

THE POAFPYBITTY SITE: A LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY KIOWA BURIAL FROM SOUTHWESTERN OKLAHOMA

by

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ABSTRACT

This report concerns the excavation of two Plains Indian burials in southwestern Oklahoma, six miles north of Fort Sill. The landowner, herself a Comanche, had been told by her father that the burials were of Kiowas killed near that place by soldiers from the fort in the latter 1800's. Removal of the grave fill revealed the skeletons of a middle-aged female and a teenaged boy, plus a large inventory of grave goods acquired both by trade and indigenous manufacture. The grave goods confirm that the burials were Kiowas, buried between 1872 and 1875. The burials from this site are compared to other documented Plains Indian burials.

INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1966, two men recovered a large number of "seed beads" from a hole excavated by children in what was believed locally to be an historic Indian grave. One man, who grew up in the neighborhood, said that local youngsters had dug at the site periodically for many years. The Comanche landowner said that her father had told her the grave contained Kiowas killed prior to the reservation period (beginning in 1875) when the father was a young warrior. The Kiowas, according to the father's story, were camped on East Cache Creek, 1½ miles east of the grave, when soldiers from nearby Fort Sill attacked the Indians and chased some as far as the site where several were killed. After the departure of the soldiers the Indians returned and buried their dead. Historic records (Nye 1937, 1962) confirm the presence of Kiowas on East Cache Creek several times in the early 1870's, which is commensurate with the informant's statement and with subsequent dating by artifacts in the grave. The same sources also confirm the presence of the informant's father in the vicinity at the time

The site, 34CM215, is near Chandler Creek, six miles north of Fort Sill in southwest Oklahoma. The pronunciation of the name, Poafpybitty, rhymes with Loaf-Pah-Bit-Eee, with the accent on the "Loaf" (like bread) and 'bit'. The Wichita Mountains, bare granite outcrops with a relief of roughly 1000 feet, begin about two miles south and west of the site. These mountains were semi-sacred to the Kiowa and Comanche, especially Medicine Bluff about five miles south (Nye 1937:76). To the east and north of the site the plains extend to the horizon. Historically, this area was the range of the Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, and Comanche tribes. The agricultural Wichita and Caddo also lived in the vicinity.

EXCAVATION

Initially, the site appeared as a shallow depression 1.3 by 2.0 meters in size, with the long axis east-west, at the approximate center of a 7.5 meter circle of stones resembling a tipi ring. The roughly globular stones, one to five pounds in weight, are common in the pastures around the site. A collector's hole was present in the east end of the small depression.

The collector's excavation was reopened and cleared of fill. In the fill fragments of rusted tablespoon bowls and numerous beads were discovered. At the bottom of the hole the partial lower extremities of two skeletons were found. The wall profile showed the edges of the grave across which the collectors' pit had been dug. Lack of a plow zone indicated that the site was virgin pasture. The entire surface of the area was

cleared of topsoil exposing the plan of a grave pit approximately one meter in width and two meters long. The grave fill was removed by following the walls, revealing a pit 0.85 meters in width by 1.76 meters in length at the bottom, with nearly vertical sides. Depth from the surface to the grave floor was 1.51 meters.

The two skeletons found in the grave were fully extended with their heads to the west. Along the south wall was the skeleton of an adult female, interred face down. Beside her, along the north wall, was the skeleton of a sub-adult male who had been placed on his back (Fig. 1). Both skeletons were complete with no evidence of disturbance except for the feet. Apparently, the earlier excavators had exposed the feet, removed souvenirs, and refilled the grave.

Preservation in the grave was fairly good with fragments of textiles, hides, and wood present. It was clear from the stratification of the contents that the two bodies had been placed in the grave first, various offerings added, and the total covered with one or more heavy hides, probably buffalo robes. The bodies themselves were not individually wrapped or bound, nor was there any kind of coffin. No artifacts were found in the undisturbed fill above the buffalo robes. There was nothing at or near the surface to indicate the sacrifice of horses, although such evidence probably would have been scattered in the century since the interment.

PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Burial 1

Sex: female

Age: 30-40

Stature: 158.5 cm

This is the well preserved skeleton of an adult female American Indian. All of the bones were present in correct anatomical order in the grave except the bones of the feet and ankles. Age is estimated from relative tooth wear and osteophytic lipping of the vertebral and other joints. Sex is based on pelvic morphology. Stature is estimated from the tables of Genoves (1967) for Indian females.

Copper stains are present in the regions of both wrists and forearms as well as the left scapula. The soft tissues of the distal half of

the right forearm are mummified due to the copper bracelets in contact with the flesh. The same condition is not found in the other forearm although it is also covered with bracelets. Mild obelionic deformation, asymmetrical to the left, is noted.

Trauma: None apparent.

Pathology: The bodies of the third and fourth cervical vertebrae are ankylosed anteriorly. No other sign of osteophytosis is found in the cervical or thoracic regions, but a trace of lipping is seen on the body of the last lumbar vertebra.

A button osteoma 3 mm in diameter is located 4 cm. above nasion in the midline of the frontal.

Anomalies: None noted.

Dentition: All 32 adult teeth are present. Despite considerable occlusal wear, there are no caries or abscesses. The maxillary incisors are worn to the roots with a decreasing gradient of wear to the third molars, which are worn only on the apices of the cusps. In the mandible, wear is much less pronounced and occurs principally in the molars.

Burial 2

Sex: male

Age: 13-14

Stature: No estimate possible.

The skeleton, except for the feet, was found complete in the grave. It was very fragile and disintegrated partially on removal. Age and sex estimates are based in epiphyseal union and the angle of the sciatic notch respectively. The skull is slightly warped, but there is no intentional cranial deformation. It is not possible to measure any of the fragmentary long bones.

Trauma: The right fibula had been fractured during life. The fracture had failed to unite, and the distal fragment of the fibula had undergone atrophy. This would have produced a weakened ankle, and probably a limp.

Pathology: There is no evidence of any specific pathology, but the poor condition of the bone compared to the excellent preservation of the other individual in the grave suggests that some mechanism may have caused the bones of burial 2 to be more susceptible to decay. This mechanism was possibly decalcification due to general debilitation from disease, or malnutrition which could have included actual lack of food or



Fig. 5. Reverse of woman's hand mirror showing aboriginal carving.

the pitcher. There is no lid. The approximate height of this pitcher is 37 cm and the maximum diameter, near the base, is 18 cm.

A large tin cup was broken and scattered in the vicinity of the pitcher. The activities of the collector account for its disturbance. The cup was probably about 15 cm in diameter and 7 cm deep. The rim was rolled and a handle was riveted to one side.

Pencil leads. Four fragments of octagonal pencil lead approximately 65 mm long were lying near the right elbow of the male. There was no sign of the wood of a pencil.

Sewing kit. A small leather pouch found at the left side of the woman's waist probably hung from her clothing or belt. It contained a brass thimble like those in use today. Nothing else was found in the pouch.

Rings. Near, but not on, the right hand of the woman were two German Silver finger rings. They are cut from sheet metal, and bent to shape but not soldered where the ends meet. One ring disintegrated upon removal. The other has a series of lunate figures stamped end to end along one border.

Seed beads. The soil around the bodies appeared to be lighter in color than that of the nearby dirt. Closer inspection revealed that the coloration was due to a tremendous number of seed beads. The heaviest concentration was over the back of the woman and near the shoulders of the boy, but lesser

numbers were found scattered over the grave floor. The collectors had disturbed only the feet of the burials, but to judge by the number of beads in their fill they must have encountered another concentration, possibly beaded moccasins. Because of the decay of the material to which they had been attached, no pattern was discernable in the scattered beads.

The majority of the beads are white, but turquoise and dark blue are also well represented. A lesser number of red, pink, and yellow beads are also present. An estimate places the distribution of the colors at 60% white, 15% each of turquoise and dark blue, and the remaining 10% of red, pink, and yellow. Few black, purple, and green beads are also present. The sample recovered was not random although it came from several different parts of the grave. For this reason exact percentages of the beads cannot be calculated.

Buttons. Several kinds of buttons were associated with the male skeleton, but none with the female.

Fifteen milk glass buttons were found on and near the chest of the boy, possibly from a shirt although no fabric remained to indicate one. These buttons are from 10 to 13 mm in diameter, and from 3 to 4 mm thick. They are plain white, biconvex in shape with a slight depression on one face, and have four attachment holes.

Milk glass buttons were introduced into the United States in the 1860's (Fontana and Greenleaf 1962). Two buttons identical to those from 34CM215 were found at the White Site (Suhm 1962), and others at the Yellowhouse Canyon burial site (Newcombe 1955). Similar buttons were found at two historic sites in South Dakota (Metcalf 1963; Smith 1960) indicating their common and widespread use.

A single hard rubber molded button with a ring-shaped brass shank molded into the back was found near the boy's waist. On the front is a raised eight-point star and on the back is the notation "N.R. Co. Goodyear's P". The button is 18 mm in diameter and 5 mm thick. The N.R. Company made buttons from 1851 to 1870 under Goodyear's patent. (Albert and Kent 1949:68 and 124).

Two very corroded iron buttons were found in the grave fill and could not be

assigned specifically to either skeleton. These round buttons are 15 mm in diameter and 4 mm thick. The front is concave and the back has a slight depression at the center. There are four attachment holes. Buttons of this type were used on civilian clothing as well as those portions of military uniforms which did not show, e.g. trouser flies.

Glass bottle. A cylindrical glass bottle 79 mm high and 36 mm in diameter was found between the skeletons. The bottle narrows 60 mm up from the bottom, with the remaining 19 mm being a neck 23.5 mm in diameter. A lip 5 mm high and 27 mm in diameter completes the top. The bottle had been plugged with a cork stopper which was found inside. A diamond of raised lines appears on the side of the bottle. Within the diamond is the raised inscription "HT & Co." The source of the bottle cannot be identified.

Hair plates. Three hair plates had apparently been attached as ornaments to some item of clothing on the woman's torso. These circular plates, 39 mm in diameter and 0.8 mm thick, have a circle 13 mm in diameter cut from the center except for an equatorial strip 4.6 mm in width by which the disc could be laced to fabric, leather, or a strand of hair.

Saddle. At the west end of the grave, above and between the skulls, was a saddle complete with buckles, rings, stirrups, etc. Very little of the wooden saddle tree remained, and almost none of the leather. Metal rims indicate a high pommel and cantle, but no horn. According to James S. Hutchins of the Military Advisory Board of the Smithsonian Institution (Pers. Comm. to WKJ) the saddle and stirrups are of civilian type in use prior to 1860.

Bits. Two complete snaffle bits were found, one at the extreme west end of the grave against the saddle, and the other between the bodies with the headstall. The mouth bars of the identical bits are 90 mm long and 9.2 mm in diameter and hinged in the center by interlocking rings. At the lateral ends of the bars is a rod perpendicular to the mouthpiece. This rod is 157 mm long and 9 mm in diameter at the center, and tapers slightly toward the ends which are capped with a ball 13 mm in diameter. Also attached to the mouthpiece at the same point as the rod is a ring 55 mm in diameter for attachment of the reins and headstall. These bits could

not be identified as to the maker since corrosion obliterated all marks on the surface of the metal.

Headstall. A decorated headstall was found between the burials. The leather portions of the headstall disintegrated during the removal, but the order of the decorations was noted before they were disturbed. In all, there are nine stamped German Silver ornamental pieces of aboriginal manufacture (Fig. 6). The decoration is by a line about 4 mm inside the edge of the pieces, with the space between the line and the edge filled with incised diagonal hatchures. Exceptions are the undecorated forehead pieces, and a naja or crescent which is decorated by stamped radial lines 3 mm in length. The backs of the pieces show solder scars from the attachment of straps. A typical attachment strap would permit passage of a leather piece 29 mm wide and 7 mm thick. The strap 28 mm long and 1.5 mm thick is made of a single piece of German Silver bent to shape. On the solder side the ends do not meet, leaving a gap 5 mm wide. The decorations can be duplicated in most museum collections of Indian bridles of the latter half of the nineteenth century, and are still made by Navajo silversmiths (Adair 1944: Plate 5A,D).

CONCLUSIONS

Dating. The grave could not be older than the 1872 issue date of the military helmet plume holder, not more recent than the 1901 date of acquisition of the land by the present owner's father. Further, the presence of the shell hair pipe breastplate, but the absence of bone hair pipes suggests that the interment occurred no later than about 1885 according to data presented by Ewers (1951). This date is confirmed by the large number of metal ornaments in the grave since Feder (1962:70) states that "by about 1880 metal ornaments were no longer popular on the Plains. The quantity of metal evident in photos taken between 1865 and 1880 is all but completely absent in photos taken after 1880". This would tend to confirm the informant's story, which indicates a date in the period before Indian white hostilities had ceased, or about 1875 (Nye 1937:235). This is the probable most recent date of the interments.

Tribal Affiliation. The informant attributes the grave to the Kiowa tribe and no reason