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Spirits of Earth: The Effigy Mound Landscape of Madison and the Four Lakes. By Robert A. Birmingham.

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US Court of Appeals, 52 cases in US District Courts, 13 Oklahoma court cases, and 87 miscellaneous government documents. The secondary literature includes a dozen manuscript collections. The richness of the bibliography alone makes the book well worthwhile.

This book will appeal to scholars of Native studies, federal Indian law, and political science. *The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma* is not meant to be a cultural or ethnohistorical study, but is a major contribution to federal-Indian legal studies where more bold examinations of modern tribal histories are appearing. Such books are overdue, and Work's book is timely and welcome. Finally, if the question "what happened to the Seminoles after their removal to the West?" is asked, this volume proudly responds, explaining thoroughly what happened from that time until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

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Spirits of Earth: The Effigy Mound Landscape of Madison and the Four Lakes. By Robert A. Birmingham. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009. 280 pages. \$24.95 paper.

Thirteen thousand years ago, spruce forests and swamps draining glacial melt water welcomed small bands of hunters into what is now southern Wisconsin. Twelve thousand years later, Native Americans constructed monumental earth sculptures in animal shapes—effigy mounds—in the prairies that the glaciers left behind. Former state archaeologist Robert Birmingham describes and interprets these ancient wonders, comparing them to the megaliths of Europe and the geoglyphs of Peru, while showing their significance and continued presence and power in contemporary times.

Most effigy mounds are found in Wisconsin, with a few in southeastern Minnesota, northeastern Iowa, and northern Illinois. Birmingham argues that effigy mounds provided ceremonial centers for the groups that were increasing their corn cultivation and becoming more sedentary in the Late Woodland era of AD 700 to 1100. Because these megalithic structures were no longer built, settled societies increased their use of agriculture once more. Birmingham's study of effigy mounds opens a window into understanding this transition as it occurred in Wisconsin and other places.

Prominent archaeologist Robert Hall (*An Archaeology of the Soul*, 1997) argued that one needs a broad understanding of Native American beliefs, cultural practices, and worldviews to understand mound builders and interpret

their mounds. Hall worked extensively on the colossal (noneffigy) mounds of Cahokia near the confluence of the Illinois, the Missouri, and the Mississippi Rivers (now East St. Louis), a city that, at its peak close to AD 1100, reached a population of thirty thousand. Although Hall proposed that archaeologists should expand their interpretive matrix to include more than the physical evidence of shards and spear points, his approach was not immediately or widely received. Yet Birmingham uses this approach in his discussion of the effigy mounds in and near Madison, Wisconsin. Acknowledging that it is impossible to prove what ancient people thought, Birmingham nonetheless points out the compelling resemblances between the animals depicted in the effigy mounds and the long-standing and current similarities between the past and present belief systems of the Ho-Chunk, who claim these mounds and mound builders as part of their ancestry. His approach contrasts with a traditional, more objective approach based on artifacts. Although he states that archaeologists generally ignore the significance of the effigy mounds, he affirms their worldwide significance in this “admittedly bold interpretation” (xxiv).

He claims that the probable ancestors of the Ho-Chunk people (formerly called Winnebago) “left behind [in the effigy mounds] detailed maps to their beliefs and worldview” that have been retained by Indian people today (xv). The ancient people’s response to the land was to bring the natural and sacred together, uniting topography with spiritual meaning in an “ongoing re-creation or renewal of the world” (xxi).

These large claims are carefully documented in Birmingham’s discussion of the well-preserved mounds of the Madison region. His wider argument, made here and in his earlier book written with Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin* (2000), is that effigy mound groupings depict the cosmology of the upper world (sky) and lower worlds (earth and water). The animals and spirits sculpted in and on the earth not only depict deities but also sometimes represent animal ancestors who were transformed into human form and began clans. Thus effigy mound building implies a widespread cultural and religious belief system, and a complex society that built and returned again and again to effigy mound sites throughout the centuries.

Upper world iconography is often represented by thunderbirds, which are found in the rock art of the region; thunderbirds, geese, and other bird forms are found in effigy mounds generally situated on high drumlins, glacier hills of sandy gravel. Within the same grouping appear long-tailed forms usually identified as water spirits, often with their long tail pointing at a springhead. Some of these are intaglios, or reverse “mounds” that have been excavated out of the earth. These identifications correspond with spirits and totemic animals from the Ho-Chunk and contemporary Midwestern Indians such as the Menominee and Potawatomi, who also have water spirits within their

cosmological systems. Birmingham documents the water spirit, thunderbirds, and power lines in historic and contemporary Indian art of the Midwest, drawing the parallel between mounds and other art forms.

Effigy mound sites also contain conical, lineal, and serpentine mounds that Birmingham proposes are also effigies: conical mounds representing the sun and moon, which were viewed as deities, while lineal, curved, and wavy mounds represent snake forms. He refers to different versions of Ho-Chunk creation stories as recorded by Paul Radin (*The Winnebago Tribe*, 1970), when after Earthmaker's creation of the world, bears, water spirits, or snakes pegged the four corners of the Earth. The four sacred directions appear to be represented in a large mound in the shape of a cross more than two hundred feet long and wide and oriented to the cardinal points of the compass, mapped by Increase Lapham in *Antiquities of Wisconsin: As Surveyed and Described* (2010).

A group called Oneota followed effigy mound builders. The Ho-Chunk are "almost certainly" among the descendants of the Oneota, who in turn were probably descendants of the ancient effigy mound builders. If true, then the historic Ho-Chunk expansion into the Madison area is a return to their ancestral base. This genealogy is claimed by modern-day Ho-Chunk, and their oral, artistic, and religious traditions affirm and corroborate Birmingham's thesis.

The body of *Spirits of Earth* reads like a walking tour of the Madison region that incorporates archaeology, iconography, and spiritual knowledge into a package of visual delights. The author describes how the four-legged effigy mounds seem to climb up the sides of hills, while serpentine water-spirit forms point to and crawl along the ground near springs. Some of the effigies are depicted in aerial views, with four legs and tails as seen from above, while other mounds depict animals seen in profile. Farmers and gravediggers destroyed many effigy mounds, but others such as Theodore Lewis and Charles E. Brown worked hard to preserve them. Currently, the Ho-Chunk are acquiring mounds and are active in their preservation.

Birmingham provides an appendix of "Selected Mound Sites Open to the Public," as part of an attempt to preserve and honor remaining parts of a sacred landscape that continues to make a connection between the "natural and supernatural worlds" (xix). Birmingham ends his work with a passionate plea for recognizing, celebrating, and preserving "these magnificent places, . . . equivalent as world wonders to the megalithic landscapes of Europe and the Nasca Lines of Peru" (205). His eloquent writing does justice to the power and beauty of his subject.

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