

TWO HISTORIC INDIAN BURIALS FROM AN OPEN SITE, 23AD95, ADAIR COUNTY, MISSOURI

by
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Abstract

Two historic Indian burials from Adair County, Missouri, are discussed. A summary of the site and description of the find are given; ethnohistoric inferences are made on the basis of the available data.

Introduction

In mid-September, 1964, an archeological site along the Chariton River in Adair County, Missouri (23AD95) was brought to the attention of Dr. Carl H. Chapman, of the University of Missouri by Junior Pickett, Francis Gashwiler, and James McKee of Novinger, Missouri. These three members of the Missouri Archaeological Society had been surveying sites along the Chariton River in north Missouri. Upon learning from them that possible copper trade items (reportedly a copper tinkler) and human cranial fragments were being exposed by cultivation, Dr. Chapman asked Richard A. Marshall, then Director of Highway Salvage at the University of Missouri, and the writer to inspect the area in order to salvage whatever features were in danger of destruction.

In the course of our excavation, it became increasingly evident that we had stumbled onto an unusual and important grave. There were two shallow, supine burials within what appeared to have been a prepared mortuary area that had a fence enclosure and protective cysts over each burial. With each burial there were a variety of historic trade goods. As

such, the two burials salvaged from the site seemed to offer an almost unique opportunity in Missouri archeology for ethnohistoric evaluations.

Hence the purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to describe the site, the excavation and what was recovered; second to determine an approximate date of interment; and third, to attempt an ethnohistoric analysis and interpretation of this mortuary feature.

Site Description and Excavation

23AD95 is an open site on the east bank of the Chariton River north of Kirksville, Missouri, in Adair County. The site is directly south of the county line between Adair and Schuyler counties. The topography of the valley in which the site is located is typical of the alluvial bottoms of the upper Chariton which may be characterized as broad, generally flat river terraces with occasional rolling sand swells.

When Marshall and I visited the site, cultivation had disturbed and obliterated some of its features (Fig. 1). Surface remains included a small amount of animal bone, grinding stones of a fine-grained felsite, biface fragments, a projectile point tip, waste and utilized chert flakes, a few pieces of rubbed hematite, and pottery fragments. The ceramics collected were all sand and sand/grit tempered ware with a considerable variety of surface treatment and ornamentation. In general, the pottery was quite similar to that found in the investigation of the Thomas Hill Reservoir

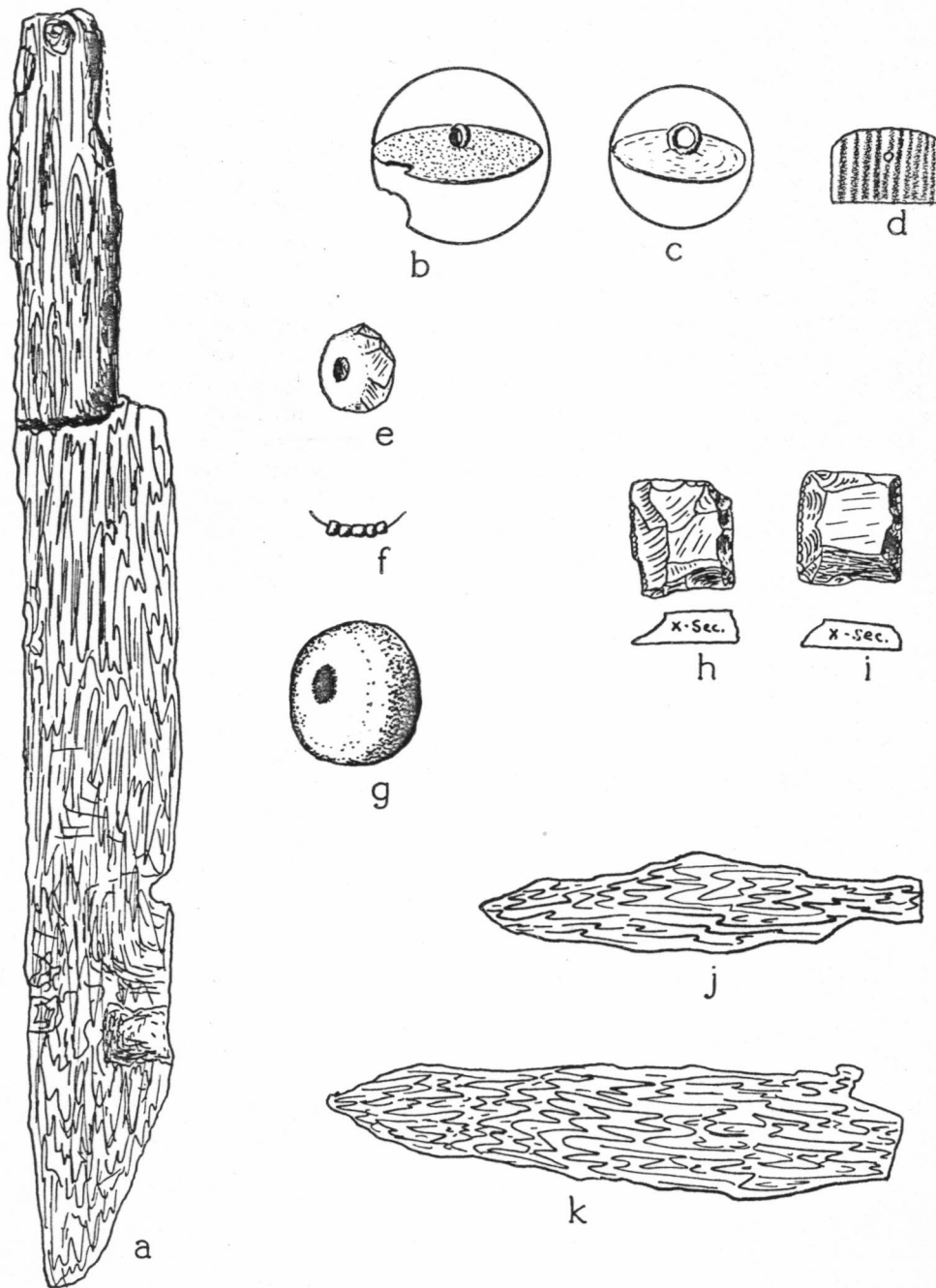


Figure 4. Grave goods from Burials 1 and 2 at 23AD95. All objects full size except e and g which are over size. a: iron knife with wooden handle; b: brass button; c: pewter button; d: fragment of sheet silver; e: faceted brown glass bead; f: seed beads; g: white porcelain bead; h-i: gun flints; j-k: iron blades.

One (Fig. 4h) found in situ, measured 19 by 23 mm. with a maximum thickness of 7 mm. The other (Fig. 4i) was found undisturbed fill near the feet of Burial 1. It measured 18 by 22 mm. with a maximum thickness of 6 mm. Both fall within the size range of pistol flints (Hamilton 1960:48, 49).

(M) A small perforated, transversely corrugated piece of silver (Fig. 4d) was recovered from the disturbed fill above the feet of Burial 1. The fragment resembles one of the ends of the smaller bracelet from the right arm (D), but is not as wide.

✓ (N) White porcelain seed beads and faceted brown glass seed beads were recovered primarily from the water screening. The faceted brown glass beads were from the pelvic and thoracic areas, while the white porcelain beads were concentrated mainly in a band just below the knees. Dimensions of the brown faceted beads are 3 mm. in diameter and 2 to 3 mm. in length, and the round white beads are 2.5 to 3.5 mm. in diameter and 2 to 4 mm. in length (see Fig. 4e-g).

(O) A utilized chert flake was found at the base of the burial basin 4 inches east of the copper or brass button (J), and may or may not have been a burial association. In this general area was the valve of a mussel shell.

Burial 2

Burial 2 was parallel to and immediately west of Burial 1. The skeleton lay on its back in an extended position with the head to the north. Plowing had removed the right humerus, ulna and radius, left and right clavicles, cervical vertebrae, and the skull and mandible. None of these elements were found, but the remaining bones of the burial were articulated and undisturbed. No indication of stature seemed feasible from field measurements. In reviewing the burial, Bass indicates that the individual was a female over age 30.

Copper staining was present on a few of the bones, but no copper or silver

ornaments were found with Burial 2.

Burial associations of Burial 2 included the following items:

(P) A large knife (Fig. 4a) of iron or steel was found adjacent to and east of the left upper arm, the handle near the shoulder. In general the knife appears to be similar to a modern butcher knife. Parts of the wooden handle were preserved.

(Q) Two small rectangular concretions from a large (50 by 62 mm.) thin rectangle of iron were found near the top of the burial pit between the two femurs. The rectangle was found in disturbed fill from Burial 2.

The only known grave goods not assigned to either burial is the copper tinkler found by Gashwiler.

Date of Burial

The trade goods recovered have made it possible to suggest a date, or rather a range of dates, for the time of burial of the two individuals. Admittedly, dating has been based on limited information, and not all of the items were considered. Major disappointments were the iron objects and the textiles, of which there were at least four different kinds; no satisfactory information has been discovered and they are not considered datable at the present time. Neither were the white porcelain and faceted brown glass beads considered. Nonetheless, the different kinds of items that were investigated provided a series of overlapping, closely related dates of manufacture or use.

In chronological order the gun flints probably have priority. Their prismatic form and dark gray-black color are indicative of English gun flints, which were first introduced into America around 1750. Prismatic gun flints did not become the predominant type until after 1775. Before 1775 the round-backed wedge-shaped French gun flints of amber color were in general use. In Missouri there was a gradual shift to the use of prismatic flints between 1770-1820 (Hamilton 1960:75).