



# The Cahokian

*Zoe Saadia*

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## **The Cahokian** Zoe Saadia

“The Cahokian” is a historical novel, based on the final years of the largest North American pre-contact empire.

Acoto, the Chief Warlord of Cahokia, accepts a mission in the far north-east. Determined to restore the fading glory of the Empire, he leads a campaign against the northern barbarians.

However, the League of the Iroquois is not an easy target. Before the day of the crucial battle is over he discovers his life is about to take a very unexpected turn.

## **The Cahokian Details**

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Author : Zoe Saadia

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# From Reader Review The Cahokian for online ebook

## J.A. Beard says

Rating 3.5 stars

In the 13th century, the massive Great Mound of Cahokia in the Mississippi Valley supported a huge city and the accompanying civilization. In the following centuries, this complex civilization would collapse. The Cahokian follows the unexpected life course of a warlord, Acoto, of this expansionist culture. The author examines cross-cultural familiarity in her exploration of the common human traits of ambition, attraction, and adaptation, but also provides something fresh in that the story spotlights a culture that has received little coverage in fiction.

At the heart of the story is the aforementioned Acoto. A proud, ambitious man, he finds himself embroiled in political struggle that thrusts him far away from his home. The author uses him as the lens to explore both the Cahokian/Mississippian culture and the Native cultures of the Ohio River Valley. Acoto is well-developed, and the author does a fine job of presenting his motivations, justifying his actions, and making him sympathetic despite his violent occupation. This is a particular feat as though there are various struggles presented in the course of the novel, his various foes, depending on circumstance, are far from evil, nor their actions not understandable. The Cahokian also does a good job of presenting two very different Native cultures of North America, allowing the reader to understand their mindsets, and also showing how ambition is a disease of all civilizations. Good secondary character development helps in presenting both the sympathetic and not so sympathetic people of both cultures.

I'm far more familiar with the Native groups of the west coast in recent centuries than the cultures of this time and region, so I can't speak to the total historical accuracy of everything in The Cahokian, but the fine level of detail certainly brought a strong verisimilitude to my reading experience. The novel seems well-researched. There are a few portions where, to my knowledge, the author has to fill in details, as our understanding of the Cahokian/Mississippian culture isn't as extensive as it perhaps should be, but none of it rings false, and it all fits in well with the more directly grounded elements.

While this extensive, at times educational, level of detail does a good job of taking the reader into the time and mindset of these ancient peoples, it also contributes to some of the weaknesses of the novel. There's a flagging tension in the second act as the book focuses more on cultural exploration. Depending on your tastes, this may not bother you, but it made portions of the second act feel slow to me. Even though the detailed discussion of the cultural differences was justified by the circumstances presented in the book, there were just a bit too many scenes where Acoto and others sit there and discuss the differences in their respective cultures. Thus, at times, it came off as more pedagogical than engaging. While such scenes were interesting from an educational standpoint, they damaged the pacing of the novel.

Similarly, there is such a thing as too much attention to detail, particularly linguistic detail when writing a story in a language other than the one used by the characters in the story. As someone who spent a number of years involved in linguistics and translation, I understand the urge of linguistic accuracy, but fiction is a different sort of beast. This sort of problem was a minor issue when it came to the rendering of certain Native names and places. There is a skill to rendering names from foreign languages in a story meant for general consumption. A reader otherwise unfamiliar with the language should be able to at least approximate all the sounds used. Several words were rendered partially with non-alphabetic symbols whose meaning was never defined or made clear. The overall result is that this fidelity to phonetic accuracy ended up being distracting

more than enlightening.

Acoto, as a warrior and a warlord, is involved in more than his fair share of battles. One might question the relative tactical disparity sometimes displayed by others in comparison to Acoto, but all the battle scenes had a nice tension about them and successfully communicated both the excitement and fear of battle without being overwhelming or fixating on violence for the sake of violence.

Overall, anyone interesting in a story about a man learning more about himself as he bridges two ancient Native North American cultures would be served well by picking up *The Cahokian*.

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### **Jean Paul LeFrey says**

An excellent book. Well written, well told and the subject matter was well explored. A book for all times, fits in the present time and will always fit the future. Prejudice is a universal subject and learning about others will remain a problem to solve forever. Worth the read.

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### **Sarah Castillo says**

UPDATE!!! Zoe Saadia sent it off to the editors and now it's back!! It's now a beautiful piece of work that deserves all 5 stars!

This is a really hard review to write. Saadia tells Acoto's, the Cahokian's, story with such grace and beauty. She describes the land and the people without referring to any of the common tropes, sticking to the history, but making it real and human. The story of his adventures, his battles, his betrayals, and how he changes is so compelling, so human.

What's really amazing is how she avoids giving us a series of immersion breaking info dumps to explain the Cahokian's culture by immediately thrusting into a culture that is not his own. Another culture that is unfamiliar to most readers. This way we are able to share a situation with Acoto, we are discovering this new culture together, while he also compares it to his old culture. It all feels very natural.

So why is this a hard review to write? Because I'm not sure that I can recommend this novel. The storytelling is amazing, the writing is amazing. The editing is absolutely terrible. It doesn't read like a finished work. In fact, it reads like a translation that was put through a particularly angry Word spellcheck. It didn't completely ruin the story for me, but it was like listening to a symphony on a scratched CD. The broken rhythm is jarring. And unnecessary.

So, if you are interested in a skillful historical fiction set in pre-Columbian North America, and you think you can read around the terrible editing, you should pick it up. If poor grammar and bad editing is one of your pet peeves, avoid this like the plague.

Check out my other reviews at my [blog](#)

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## **Elizabeth Marshall says**

What an amazing story!

The Cahokian is a great story about the clashing of two worlds. Acoto, a warlord from Cahokia, is thrown into the world of the 'Barbarians'.

However, as he learns more of their world he comes to realise that his might not be the glorious, proud empire that he once saw it as.

This story shows the great enlightenment of society and the diverse nature of humans. It is a gripping story filled with action packed battles and in depth analysis of the two different worlds. The descriptive writing talents are fantastic as Saadia paints vivid pictures of these wonderfully tranquil environments.

An utterly fascinating read which I recommend to anyone who enjoys a thrill and a peek into a unique and exciting new world!

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## **J.C. Andrijeski says**

I really loved this book. It has this very epic, timeless quality to it that's hard to put into words, but that made it both feel very real and specific to the historical period and also, yeah...timeless. The main character, Acoto, is a really fascinating and sympathetic person, and his growth throughout the novel is pretty amazing. But even from the very beginning I found him to be unusually subtle, intelligent and introspective compared to most of the books I've read lately, especially given how narrow his world view is at the beginning (for understandable reasons), and how little room there is for alternate opinions in the very political and religious setting in which he's raised. I love how he changes through the course of the book, from the political problems he has that drive him into making decisions and exploring parts of the world that he had no interest in seeing before...which eventually changes the course of his life entirely. I don't want to give away too much by saying a lot about the plot, but I really loved the contrast between the two cultures explored in the book, and all of the characters were so fascinating, from his "brother" in the other tribe (who is basically "him" only the version created by this other culture) to the brother's sister to all of the elders...I don't think there's a single character in this book I didn't find interesting, which is saying a lot, since the work is pretty ambitious. Zoe Saadia has really reintroduced me to historical fiction again, and making me want to read more of it! I read a lot when I was younger, and now I'm remembering why...there's something so incredibly immersive in reading a book of this kind when it's done well, with people I can wholeheartedly believe in, and in whose lives I become fully invested. Highly recommend!

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## **C.C. Cole says**

I found "The Cahokian" to be a great read! This book opened cultures I've rarely visited in fiction or non-fiction reading, exposing a brutal clash of people sparing the reader few details. The prose-driven story is big on detail and small on animation, and to me a reasonable variation in which to create an adventure novel with historic backdrops. I found the book fascinating from the first page and recommend it highly to readers that favor a treat from mainstream templates, paranormal romance, or dark fantasy stories. This fast-reading

piece is interesting and enjoyable. Excellent work, five stars!

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### **The TBR Pile \*Book review site\* says**

DNF - TBR reviewer: Monua

I found the blurb interesting but I couldn't get into the book. It was well researched. I only got about 25% through. I've come across books before that I just couldn't connect with. The thing is, I love historicals, so it is quite perplexing.

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### **Antoinette Ouellette says**

Following a warrior through Becoming exalted and praised ..then turned and betrayed by his own ..what a great start of a story ..I was so evolved in they storyline that I kept wanting Life to pause while I read! The historical descriptions had me scrambling to review the different stories I already knew ..and the way that I would react to a totally new life with Totally new priorities...Would I try to return to. My old life or relearn to live this new and totally foreign way? It actually gave me pause to think how strange democracy may look to an outsider..then the Warriors life story made me forget the politics as I waited to see if he could start anew.. Or start his own rebellion such vivid battles and so much knowledge and battle savvy be turned against his captors ?Having fallen in love gave him much to think about as well..would he ever be trusted? It was wonderful and full of historical points that were fascinating.Romance ,fighting,Political deviousness, It had it all! As a person who loves reading About First Nations and ancient Civilizations this was a humdinger of a story!

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### **Rhea says**

It took a bit to get into this book. Some typos jarred me a little, and one thing that really annoyed me was that I felt there were too many synonyms for "said" that should have just been kept as "said". Overall, these were fairly minor problems.

The story was a bit slow to start, but it got really interesting about 25% though, so I'm quite glad I stuck with it and pushed through.

While I had some minor quibbles with the writing, I enjoyed the story, and I will definitely have to check out more of this author's work.

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### **Sue Owen says**

I enjoyed the heritage that was present in this book. I liked traveling with the characters through their family's history and the traditions that were represented here. I think, however, that the plot needs some work. I was mostly confused between the 'then' and the 'now' time frames and don't feel they were

delineated enough. I feel it's not quite 'finished' and needs a good editor to correct tense and grammatical errors.

Typically, I don't review books like this that I consider unfinished however, I felt this one was worth the read just for the development both character and scenes that were put into it. I really liked reading about the traditions and ceremonies and why things are the way they are in this viewpoint.

I would love the author to spend some time editing and then read it again. I think it has huge potential to be a classic and just needs a bit of polishing.

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### **Tarrin Lupo says**

This was a fast read for such a large book. I had never known anything about the Cahokian culture and this time period. The descriptions were excellent and sucked me right in. The story flowed well but it does remind you how brutal and cheap life was back then. You can lose your life in a gambling game, sacrificed to stop the bad weather, used as a pawn in a land grab battle for politicians, family power grabs or simply a macho duel of egos. This is was a wonderful and fascinating time period that has been greatly ignored. The author defiantly did her homework and kept a tough topic very interesting. I liked the characters and it was well edited. The ending wrapped up nicely and does not toy with the reader. I am looking forward to what Zoe comes up with next!

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### **Leonide Martin says**

Interesting story about the ancient mound-builders of the Mississippi watershed and their interface with the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) alliance of five tribes. The political and social organization of the Five Nations Alliance formed a basis for the development of the U.S. Constitution. The premise is intriguing, that a Cahokian warrior from the primary mound city is captured by a raiding group of Alliance nation Onondaga warriors. The two groups were battling in overlapping territories for dominance. The Cahokian grapples with diametrically opposed social organization and values as he blends in with his captive tribe and rises to prominence. Eventually he must confront his former tribe and make choices about his loyalties, while romancing the sister of his captor. The plot keeps you engaged, a lot of research underlies the settings and tribal customs, and use of some Onondaga language adds authenticity. I would rank this 4 star except for numerous typos or misspellings, incorrect sentence structure and syntax, and too much bloody detail in battle scenes.

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### **Austin Briggs says**

Let me get it out of the way immediately: this is an excellent book. Now, to the specifics:

1. The book steadily pulled me in, enchanted me with the quality of the story. The book dives into a decisive period of life on Acoto, a Cahokian leader who fell captive to his enemy. For a while, the story became a bit of an obsession for me; I began to care deeply for the man. I don't have much time to read during the day, and that gave me the whole day to look forward to relaxing with this book at night :)

2. There's a lot of classical quality. The author explores the inner worlds and attitudes of the characters living in the alien (to me) culture, and builds a credible world that feels distinctly Native American, full of honor, war, love and betrayal. The book is packed with emotion, never becoming melodramatic.

3. I thought the research was not only outstanding, it was also built it seamlessly into the story. In fact, the story fed on rich details of life. While it's clearly a character-driven novel, I enjoyed the richly recreated location and the atmosphere.

I believe this is an important book. It stays well away from the usual stereotypes of the Native American character (noble savage, child of nature, ruthless killer, etc. - whatever they may be) and shows the world of real men and women who puzzled over the life's tough decisions, made mistakes, and now and then triumphed through the strength of their character.

As usual, I have one improvement suggestion, but in his case it's nothing that can't be resolved fast. The book is, overall, well-edited and pleasantly formatted. However, a few words are mixed up in a couple of places. Nothing major, and definitely not something to worry about while reading.

I truly enjoyed The Cahokian, and gladly recommend it to fellow students of history and human condition :) I can't wait for the author to release more well-researched, clever, deeply humane stories!

Zoe Saadia is an author to watch, with her keen understanding of human emotions and reactions.

Austin.

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### **Juliana says**

enjoyed this!

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### **John Caviglia says**

The Cahokian is a page-turner, plotted with plenty of pre Columbian intrigue, battles galore ... and at its heart a romance that bridges cultures. I found it truly gripping, particularly as I live in upstate NY, in which much of the action takes place. And as one with an abiding interest in Native Americans, it was fascinating to me that the plot is built about the conflict of the mound building culture (Cahokia) in present day Illinois, and the Onondaga of north/central New York State, who are essentially having a border war, with the distances involved like those of European states.

The deeper conflict in this novel is cultural and political, embodied in the main character, Acoto. The mound building society, of which he is a warlord, is in its distant way an echo of the Aztecs. They build pyramids. They practice human sacrifice. And their society is autocratic, patriarchal, hierarchical. They have a "king." There are "nobles" and "commoners." And when Acoto is captured by the Onondaga, one of the Five Nations of the Iriquois, he is faced with a totally different culture, in which all are equal and govern themselves—in effect, democratically—and in which women play an important matriarchal role. With a foot in each culture, and a beautiful Onondaga woman 'interested' in him, will he return to his own people...?



I find it fascinating that the Mississippian culture, of which Cahokia formed a part, was in pre Columbian America structured more or less like the European states of the time— that is autocratic, patriarchal, hierarchical—while the Five Nations of the Iriquois had a democracy long before there was any such thing in Europe. Weirdly, Acoto is in a cultural position akin to that of the first Europeans encountering the Five Nations. He leaves behind a past in what is in effect a royal court in Cahokia, with its posturings, intrigues, plots for power behind the throne, even murders, all quite Shakesperian, though the action occurs on pyramids ... and encounters an early version of 'united states.'

As the Mississippian culture was essentially extinct by the time De Soto—the first European to do so—crossed their lands, Saadia has a largely blank canvas on which to sketch the dramatic beginning of her novel. Not so the Iriquois, who are still among us as themselves, and she takes care to add careful cultural detail that concerns them.

Bottom line. The Cahokian is a great read in itself. And I laud Saadia's general enterprise, which is to bring the complex diversity of pre Columbian America to vibrant life.

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