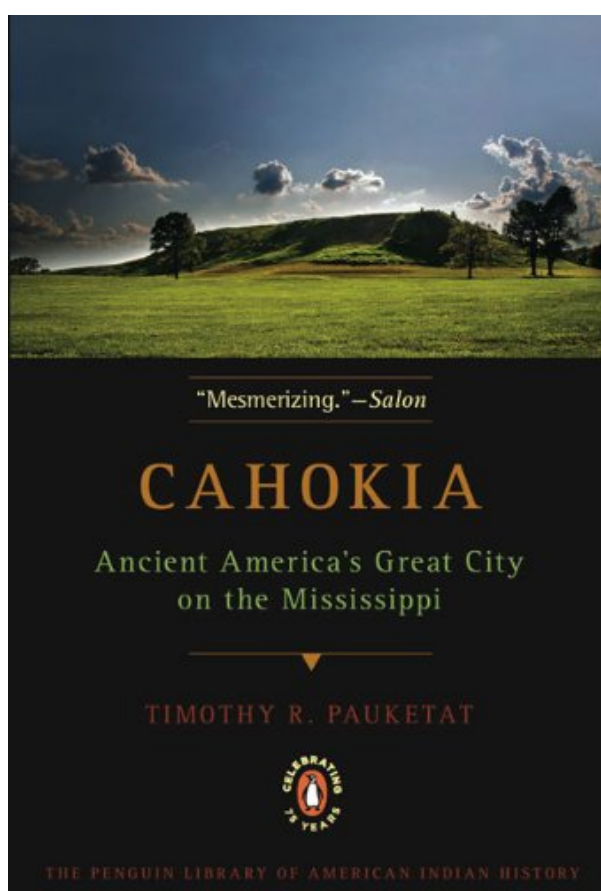
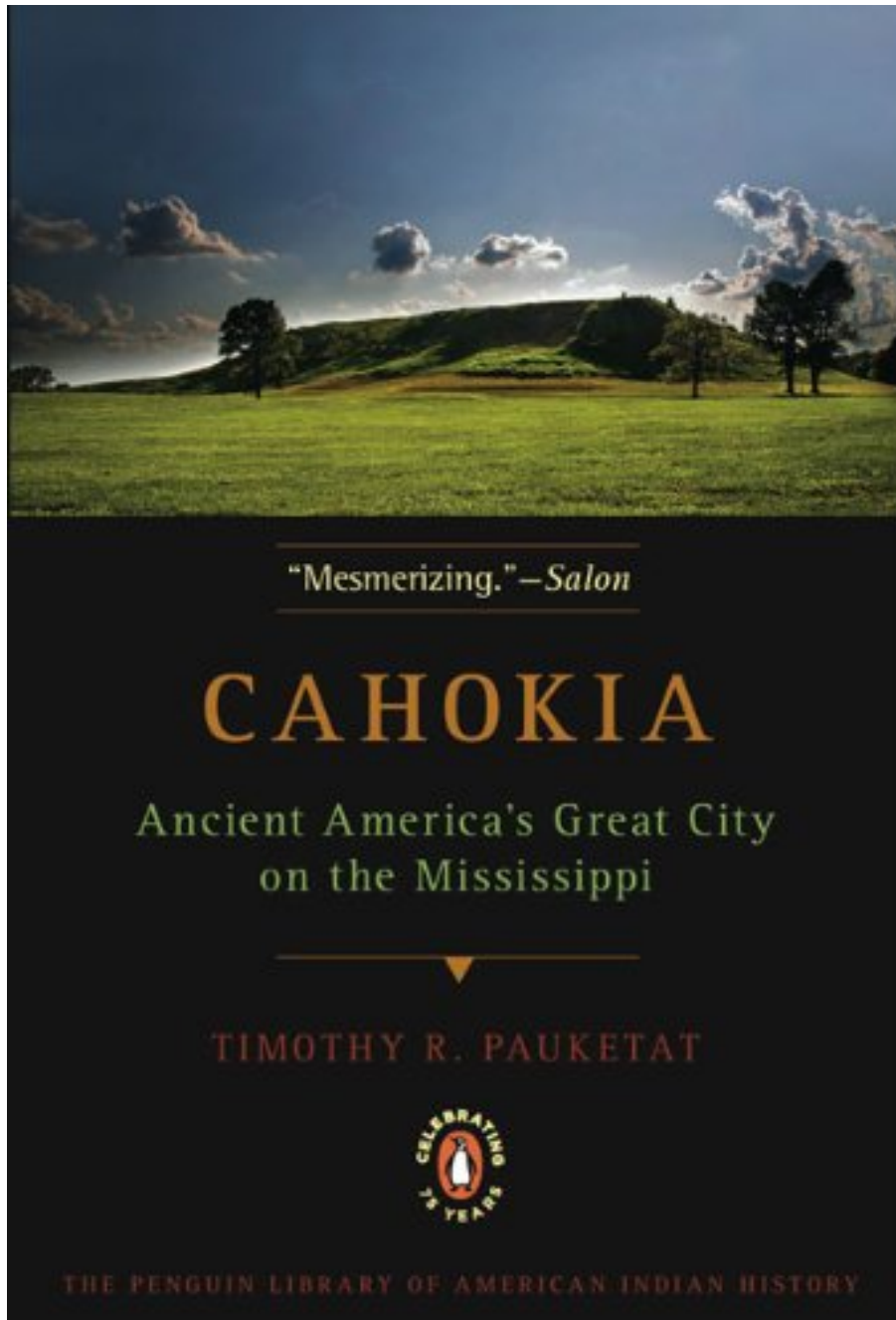


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From Publishers Weekly

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The fascinating story of a lost city and an unprecedented American civilization

While Mayan and Aztec civilizations are widely known and documented, relatively few people are familiar with the largest prehistoric Native American city north of Mexico—a site that expert Timothy Pauketat brings vividly to life in this groundbreaking book. Almost a thousand years ago, a city flourished along the Mississippi River near what is now St. Louis. Built around a sprawling central plaza and known as Cahokia, the site has drawn the attention of generations of archaeologists, whose work produced evidence of complex celestial timepieces, feasts big enough to feed thousands, and disturbing signs of human sacrifice. Drawing on these fascinating finds, Cahokia presents a lively and astonishing narrative of prehistoric America.

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62 of 65 people found the following review helpful.

Mounds of mystery

By Jay C. Smith

Cahokia: Ancient America's Great City on the Mississippi (Penguin's Library of American Indian History)

I am a lay reader and know very little of archeology, but I have a special affinity for Cahokia. In 1967 my friend and I camped at what was then Cahokia Mounds State Park and were able to observe close-up a dig then in progress, with helpful explanations provided by the lone archeologist on-site. It seemed so painstaking, performed with fine instruments and brushes and, in so far as we could see at the time, it uncovered only shards and fragments.

Back then archeologists still had not grasped much of the significance of the site as it is now understood. At one time they believed it to be a ritual center, occupied only briefly by a few inhabitants. It is now known to have been a major eleventh- and twelfth-century populous urban center supported by surrounding farms, an early example of a government-sponsored urban renewal, a culture that marked a radical transformation in the history of indigenous Americans.

Well-told non-fiction accounts of archeological enterprises can draw in readers much like a good mystery, and Timothy Pauketat displays something of a novelist's touch here (although do not expect "Indiana Jones"). He recounts dozens of discoveries, generally in sufficient detail for readers to evaluate for themselves the evidence the archeologists were accumulating. Pauketat, himself a noted archeologist of the Cahokia site, clearly admires many of his predecessors and he gives us enough information about several to add an appealing human element to the narrative.

What most fascinates me is the breadth and detail of what archeologists are able to infer from what they find. Consider some of the more remarkable findings from Cahokia, the skeletal remains of females buried in groups in mounds and showing signs of violence (one such sign being clenched hands and feet, indicating spasms at the time of death). Many of these women seem to have been from someplace else, not Cahokia, based on their dental morphology and bone characteristics. Via isotope studies bioarcheologists can tell something about the women's diet (generally different than that of Cahokians), and they even venture judgments about the women's beauty based on their bone characteristics. These findings form one large piece

of a body of evidence that enables the archeologists to conclude that notable features of Cahokian society included human sacrifice, political theater, and social inequality.

Sometimes the inferences can go too far, beyond the evidence. It seems to me, for example, that Pauketat is not on very solid ground in some of his speculations about the purposes or effects of the ritual sacrifices (although he is careful to present them only as possibilities, not certainties).

Of course not all of the mysteries of Cahokia are solved, including such major ones as where the people came from, why they disbanded (around the end of the twelfth century), and where they went. Pauketat says that most archeologists believe the Mississippian phenomenon, including Cahokia, was home-grown independent of Mesoamerican culture, but he seems to leave open the possibility of connections.

I was left wondering, for example, whether advances in skeletal DNA technology might help answer some of the remaining questions about the origins and destiny of the Cahokian people. The story is likely to have further chapters.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Brilliant introduction and narrative to the evolving and fascinating story ...

By B. Isenberg

Brilliant introduction and narrative to the evolving and fascinating story that is Cahokia. I particularly enjoyed the chapter in which Mr. Pauketat took the reader for a walk through Cahokia. This is a historical narrative at its best and I found it hard to put down. Pauketat is not only a phenomenal and respected expert archaeologist, but he is a very talented writer as well.

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A required read for any Indigenous thinker.

By Amazon Customer

Pauketat has embraced and accepted the oral tradition of Native People's and forever transformed anthropology forever, for the better. From this important work, one can see the imprint of history onto the modern Indigenous.

The legacy of Meso-America is evident in the North American institutions of the Ancient Earthen Works and the long buried cosmology of First Man, Mother Corn, the Thunder Twins, and the Upper and Lower Realms.

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