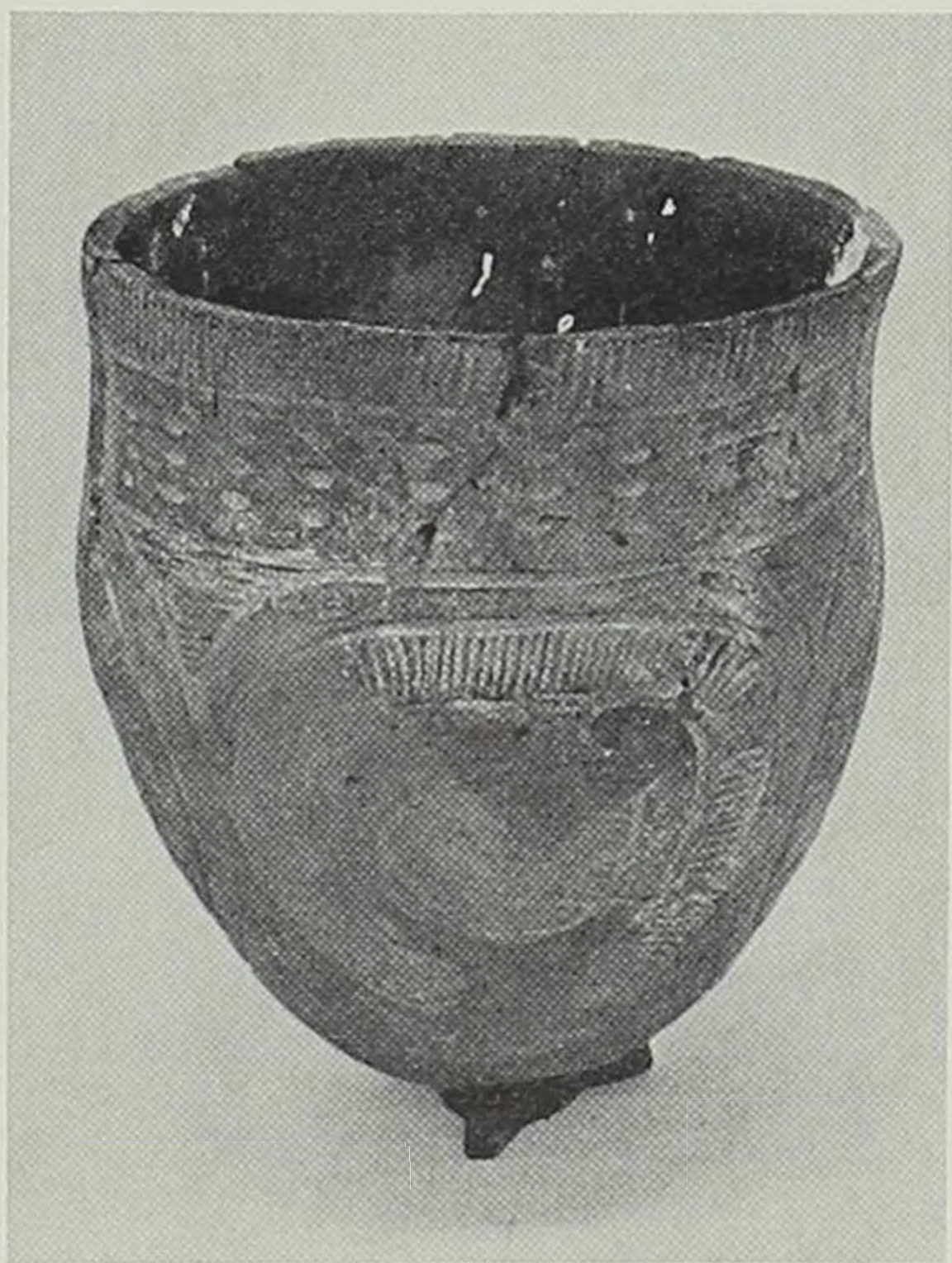
Marine Shell.



Middle Woodland pottery—Cook Farm.

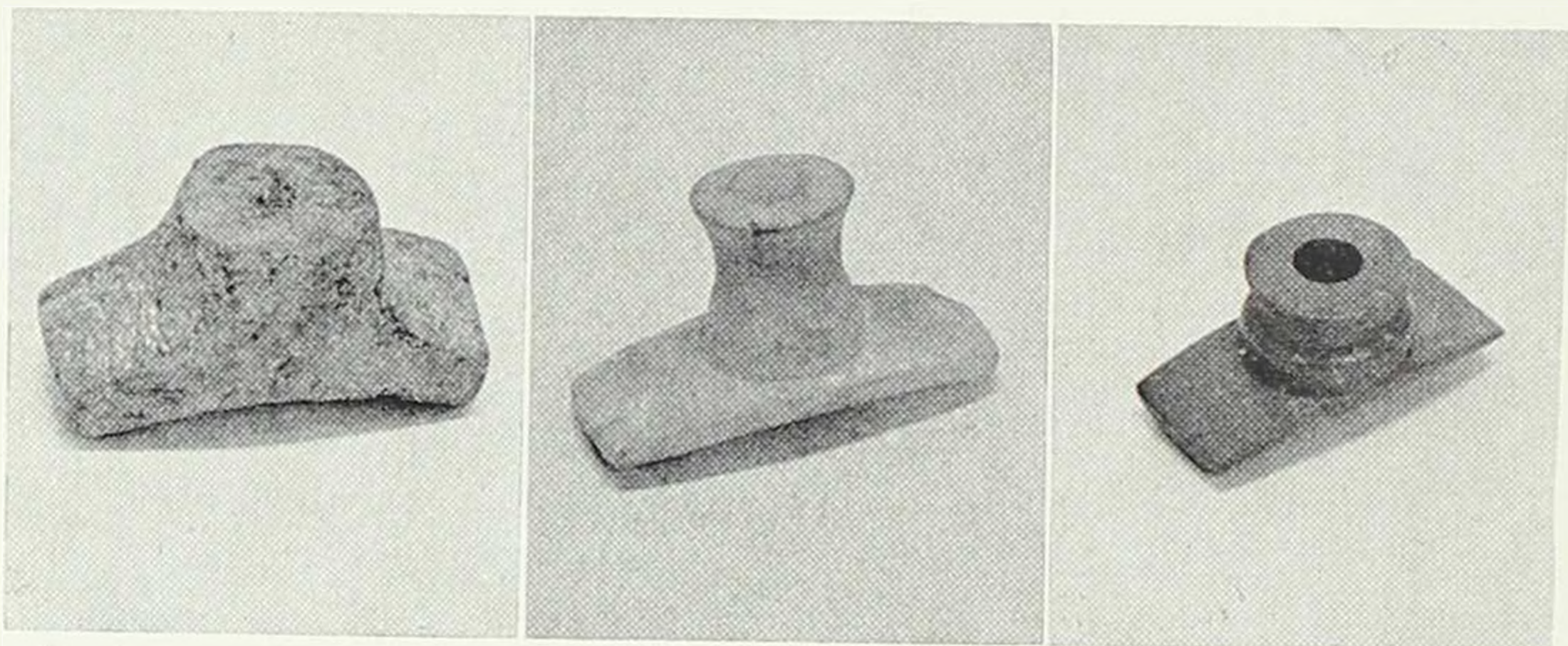


Middle Woodland pottery—Cook Farm.

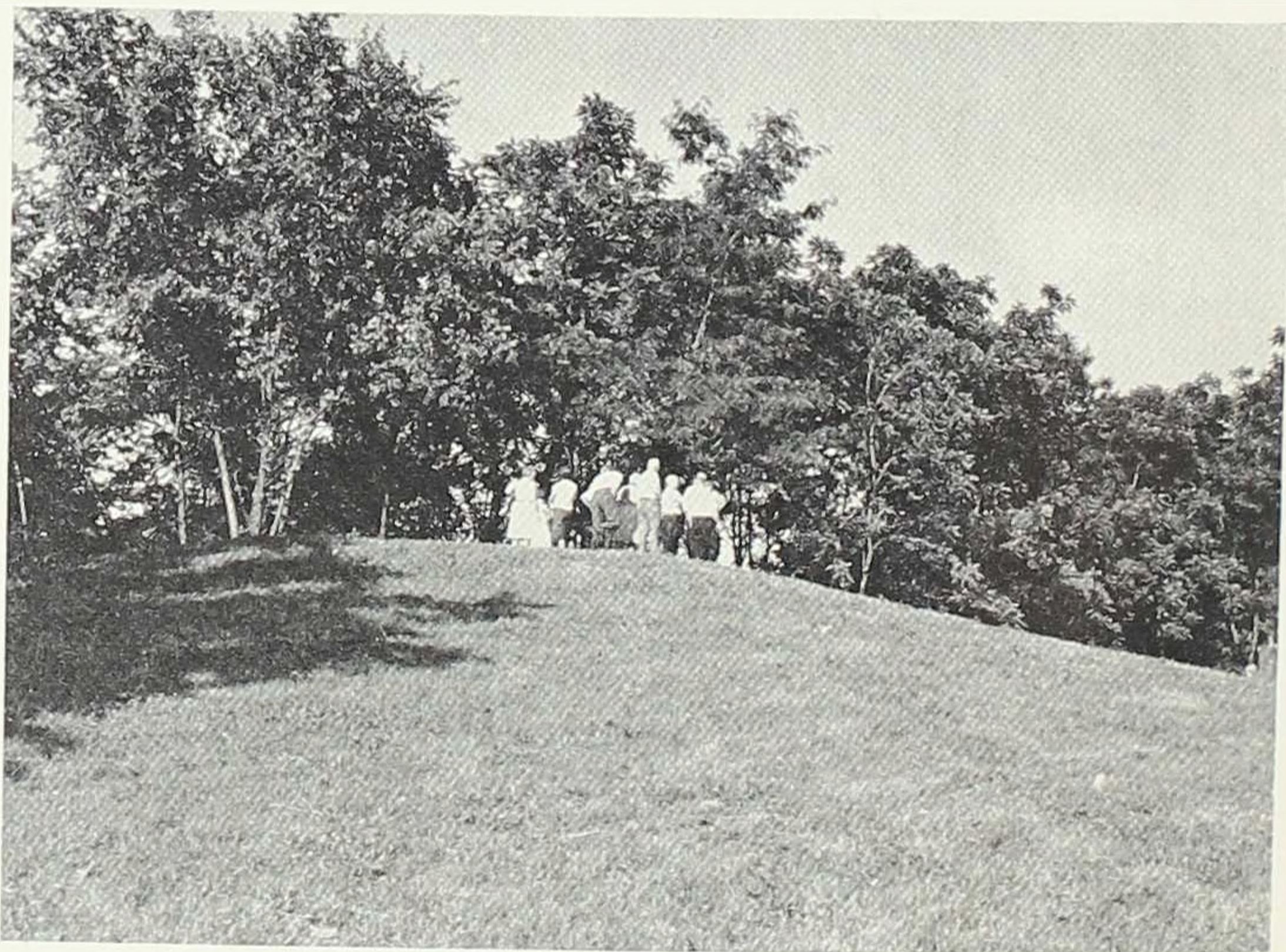


Middle Woodland pottery—Cook Farm.





Blank or unfinished pipe. Plain mound builders pipe. Plain mound builders pipe.



*State Historical Society photo*

This, the largest, is one of six Toolesboro Mounds now owned by the State Historical Society of Iowa. It has not been excavated.

In others, cremations were placed on platforms. Usually there was more than one individual in a tomb. Grave offerings, placed with burials and cremations, included pipes, cut sheet mica, copper axes and ornaments, beads and pottery vessels.

When the tombs were filled they were covered with small mounds of earth and the wooden structures around them were burned. Then a larger mound of earth was erected over the whole area with the outline of the wooden structure serving as the limit of the mound base. When there was no more space in an enclosure, a new site was selected for another.

The construction of such large enclosures and the large and impressive mounds must have required the cooperative efforts of more than the occupants of one small village. Prufer has suggested that the individuals buried in the mounds were members of a privileged class whose survivors organized the labor for the construction of the monuments. Perhaps this privileged class was a small priestly ruling group who occupied the enclosures part of the year. At any rate, some inter-village social organization was required to plan the structures and organize the labor.

In Illinois most of the mounds are subconical structures which are located in groups along the bluffs above the village sites or nearby on the flood plain. There are usually five to fifteen mounds in a group. However, some groups are larger. There

are 81 mounds in the group at Albany, Illinois.

Usually a mound was built by removing the top soil and putting down a layer of clean sand. A pit was dug in the center of this prepared floor and a log tomb was built around it. In some mounds the tombs were of logs and stones, or of stone slabs. In other mounds, there was no subfloor pit, but the burials were placed on the prepared floor.

Both extended and bundle burials occur in the mounds and in some instances there are also cremations. Individuals of both sexes and all ages have been found. Grave goods—ceramics, pipes, earspools, beads or occasional utilitarian objects—were placed with some individuals in a tomb. Often special dark soil was placed over the burials.

In some mounds there is evidence that the tombs may have been open and individuals added from time to time. During the interim the tomb may have been temporarily covered with matting or bark. Sometimes a number of individuals appear to have been bundled and stacked at one end of the tomb, or on top, after it was closed. The contents of the mounds vary, no two are identical, even in the same group. After the tomb was filled, earth was piled over it, a basket load at a time, until the mound was completed. Surveys have indicated that the ratio of mound group to village sites in the Illinois River Valley may be one to three, so perhaps several villages cooperated in building the mounds in a group.

The ceremonial aspect of the Middle Woodland life is the most impressive. Undoubtedly their religion was concerned with gods who were associated with the sun and the rain and fertility for these things are important in the lives of simple agricultural peoples. It was suggested above that in the annual cycle there may have been ceremonies associated with the planting and harvesting of the crops. We would probably find that there were others connected with success in hunting. No doubt there were other rituals associated with the birth and naming of children and their passage into adulthood.

Bear ceremonialism may also have been practiced for there were bear teeth and imitation bear tooth ornaments as well as cut and polished sections of bear jaws, but bear bones are missing from the village debris. In historic times Indian groups in the northern part of North America were very respectful of the bears. They avoided eating them or, if eaten on special occasions, the bones were gathered and given special treatment and not placed with the other refuse.

The most spectacular aspect of the ceremonial life as far as the archaeological record is concerned is that associated with death. Great care was taken in the dressing and laying out of many of the individuals buried in the flesh. In Ohio the great majority of individuals were cremated. These were probably exposed on platforms until

the flesh disintegrated and then the bones were gathered and cremated in special basins before being placed in the tomb in the mound. There undoubtedly was a certain amount of ritual associated with each stage in this burial procedure. As most of the mounds, and the tombs within the mounds, contain more than one individual, it is possible that the final burial rites—the placing of the individual skeletons in the tombs, and covering the tombs with earth, may have taken place only once a year. Or, it may also be that once every few years individuals from many villages gathered their dead and, with much feasting, singing, and dancing, placed them in the tomb. The best of their ornaments of copper and mica and beautifully made flint blades and copper celts as well as pottery vessels, shell containers and copper, pearl, and shell beads and pipes were placed as offerings. Similar feasts and rituals took place among a number of tribes in historic times.

We may imagine that the processions winding around the mounds must have been impressive,—some priests wearing robes with copper and mica ornaments attached and necklaces of shell and copper beads; others dressed in antler head-dresses. There may have been musical accompaniment with men playing panpipes of copper and silver and perhaps rattles, drums and whistles. Such rituals would have been long remembered.