STONE DISKS AS TREATY “SUNS”

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ONE of the minor mysteries of American archaeology concerns the use made by the Indians of certain stone disks found in the Mississippi Valley and the Southeast. According to Charles C. Jones, Jr., the first of these disks was “ploughed up in 1859, on the lower terrace of the large temple-mound on the Etowah River . . . near Cartersville,” Georgia. Other discoveries followed, and several scores of the disks are now in archaeological collections.

Many conjectures have been made as to their function. In 1873, Jones suggested that they were ceremonial plates on which food was offered to the sun god. “We incline to the opinion,” he wrote, “that these stone plates were designed for sacred uses, and that in them was exposed the food offered to the Dii Minores of those peoples who, antedating the modern Indians—dwellers here at the dawn of the historic period—erected the large temple-mound in honor of that great God who mingled not with men, and before whose flaming minister—the sun—they prostrated themselves in blind yet profound adoration.”

G. P. Thruston, while accepting Jones’ view of the more elaborate disks, thought that “some of the plainer forms . . . were probably used for domestic or culinary purposes.”

Most of the disks have notched or scalloped borders (Fig. 1 and Pl. I). This fact suggested the possibility that the notches might have some relation to divisions of time. In 1875, W. M. Anderson pointed out a certain similarity between one of the disks and the Toltec calendar. W. H. Holmes also suggested that these objects might be calendar disks. “The student,” he said, “will hardly fail to notice the resemblance of these disks to the calendar stones or time symbols of Mexico and other southern nations of antiquity.” In 1904, H. R. Stoddard said of a particular disk, the border of which is formed of thirty-six notches, “That the engraved discoidal was ever used as a sun dial or measure of time is problematical; that it could have been used as such, accurately, is self-evident.” He accordingly concluded that the disk in question was presumably designed for such a purpose.

Unfortunately, all theories relating the disks to the measuring of time break down when an attempt is made to apply them to the class of disks as a whole. No single disk can be identified completely with any known calendar, and no two agree in their system of notching.

In many cases the number of notches on a disk is an irregular one involving no connection with recognizable intervals of time. The notches vary in number on different disks from seven at one extreme to seventy-two at the other, and are found in such seemingly haphazard numbers as fifteen and twenty-three; in one instance, fifty-nine small notches are irregularly subdivided by seven large ones. Such varied and, it would seem, numerically uncalculated notching suggests that the notches have no intentional relation to time and must have been made in some other connection.

These stubborn facts soon discouraged the proponents of theories related to time measurement. Even in their initial statements of the calendar hypothesis, both Anderson and Holmes were forced to admit the difficulty of pressing it to a satisfying conclusion. “I have fancied a resemblance,” said Anderson with regard to his comparison of the disk with the Toltec calendar, “but I cannot establish a complete agreement between the two tablets.” He then enumerated the difficulties involved in trying to force the intractable notches into relation with a time system. Holmes recognized the same difficulties, remarking with regard to his calendar suggestion, “There is, however, no absolute identity with southern examples.” Eventually most

1 Jones, 1873, p. 373.
2 Thruston, 1897, p. 275.
3 Ibid., p. 376.
4 Quoted in Page, 1875, p. 378.
5 Holmes, 1883, p. 279.
6 Stoddard, 1904, p. 156.
7 Page, 1875, p. 378.
8 Holmes, 1883, p. 279.
students of the subject, including Holmes, abandoned any attempt to connect the disks with time measurement.

The theory which has found most general acceptance was put forward by Clarence B. Moore in 1905. "Stone discs and slabs were found by us on many occasions at Moundville . . . and in each case the disc or the slab was more or less thickly smeared with paint, sometimes cream-colored, sometimes red . . . . It seems conclusive to us that the paint on the discs and slabs is purely of aboriginal origin.

"The universal presence of paint upon these discs and slabs seems to offer a clue to the purpose for which they were used, and, until a better suggestion is offered, we shall consider them palettes for mixing paint."9

A year later, that is to say in 1906, Holmes published a paper devoted to the disks in which he accepted Moore's theory in preference to his own previous suggestion. "In a recent work," Holmes wrote, "Mr. Clarence B. Moore illustrates a number of discoidal and rectangular stone plates obtained from mounds in Alabama and elsewhere in the South, which he is able to identify as mortar plates, or palettes, intended for the grinding of pigments. It thus happens that another of the several groups of archaeological objects heretofore placed in the problematic class is safely assigned to a definite use, although the exact manner and significance of the use remains in a measure undetermined. The rectangular plates bear a more or less marked resemblance to the flattish rectangular tablets employed by Pueblo shamans in grinding pigments for sacred purposes; and several of the mound specimens, both rectangular and circular, as demonstrated by Mr. Moore, bear unmistakable evidence of use in preparing colors, a sufficient amount of the pigment remaining on the surface to permit technical analysis. The colors are for the greater part red and white, the former being hematite and the latter carbonate of lead."10

Subsequent writers for the most part have followed Moore and Holmes in this conclusion, though still regarding it in the nature of an hypothesis rather than an established fact. Thus, Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, in their Indian Art in the United States, remark that the disks "are believed to be palettes on which paint was ground because traces of red and white paint have actually been found on some of them."11 Webb and DeJarnette, in An Archeological Survey of the Pickwick Basin, repeat the same view of the function of the disks. "Some of them," they state, "are concave on one face as if used as palettes for grinding paint. Many of them have been found with lead or iron oxides marked on them."12

On the other hand, dissenting opinions, though in the minority, have not been entirely lacking. Moorehead observes that "the discs owned by Mr. Stoddard have not smooth centres as have Mr. Moore's discs, and are apparently for other purposes than the mixing of paint."13 The most recent of all mentions of the discs to come to my attention reverts to a noncommittal attitude regarding their possible function. I refer to Waring and Holder's statement: "They have been variously referred to as paint palettes, 'sun circles,' and even calendar stones. At present it is futile to suggest a function for these objects."14

In reading The History of the Five Indian Nations by Cadwallader Colden, I chanced upon two passages which suggest that the disks may have been made for a purpose not previously considered, namely, for use as pledges of faith in the ratification of certain articles in peace treaties.

Colden's book, first published in New York in 1727, is an account of the relations between certain Indian tribes, and between those tribes and the white colonists, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A considerable portion of it is devoted to verbatim reports of Indian council meetings written during the progress of the meetings by a colonial secretary and preserved in New York's Register of Indian Affairs. These reports repeatedly record the Indian custom of laying down a symbolic gift—usually a wampum belt, but sometimes a pipe, a beaver skin, or other object—as a pledge of faith in making any serious proposition or ratifying any agreement. Among the Indians, the presentation of such a gift had the same force as does the affixing of official seals or signatures in our own society. With the gift, the agreement was consummated; without it, no final obligation was undertaken.

Of the hundreds of signatory gifts mentioned

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11 Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, 1941, p. 87.
12 Webb and DeJarnette, 1942, p. 287.
14 Waring and Holder, 1945, p. 13.
in the documents quoted by Colden, two are stone disks. Reference to the first of these disks occurs in an account of a general Council of the Five Nations which opened at Onondaga on January 22, 1670. At one session of this council, says Colden, “Cannehout, a Seneka Sachem stood up, and gave the general Council a particular Account of a Treaty made last Summer, between the Seneka and the Wagunha Messengers, (one of the Utawawa Nations) who had concluded a Peace for themselves, and seven other Nations to which the other four Nations were desired to agree, and their Brethren of New York to be included in it. He said the Proposals made in several Propositions were as follow.”

After four articles, confirmed respectively by the delivery of two prisoners and the giving of three belts, a fifth proposition is recorded in the following words:

“5. ‘Let the Sun, as long as he shall endure, always shine upon us in Friendship.’ Here he gave a red Marble Sun as large as a plate.”

A similar incident took place twenty-four years later, in a council held in Albany in August, 1694. There, on the seventeenth of the month, an Onondaga Sachem, Sadakanahatie, “after he had sung a long song,” presented a peace offer sent by the Djonondadie tribe. After several clauses, confirmed respectively by “a few Strings of Wampum” and four belts, the statement reads:

“Brethren, (we include all the Nations from the Seneca’s country to New York in this Name) heareen to us. We rend the Clouds asunder, and drive away all Darkness from the Heavens, that the Sun of Peace may shine with Brightness over us all; giving a Sun of a round red polished Stone.”

In these two passages we have verbatim seventeenth-century accounts of the use of stone disks as signatory objects. In both cases the disk replaces the more customary form of sanction, such as the wampum belt, for a representational reason. The agreement to be confirmed is a promise of peaceful relations between nations. In the wording of this agreement, the sun is invoked as a symbol of peace, in contrast to the “clouds” of war. An object recalling or suggesting the sun would therefore be particularly appropriate as a confirmation of these clauses, and such an object is provided in the form of a stone disk of a warm color. In both passages the disks are designated “suns.”

The question at once arises as to whether the stone disks now preserved in archeological collections may not be objects of the same class as the “suns” used on these two occasions. In an effort to answer this question, let us reconsider the disks in the light of the information contained in, and the possibilities suggested by, Colden’s account.

In Colden’s first reference the “sun” is said to have been “as large as a plate.” This corresponds well with the size of the existing disks. Of the eighteen examples listed by Webb and DeJarnette, ten are from 7+ to 8+ inches in diameter. This is about as close as they could come to being “as large as a plate.” Only two are smaller than this, the smallest being 4.5 inches in diameter. Six are larger, the largest being 12.5 inches in diameter. Even these extremes do not exceed the limits of what we commonly designate as “plate” sizes.

The materials of the two disks mentioned by Colden are described as “red Marble” and “red polished Stone.” The secretary who made the original records at the council meetings had, of course, only an incidental interest in the nature of the objects used as pledges. One might expect his descriptions to be based on offhand observation rather than scientific examination. “Marble” would probably mean to him any material recalling that substance. That this is so is suggested by two other passages in which Indian pipes are described as made of “marble.” Thus, in the address of Cannehoot, from which we quoted the reference to the “red Marble sun as large as a Plate,” the succeeding clause reads as follows: “6. Let the Rain of Heaven wash away all Hatred, that we may again smoke together in Peace, giving a large Pipe of Marble.” It seems evident that the term “marble” is loosely used to indicate what the second and more literal account describes as “red polished Stone.” The words of another contemporary observer confirm this interpretation, for Marquette describes a calumet as being “fashioned from a red stone, polished like marble.”

The material of some of the existing disks, when new, may well have possessed qualities in harmony with Colden’s descriptions. In all

15 Colden, 1902, Vol. 1, pp. 130-131
likelihood they originally had both a higher polish and a more intense color than they now show; a polish and color subsequently reduced by the chemical action of the earth during a period of burial which, at a minimum, must have lasted over a century. It is also conceivable that, when the stone itself was not of the desired color or texture, artificial coloring was applied. Indeed, the existing traces of paint which led to the theory that these objects were palettes may possibly be vestiges of such an original painted surface.

It is noteworthy in this connection that the traces of paint remaining on the disks are always described as red or white. It seems unlikely that the colors mixed on ceremonial palettes would have been limited in this manner; hence, the exclusive presence of these two colors appears to militate against the theory that they were palettes. On the other hand, the presence of at least the red paint is consistent with the theory that they were "suns." Red is one of the colors most universally associated with the sun and was the actual color of the two stone "suns" reported by Colden. If the existing disks were indeed made to serve as "suns," the presence of red on many of them would be a logical outcome of the desire to make them appear sun-like. Moore's description of a number of the disks he excavated are congruent with such a possibility. "On this disc," he reports in one instance, "was a considerable amount of red pigment."20 Of nine disks and five fragments found on his second visit to Moundville he says, "On practically all the palettes was paint, sometimes red, sometimes white."21

The other facts about paint reported by Moore—the frequent use of white or cream and the presence of red on one side and white on the other side of many disks22—present no obvious connection with the present theory. It is conceivable that white, because of its luminosity, may have been regarded by the Indians as another sun color. In the case of the disks reported by Colden, it would appear from the descriptions that the stone itself (possibly catlinite) provided the surface color and that the two sides of the disk were therefore red. If, in other instances, artificial coloring was added, and if both red and white were accepted as sun colors, it is possible that "suns" were painted red on one face and white on the other. Judging from Moore's descriptions, the white and the red do not occur together on the same side of any of the disks. Otherwise it might be supposed that the white was an undercoating intended to provide a smooth surface and to add brilliance and transparency to a red coat superimposed upon it.

It has been suggested that the presence of red and white paint on the disks may in some way reflect the use of red and white by the Muskogean people to differentiate various subdivisions of the tribes, such as the Red Towns and the White Towns, otherwise known as war towns and peace towns. The statements which I have been able to find regarding this differentiation are so indefinite that I am at a loss to form a definite opinion on this point, but the suggestion should be kept in mind. These tribal subdivisions have been briefly discussed by Swanton.23

Turning to other considerations, a fact definitely in line with the present interpretation is revealed by Webb and DeJarnette's observation that some of the existing disks "are drilled with a single hole for suspension."24 This observation can be significantly linked with Colden's account. His report of the address involving the first "sun" concludes with the statement, "After the Seneca Speaker had done, the Wagunahe Presents were hung up in the House, in the sight of the whole assembly."25 Since the "sun" was one of the presents involved, it was presumably hung up with the others. This suggests that it was drilled for suspension and thus shares an additional characteristic in common with a number of the existing disks.

As another approach to the problem, let us consider the engraved or carved decoration of the existing disks in an effort to determine whether it shows any relevancy to the "sun" theory. By far the most common form of decoration is the notched or scalloped border design. Of the eighteen disks illustrated by Webb and DeJarnette,26 some of which are reproduced from their plates in our Figure 1, all but one have such borders. On fourteen of these disks the notches are combined with one or more

20 Moore, 1905, p. 196.
21 Moore, 1907, p. 392.
22 Moore, 1905, pp. 204, 206, 235.

23 Swanton, 1928, pp. 165, 249.
24 Webb and DeJarnette, 1942, p. 287.
26 Webb and DeJarnette, 1942, figs. 92-93, pp. 288-289.
concentric circles into a more elaborate border, and on three the notches are combined with engraved surface images.

We have already observed that attempts to connect the notches with a theory of time measurement proved unsuccessful. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the notched border was produced purely by chance or exclusively for decorative effect. Presumably the carvers had some definite reason for repeating so many times a pattern requiring such regular spacing and careful execution.

It seems highly probable to the writer that the notched border is a conventional method of representing the sun’s rays. If the reader will examine the examples reproduced in our illustrations, I believe he will agree that the border definitely gives a sun-like appearance to many of the disks bearing it. When we look at the sun, its outline usually seems wavering, owing to the intensity of the light falling upon the retina. This gives the impression of a flaming or ray-encircled body rather than a geometrical, circular one. It would be difficult to convey this impression through the conventions of decorative stone-carving more effectively than is accomplished by the notched border designs of many of the disks.

This interpretation, though curiously absent from the published literature on the subject, has not been without supporters. Thus, the National Museum in Washington exhibits specimens of the disks in what it calls a “Synoptic Series of Pigment Plates.” The explanation accompanying the exhibit includes this statement: “The margin of the plate is usually scalloped, or notched, and it is surmised that these features represent the rays of the sun, and that the pigments ground upon the plates were used in ceremonies relating to the worship of the sun.” Holmes’ tentative classification of shell gorgets in the form of disks with scalloped borders as sun circles constitutes a parallel interpretation.27

Holmes once proposed another interpretation of the notches, suggesting that they were intended to represent the ends of feathers of the plumed serpent concentrically arranged around the center of the disk. “It is observed,” he says, “that the notches cut in the edges of the plates are in many instances carried inward over the plate in such a way as to suggest feathers as these are often formally treated in native art. . . . Recalling the occurrence of the feathered-serpent design on the obverse of the Mississippi tablet a strong presumption is created that the original conception in the mind of the makers of these plates was, at least in some cases, the feathered serpent, a northern form of Quetzalcoatl, a chief deity of the middle American peoples.”28

The reader may prefer to believe the notches represent the feathers of the plumed serpent, rather than the rays of the sun, without prejudice to the theory that the disks represent treaty “suns.” Both interpretations imply the solar significance of the disks, the one in a more symbolical, the other in a more literal, manner. Personally, I do not find in the disks I have seen a confirmation of Holmes’ observation that the notches “are in many instances carried inward over the plate in such a way as to suggest feathers.” To interpret the notches as representing the sun’s rays seems to me more in keeping with the actual designs.

Both interpretations—that the notches represent rays or feathers—provide a ready explanation of the great variety and inconsistency in number and disposition of the notches. As no fixed number of notches would be required to suggest either rays or feathers, each carver would be free to space the notches according to his own imagination and creative impulse. Variety and numerical inconsistency in the notching would inevitably result.

The disks bearing engraved images require special study. The outstanding examples are four in number: the so-called “Mississippi tablet” bearing twin feathered serpents (Fig. 1, b, and Pl. I, d); the disk with “horned rattlesnakes” encircling an eye-bearing hand (Fig. 1, e; the disk with two eye-bearing hands and other figures (Fig. 1, h); and the example displaying a large open eye (Fig. 1, k). For purpose of reference, I shall call these three latter examples respectively the “single-hand disk,” the “twin-hand disk,” and the “open-eye disk.”

The conception of the images engraved on these disks must certainly have been relevant, in the minds of their makers, to the function of the disks. If we could determine the original meaning of the images, that meaning would presumably either reinforce the present theory or conflict with it. So far as I am able to determine, the authors who have touched at all upon this phase of the subject have felt it neces-

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27 Holmes, 1883, p. 273.

28 Holmes, 1906, p. 106.
sary to confine themselves almost entirely to a descriptive approach. The principal motifs of the engraving have been classified as the feathered serpent, the hand and eye, the open eye, and the death head. Only in the first instance does this classification give us any assistance in interpreting the designs.

The feathered serpent ascription, based primarily upon the Mississippi tablet (Fig. 1, b, and Pl. 1, d), has the support of Holmes, already quoted, and of various subsequent writers. Among others supporting this interpretation are Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, who remark of the Mississippi tablet, "The disk illustrated here is decorated with two interwined rattlesnakes with feathered heads which suggest Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent of Mexico."29

We have, then, one definite clue as to the interpretation of the engraved designs. The point of special interest for us is whether the mythical concepts associated with the feathered serpent show a positive, a negative, or a neutral relationship to the function we have proposed for the disks. A positive relation appears at once, for students of the subject inform us that Quetzalcoatl was, in the words of Lewis Spence, "a deity of solar significance."30 "... the Man of the Sun ... Quetzalcoatl was represented as a traveller with staff in hand, and this is proof of his solar character, as is the statement that under his rule the fruits of the earth flourished more abundantly than at any subsequent period. The abundance of gold said to have been accumulated in his reign assists the theory, the precious metal being invariably associated with the sun by most barbarous peoples. In the native pinturas it is noticeable that the solar disk and semi-disk are almost invariably found in connection with the feathered serpent as the symbolical attributes of Quetzalcoatl. The Hopi Indians of Arizona at the present day symbolize the sun as a serpent, tail in mouth, and the ancient Mexicans introduced the solar disk in connection with small images of Quetzalcoatl, which they attached to the head-dress. In still other examples, Quetzalcoatl is pictured as if emerging or stepping from the luminary, which is represented as his dwelling place."31 "In the reign of Quetzalcoatl," says another passage, "there was peace and plenty for all men."32

All this is definitely relevant to the theory that the disks were "suns" and to the employment of the "suns" in connection with pledges of peace and with the visions of fulfillment and plenty associated with peace. Had the carver of the Mississippi tablet wished to select a mythical—that is to say, for him, religious—image expressive of concepts related to the purpose of a treaty "sun," he could not have chosen a form more suitable than that of Quetzalcoatl or some related variation of the feathered serpent.

Why the design comprises two feathered serpents is a matter for conjecture. From the decorative point of view the repeated image facilitates an attractive symmetry, but we may presume that the engraver had more than a decorative end in view. It will be noted that twin elements occur a number of times in the engraved designs: twin serpents in two of them, twin heads and hands in a third. In the latter instance, they are not so disposed as to provide the design with symmetry and must therefore have resulted from other than a decorative impulse.

The treaty context under consideration suggests the possibility that these double representations were intended to symbolize the joint adherence of the two separate parties to the agreement. In these terms the iconography of the Mississippi tablet would be a perfect embodiment of the concepts associated with a treaty "sun." The presence of the feathered serpent heightens the solar, and therefore the sacred, significance of the signatory object; the doubling and intertwining of the images symbolizes the intermingling of the spirits of two peoples in a common will to peace.

The designs on the other three engraved disks can only be hypothetically interpreted. To my knowledge no attempt has yet been made to interpret the meaning of the hand-and-eye, the open-eye, or the death-head motifs, nor has a name even been attached to the scepter-like and the eccentric forms which complete the imagery of the twin-hand disk. In the absence of specific information regarding the significance of these several motifs, let us examine them in the light of the treaty "sun" concept and attempt to determine whether possible meanings which are in harmony with the "sun" concept, with the observable characteristics of the engraved imagery, and with what we know of Indian mentality in general suggest themselves.

For such a purpose, the question of mentality

29 Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, 1941, p. 87.
30 Spence, N. D., p. 21.
31 Spence, N. D., pp. 81–82.
32 Spence, N. D., p. 60.
is of great importance. The ultimate source and explanation of every artifact is a mental one. The substance and structural potentialities of the object are derived from the material world, but its essential character and significance are determined by the impulses and attainments of the human psyche at a certain stage of cultural evolution. And just as artifacts embody and preserve for us various levels of collective psychic experience, so also whatever we can learn about any level of psychic experience illuminates the artifacts which emerged from that level.

Applying this principle to the present problem, we find that early observers of the Indians describe certain mental attitudes and traditions which are of considerable moment to us. I shall quote two descriptions of these attitudes as observed among the Hurons and recorded in the Jesuit Relations. The first is from the Relation of 1636 by Father Paul le Jeune. "They have recourse to the Sky in almost all their necessities, and respect the great bodies in it above all creations, and remark in it in particular something divine.... They even fear his anger, and invoke him as a witness in order to render their faith inviolable, when they make some promise of importance, or agree to some bargain or treaty of peace with an enemy. Here are the terms they use, Hakhrihóté ekaronhiatékout Icwakhier ekentate, 'The Sky knows what we are doing today,' and they think that if, after this, they should violate their word or break their alliance, the Sky would certainly chastise them."

Father Paul Ragueneau makes a similar observation in the Relation of 1647–1648. "Very frequently they address themselves to the Sky, paying it homage; and they call upon the Sun to be witness of their courage, of their misery, or of their innocence. But, above all, in treaties of peace and alliance with foreign Nations they invoke, as witness of their sincerity, the Sun and the Sky, which see into the depths of their hearts, and will wreak vengeance on the treachery of those who betray their trust and do not keep their word."

Similar concepts prevailed widely among the Indians and among other peoples in a corresponding stage of mental development. It will be noted that these concepts involve the idea of an all-penetrating supernatural vision which is capable of overseeing the affairs of men, and an all-governing supernatural power which is capable of punishing violations of faith; further, that this vision and power are associated in the Indian mind with imagery provided by the sky and the sun.

When we re-examine the motifs engraved on the disks in the light of these ideas, it becomes apparent that the former might easily have been symbolical expressions of the latter. The open eye is one of the most obvious and most effective symbols of an all-seeing supernatural vision, and has been so used in later religious contexts as well as in connection with sun worship. The hand and eye combines this concept of all-seeing vision with that of the all-governing power: a strong hand ready to punish the unfaithful. The death head could conceivably symbolize the vengeance to be wreaked upon those who betray their obligations. Moore illustrates a border design, engraved on a bowl, which consists of eye-bearing hands alternating with death heads. Whether or not it was so intended, such a design would at least make sense if we conceived of it as representing three related aspects of the psychic state we have been considering. As such, it would simply be a pictographic statement of the consciousness, "We are seen, we are ruled, we may be punished."

Acceptance of these suggestions provides a basis for a plausible interpretation of the three engraved designs under discussion, an interpretation consistent with all the knowledge we possess of the total psycho-historical-archaeological context from which the disks emerged. Taking first the design on what we have called the single-hand disk (Fig. 1, e), the supernatural vision and power of the sun are symbolized in the hand-and-eye motif. The two "horned" rattlesnakes are presumably somewhat crude representations of the feathered serpent, the "horns" being abbreviated indications of the serpent's plumes. The presence of two snakes and the fact that they are knotted together seem to give even more definite expression to an idea suggested above in connection with the Mississippi tablet; the idea, namely, of binding together the spirits of two peoples. The fact that the serpents are rattlesnakes, and the emphasis given to the rattles on both this disk and the Mississippi tablet, might well symbolize the element of warning which each party to a treaty usually wishes to impress upon the other.

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25 Moore, 1905, p. 175.
The design on the open-eye disk (Fig. 1, k) is easily interpreted in terms of the ideas being considered. Here the designer has concentrated on one large symbol of the all-seeing vision, leaving the other elements of the context to function as an implied mental background.

The twin-hand disk (Fig. 1, k) can be only partially deciphered in terms of the present ideas. Enough has already been said to indicate the presumed meaning of the twin eye-bearing hands, but the other elements of the design evade satisfactory interpretation. The central bar with the twin heads might possibly be a simplified and condensed rendering of the twin feathered-serpent motif, the use of death heads perhaps emphasizing the idea of avenging power. What I have called the scepter-like form and the eccentric form on this disk remain completely indecipherable in terms of any concepts with which I am familiar.

Taken as a whole, the four disks with their engraved designs appear to lend themselves with considerable readiness and plausibility to the function we have postulated—that of treaty "suns"—and this function in turn provides a mental background in terms of which the designs could easily have been conceived and to which they would seem logically related.

One other fact deserves consideration before this discussion is concluded. The "suns" reported by Colden date from the seventeenth century, as do also the records of Indian mentality quoted from the Jesuit fathers. It would have at least an indirect bearing upon our case if we could determine the probable age of the existing disks, for, if they dated from a much earlier epoch, unity of their cultural background and that of Colden's "suns" would be more problematical than if they came from approximately the same period.

While we have no way of knowing how early such disks may have first been made, two recent studies associate many, if not all, of the existing specimens with a cultural complex involving Middle American influence and infused into southeastern North America at a relatively late date. Among the many aspects associated by archaeologists with this complex are not only examples of the disks themselves, but the use of the bird-serpent motif, the hand-and-eye motif, the open-eye motif, and the death-head motif. The motifs mentioned are used on other objects as well as the disks, and the complex, of course, includes many additional elements not found on the disks. With regard to the chronological position of this complex, Philip Phillips concludes that "there are strong indications that it will fall into the period immediately preceding the historic complexes." In other words, Middle Mississippi seems to belong to the last phase of the pre-Columbian history of the Mississippi Valley, say roughly the interval between 1400 and 1700 A.D. Any connection it may have had with Middle America must be relegated, therefore, to this disgustingly late period.

Waring and Holder have arrived at a similar conclusion. "To summarize the chronological aspects of the complex: these elements appear suddenly and late. When they appear, Macon excepted, they are apparently fully elaborated. No developmental sequences of the objects are traceable."

Thus chronological considerations in turn seem to favor our theory. The complex with which the disks are associated is assigned to a period which extended roughly from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries and therefore included the period during which Colden's "suns" were observed in use and during which the Jesuit fathers made their observations. The possibility that the function of the disks and the "suns" was identical is accordingly strengthened.

CONCLUSION

While positive proof is hardly possible, there is a considerable body of convergent evidence to suggest that the stone disks of the southeastern Indians, usually regarded as "palettes," may have been signatory "suns" connected with peace treaties. Colden provides two historical instances of the use of similar disks for this purpose, whereas no documentary evidence is available in support of any of the previous conjectures as to the function of the disks. The shape, size, and drilling of the existing disks correspond closely to those which Colden describes. The material of the existing disks, the traces of paint found on them, the limitation of the paint to two colors—red and white—and the prominence given to red, are all compatible with, and in some cases favorable to, the present theory. The presence of the feathered serpent among the images engraved on the disks provides definite proof of a solar association. The notching and the use of the hand-and-eye and open-eye motifs also lend

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38 Phillips, f. 1940, p. 365.
37 Waring and Holder, 1945, p. 28.
FIG. 1.—Southeastern stone disks: a, c, d, f, g, i, j, l, after Webb and DeJarnette; b, the "Mississippi Tablet," in the Ohio State Museum, from a mound in Issaquena County, Mississippi; e, disk with two "horned rattlesnakes" surrounding an eye-bearing hand; h, disk with two eye-bearing hands and other figures; k, the "open eye" disk. e, h, and k are from Moundville, Alabama.
Southeastern stone disks:

a, c, disks from Moundville, Alabama, in the Alabama Museum of Natural History; b, disk from Moundville, Alabama, in the Museum of the American Indian, New York; d, disk from a mound in Issaquena Co., Mississippi, the so-called "Mississippi Tablet," now in the Ohio State Museum. All photos courtesy of the institutions mentioned, except for d, which is courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.
themselves readily to a solar interpretation. The cultural complex with which the disks are associated is ascribed by archaeologists to comparatively recent centuries, including the century of Colden’s recorded examples.

In view of all these facts, it seems safe to conclude that there is at least as much evidence to support the theory that the disks were treaty suns as there is to support the theory that they were palettes.

Whether the disks and the rectangular tablets, at present grouped together as “palettes,” are to be differentiated from each other, the former being classed as “suns” and the latter retaining their status as palettes, is a question which I shall not attempt to answer. If the subject is of sufficient interest, perhaps this and other problems arising out of the theory presented here will be taken up at some time by readers of this paper.

Exhaustive search through the historical records of Indian affairs would no doubt bring to light further instances of the use of stone disks as signatory objects. My own incidental reading, carried on for a different purpose, has furnished one additional example of the use of a signatory “sun,” though in this case the latter was made of beads, not stone. This instance is recorded by Father Jean de Quen in the Jesuit Relation for the year 1655–1656: “In the summer of last year, 1655, it was thought necessary to send a Father of our Society into the country of the Agnieronon Iroquois [Mohawks], in order that we might, by this show of friendship and confidence, confirm the peace with them.”\(^3\)

The emissary reached the Mohawks, made his peace overtures, and displayed the presents which he had brought from the French governor. “One of the Iroquois Captains exhibited, in his turn, some very rich presents, in answer to the various articles of peace proposed by the Father. The first and finest of these presents was a large image of the Sun, made of six thousand porcelain beads,—its purpose being, as he said, to dispel all darkness from our councils, and to let the Sun illuminate them even in the deepest gloom of night.”\(^3\)


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