

**WHO WERE THE MOUND BUILDERS IN THE UNITED STATES**

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**Abstract**

In this paper we test Leo Wiener's theory that the builders of the mounds in the United States were people from West Africa. In 1310 Abubakari, King of the Ancient Empire of Mali, led 25,000 colonists to settle the New World. The research has yielded information that the Malian explorer-colonist left beautiful mound structures and writing. The results indicate that the African and American mounds have statues built in the same style with many of the same features. They support Wiener's theory that the Mande speaking people built some of the Mississippian mounds.

Key terms: Black Native American Mali, Mississippian culture

In the 1500's European explorers and conquistadors traveled the American southeast and found numerous Native American populations. Often they found Mongoloid and Black Native Americans living near one another in separate villages. Explorers, such as Hernando de Soto and Jacques Le Moyne found the Native Americans building and/or living on the mounds (Hodges and Lewis, 1907; O'Connor, 1995; Squier and Davis, 1848; Young and Fowley, 2000). They reported that the mounds were used for habitation, the King's residence or burial mounds for elites.

Who were the Mound Builders in the United States? Granted, most researchers agree that the Mound Builders were probably Native Americans but, controversy surrounds the ethnicity of the Mound Builders.

Leo Wiener (1922) claimed that many of the mound builders of the United States and Mexico were Manding speakers. He saw the mounds as defensive structures built on the African type of stockade model. Wiener noted that: "I have already pointed out that the mounds of the Mound-builders were town sites, with the hill for the caciques [chiefs] residence and temple, just as in the Sudan, and that the North American stockade is identical with the one in West Africa" (317). In this paper we will test this hypothesis by comparing artifacts found in American mounds and African mounds.

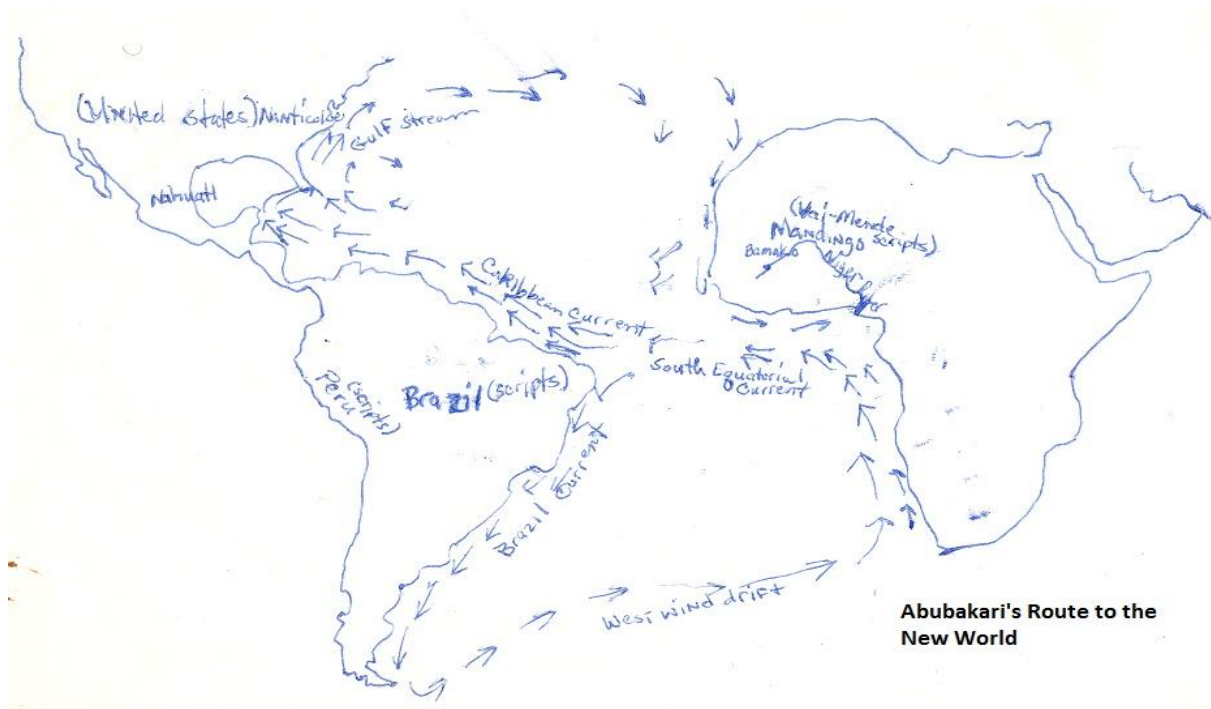
**Results**

We find many similarities between the art styles of the inhabitants of the mounds found in the area that encompassed ancient Mali, and the mounds built in the United States and South America.

In 1310 Mansa [King] Abubakari of the Mali Empire set sail from his Kingdom in West Africa to visit the lands across the Atlantic. In this expeditionary force there were 25,000 men and women (Winters, 2013). Over time the Malians were nativised so we can count them among the first Black Native Americans.

People in West Africa during King Abubakari's time were not ignorant of the nautical sciences and navigation. West Africans had a highly developed knowledge of boat technology and navigation sciences. The canoes they built from gigantic trees were as big as the boats sailed to America by Columbus.

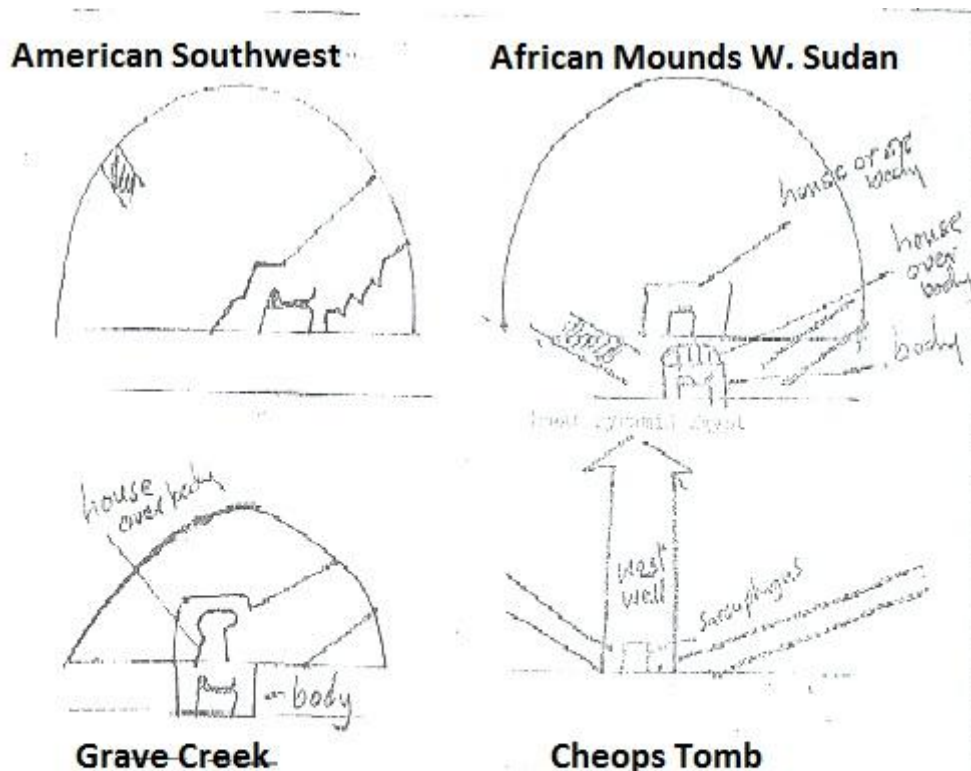
Much of what we know about African nautical sciences comes from Vasco da Gama. Vasco da Gama is said to have found information about the West Indies from Ahmad b. Majid, whom he met along the West Coast of Africa (Bazan, 1967). Majid wrote a handbook of navigation on the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, Sea of Southern China and the waters around the West Indian Islands. Majid is also said to be the inventor of the compass (Ferrand,1928).



Much of what is now Georgia was a stronghold of the Black Native Americans. These Blacks lived predominately from the Smoky Mountains in North Carolina southward as far as St. Augustine, Florida.

The vast majority of Native Black Americans lived in California, or along the Southeastern seaboard in North America. They belonged to many Confederations including the Muskogean and Algonquin. Some of their tribal names include Choctaw, Tuscarora, Secolan, Tamacraw, Nanticoke, Kashita (Kauche-te), and Yamasee to name a few. The BNA tribes mainly belonged to the Muskogean and Algonquin Confederacies.

The only occupied mounds seen by Europeans were those built by the Black Native Americans between the Carolinas and Florida the principal location of mounds in the southeastern part of the United States. Hernando de Soto the only European to see occupied mounds tells us much about their construction and use.



The Manding lived in mounds along the Niger rivers. The mound cultures of ancient America were built by Africans primarily Manding. The people of the Niger Delta formed river riverine communities which were partly

De Soto and his men discussed the mounds they found among the Florida Indians. De Soto noted that at Ucita, Florida: "The town was of seven or eight houses built of timber, and covered with palm-leaves....The chiefs house stood near the beach, upon a very high mound made by hand for defense; at the other end of the town was a temple...."(Hodge and Lewis,1907). It is interesting to note that in Florida one of the major ethnic groups living there was the Yamassi or Jamassi a tribe of Black Native Americans (Quatrefages,1889).

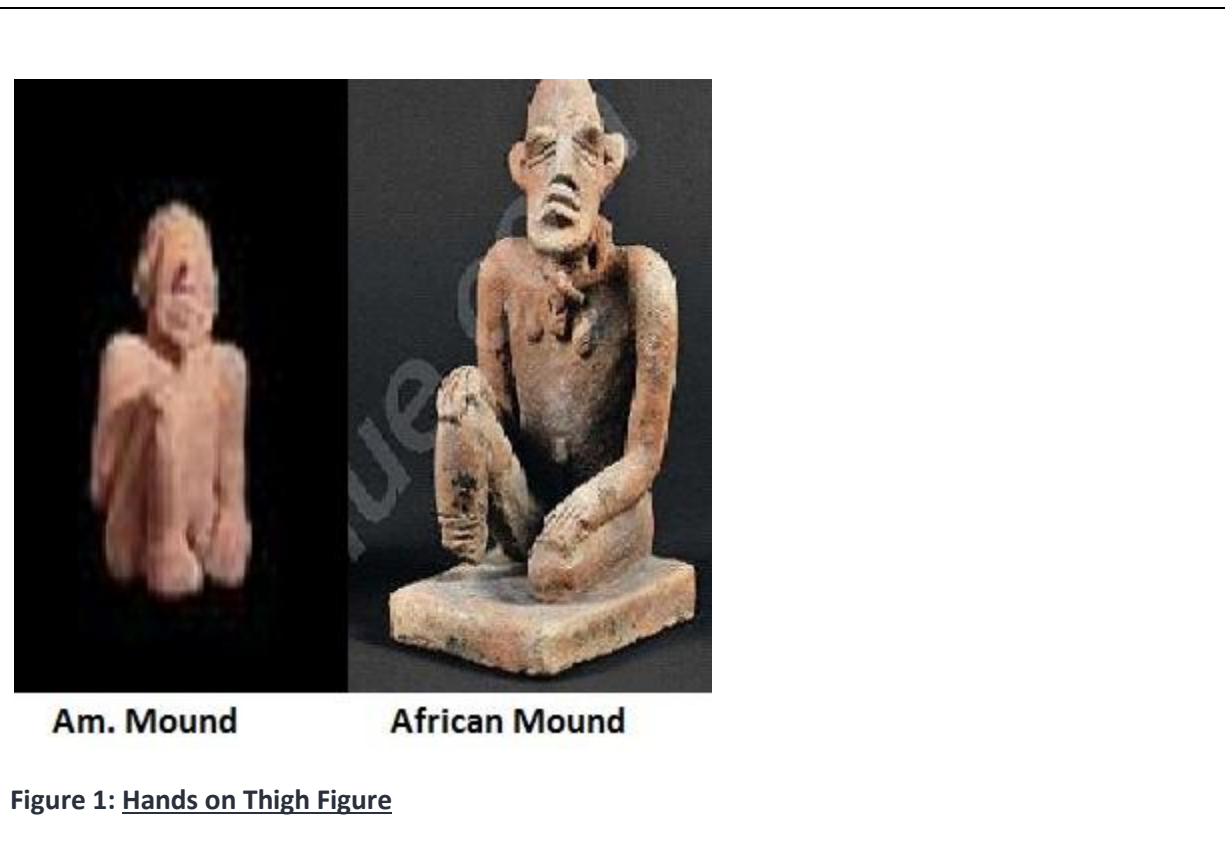
The mounds of ancient America follow the lines of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, and outlying regions as well. They vary in size from colossal mounds in Illinois to mere blisters rising from the earth.

The mounds in the United States are usually found near rivers. In the Ohio Valley 10,000 mounds have been discovered. In the north the mound zone begins in western New York and extended along the southern shore of Lake Erie into what is now Michigan, Wisconsin and on to the states of Iowa and Nebraska. In the southern United States the mounds lined the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to eastern Texas, and extended up through the Carolinas and across to the state of Oklahoma.

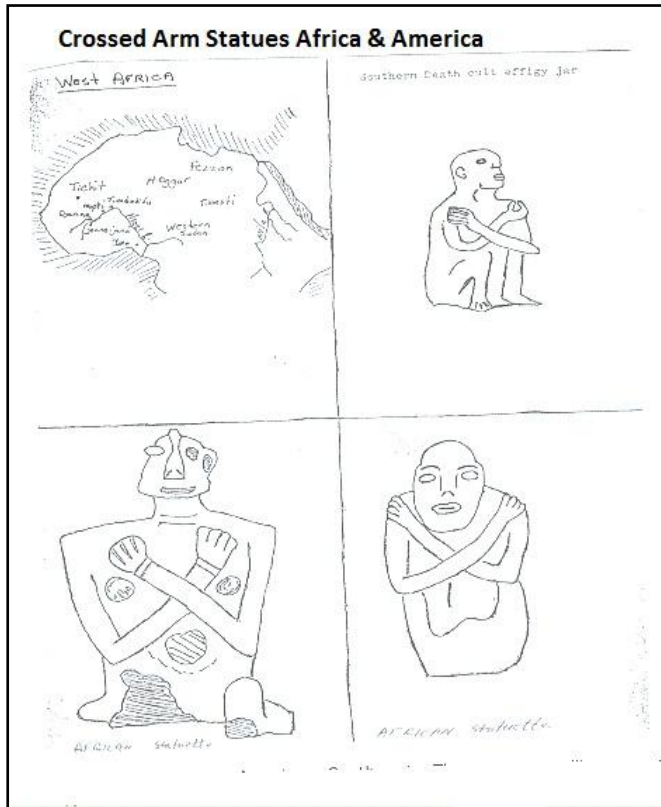
Most, if not all of these mounds had long been abandoned by their former inhabitants when they were discovered by the Americans, 200 years after the Spanish had witnessed the Yamasee building mounds. The excavated mounds have yielded human bones, weapons, tools, inscriptions and jewelry.

Statues of Africans have been found in these mounds. There were three types of African statues found in the ancient mounds excavated in North America and the western Sudan.

In Figure 1, we see the humanoid figure in a sitting position with their hands on the thigh and right knee pointing up while the other knee is resting on the ground are found in Tennessee and Indiana at the Angel site.



In Figure 2, we see the most common type of statue found in North America, that is the statues of humanoids in a sitting position with the hands placed across the chest have also been found at Etowah and Temple mound sites in Tennessee and Georgia. It is also interesting that anthropomorphic statues found in Polk County, Georgia are analogous to statues found in Mauritania.



**Figure 2: Crossed Arms Figure**

Black Africans are characterized as being broad faced, full lipped, illustrating prognathism , large boned with fleshy noses. Samuel Morton in *Crania Americana* , written in 1839 noted that Adena people possessed "ponderous bony structure[s]...large jaws and broad face". This description of the Adena, fits exactly the description of the West African type.

Most of the Malian influence among the mound builders corresponds to artifacts recovered from the Southern Death Cult. The arms on these statues are placed across the chest. The pipes recovered from many mounds in the United States and the name for Tobacco suggest that it was the Manding who introduced tobacco to the New World.

In Figure 3, we find the third type statue , found in West Africa and North America. These statues have as its base the feet and buttocks.

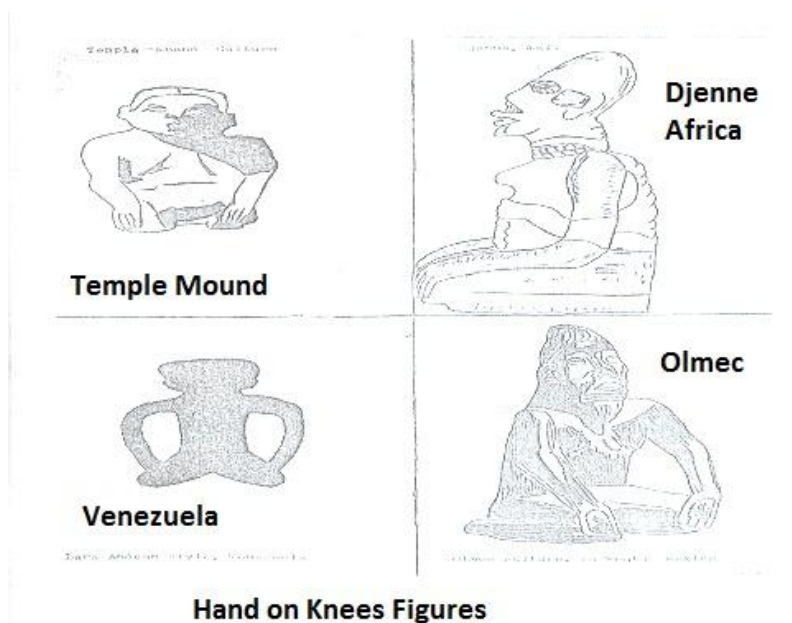


Figure 3: Hands on Knee Figures

The sculptural evidence found in the mounds all indicate an African origin as proven by Wiener (1922). A long pipe with a crouching figure on the bowl on exhibit in the New York Historical Society is of an African with compound bracelets, five on the wrist, six on the upper arm, four on the calf, such as only found in Mexico and west Africa. These bracelets are found in gorgets from the Etowah Mound, which show Malian influence.





Figure 4: Gorgets

#### Discussion

The Manding may have also constructed the Temple Mounds. In these mounds we see artifacts analogous to those discovered in Africa. These mounds were built between A.D. 700 and 1700. The Temple Mounds were built in the central Mississippi Valley, Arkansas, southern Missouri, southern Illinois and western Tennessee. All of these regions of the Southeast were inhabited by Black Native Americans.

Other sculpture heads and figurines of Africans have been found on the banks of Paint Creek ,near Chillicothe,Ohio; Tennessee; Mississippi; and on Green Flats in Virginia, which wear African headdresses ,skull caps and facial striations identical with those of the Manding. We also find the depiction of Africans in carvings from Spiro Oklahoma. At Spiro Mound African faces were carved on shells and the Manding cross sign placed on the palms of the hands on one artifact (See: Figure 4). This cross in the Manding script meant "righteousness, purity". Other inscribed works of art from the Moundville site in central Alabama also show Manding signs, especially the Manding cross.

In addition to the transfer of African style statues in the mounds the Malians also left many inscriptions. These inscriptions and statues support the African origin of many mounds in the United States.

In conclusion, this comparison of artifacts in the American and West African Mounds supports Weiner (1922) hypothesis that the Mound builders were probably of Mande origin. It would appear that some of the 25,000 colonist taken to America by King Abubakari, landed in the United States and built mound structures for habitation and defensive purposes.

A figurine found in a cemetery at Nashville, Tennessee was of an African women, while another African statue was found at Clarksville, Tennessee in 1897. These statues as well as heads on the **gorgets** from the Missouri mounds show analogous striations found on the faces of Manding clansmen (Wiener,1922).

The major reason for the varied art styles among the mounds that were built by the Malians, result from the fact that Mali was composed of many different ethnic groups that spoke different languages and practiced varied cultures. As a result of this ethnic pluralism we find an homogenous people who inhabited many mounds in the United States, that practiced a multiplicity of cultural forms.

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**Am. Mound**

**African Mound**

**Figure 1: Hands on Thigh Figure**

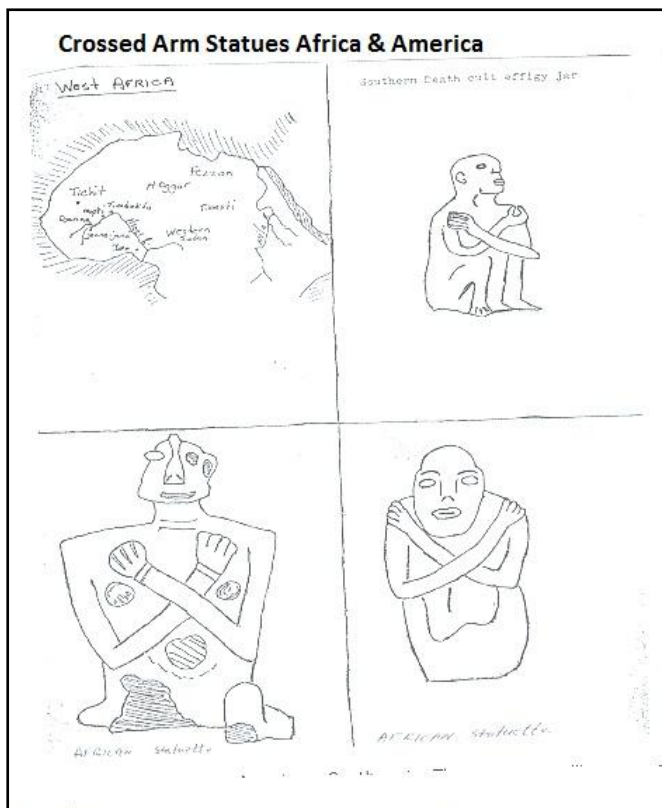


Figure 2: Crossed Arms Figure

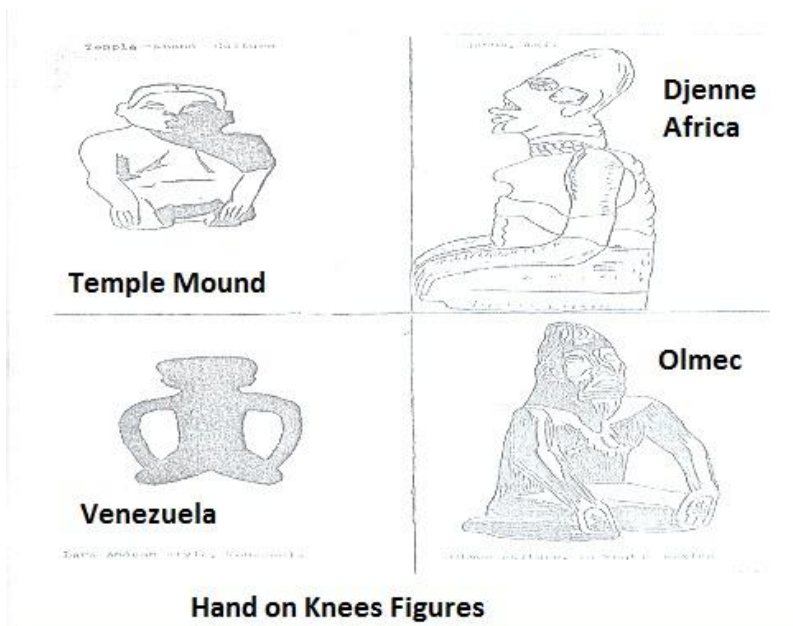


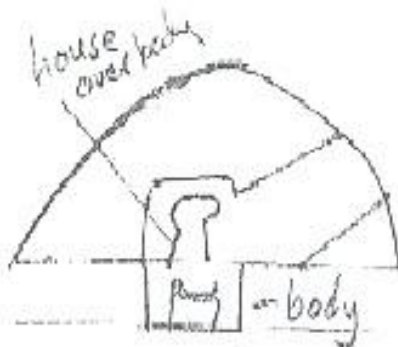
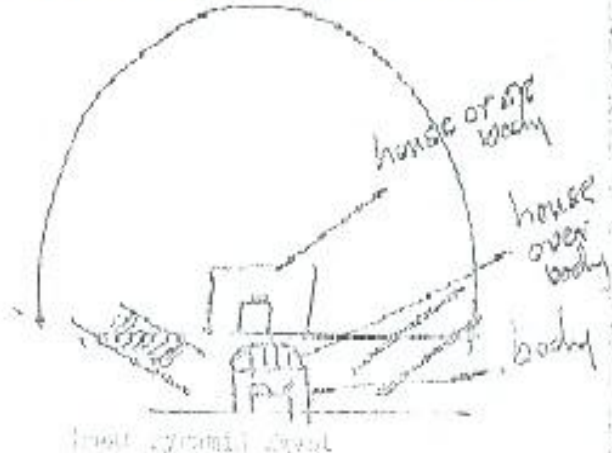
Figure 3: Hands on Knee Figures



**American Southwest**



**African Mounds W. Sudan**



**Grave Creek**

**Cheops Tomb**

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