She Took Off Her Wings And Shoes

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DO NOT DRIVE INTO SMOKE
Spiro Mounds, Spiro, Oklahoma
The title of the poem comes from a sign
posted at the Oklahoma border.

We retrace the village at Spiro Mounds,

as we move along the paths,
the mounds rise above us
three mounds together, tiered.

No one lives here now,
the Arkansas River is out of sight,
but we can hear the barges moving up and down.

Living close to the burial grounds and being buried here
means you have some connection with royalty;
gods.

The small lodge that held fifteen people
used smoke to keep insects and rodents away.

Conch shells that may have come from as far as Florida
are incised with drawings of armadillos.

As we drive away, not even a shape yet
only wisps shifting toward the white sun
then becoming two deer for an instant
leaping over the highway
then gone,
not needing to become
anything.