

NOTES ON GLASS AND SHELL BEADS FROM 46-KA-9 (MARMET)

By Roland E. Barnett and C. L. Paxton

The string of glass and shell beads, Figure 1, was found by us on October 24, 1952, at site 46-Ka-9, Marmet, West Va., with burial number 25. This was 14 yards east of Thirty-Ninth Street and 18 yards south of the Kanawha river, on property of the Ramond City Coal Company.

We were excavating a large ash pit, approximately four feet in diameter. The pit was filled with mussel shell, animal bones and broken pottery sherds. After digging to a depth of three feet the midden gave way to a mixture of yellow river silt and black loam, indicating that the soil

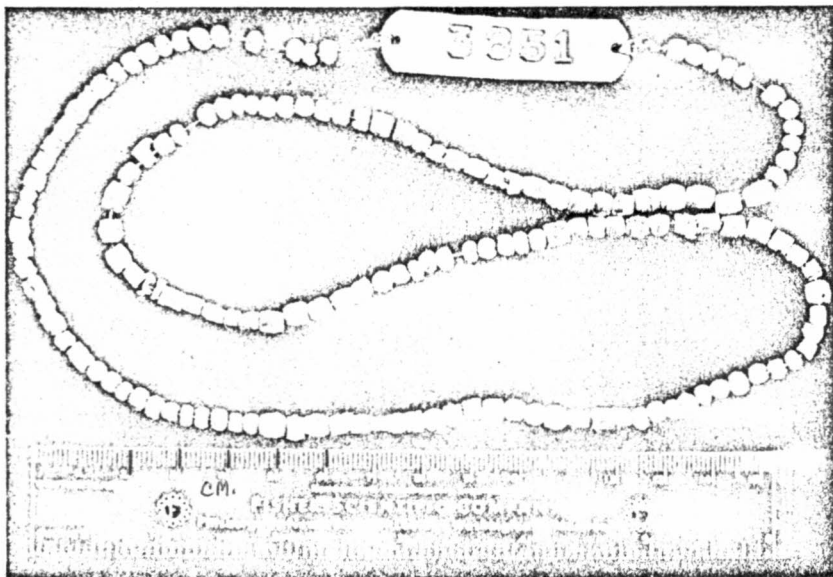
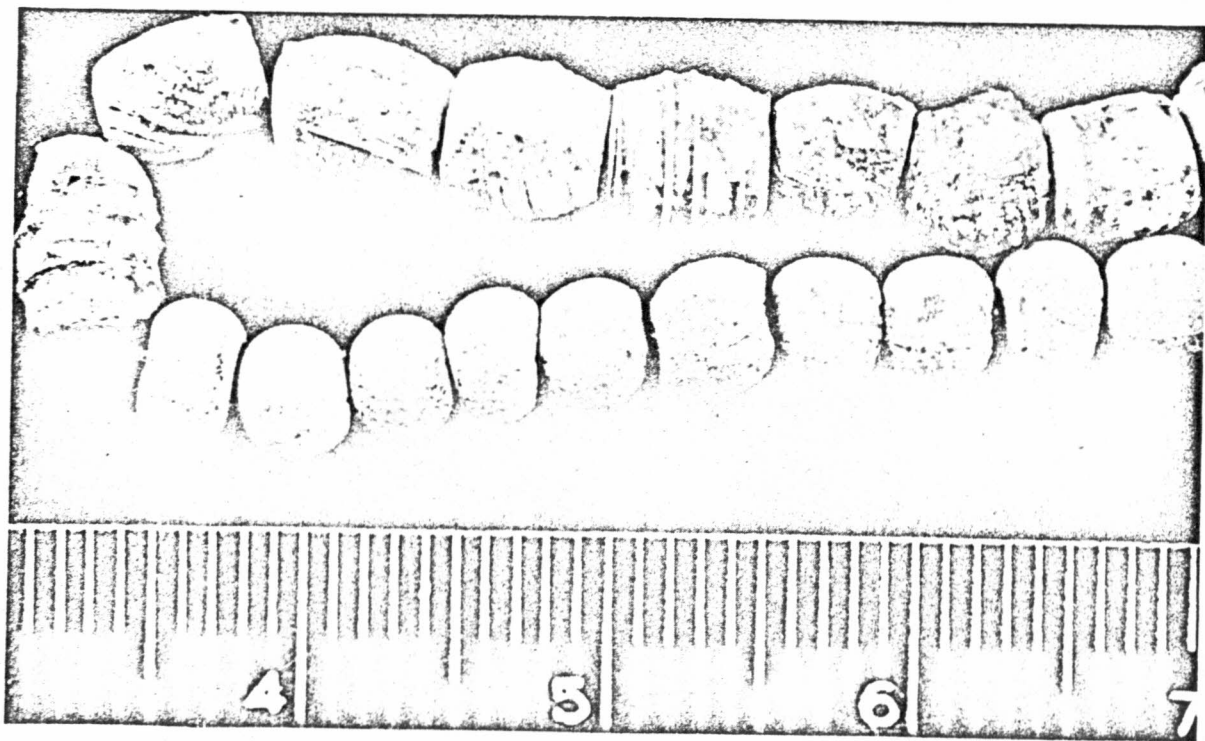


Figure 1

had been disturbed at some time. At a depth of four and one half feet, we found the leg bones of a skeleton. Then by carefully removing the top soil we uncovered the skeleton. The bones were in a good state of preservation, the body was extended, on back, arms parallel to sides, position north to south. The pelvic section indicated that the burial was that of a female. All the bones were in place except the skull which was missing, and there was no indication of any previous digging. From all appearances the woman's head had been removed before burial.



Enlargement of glass and shell beads found with burial no. 24. The beads

Figure 2

showing the smoothest surface are of glass.

The only artifacts found with this burial were 153 beads (Figure 1) laying in a row around the neck, across right shoulder and breast, extending below the sternum and back up to the left shoulder and neck. Some of the beads were out of place, probably due to flesh decay, but most of them were in a clearly defined row.

87 of these beads were of the small tubular type common to most Fort Ancient sites in this area, while 66 of the beads were glass, or at least some material resembling glass. They are bluish green in color, resembling jade. Great care had to be exercised in removing and treating the beads as they were very fragile and would crush with very little pressure.

At the time of the discovery we were not prepared with suitable photographic equipment so no photographic record was kept of the burial in situ.

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Editor's Comment:

We wish to comment on three points in connection with this interesting burial: (1) Decapitation before burial; (2) the presence of glass beads; (3) association with the burial of shell beads and the presence of pottery.

The practice of decapitation by the older Adena people of the area is, of course, well known, but we find no article on the subject of such a practice by the Fort Ancient. Was that a trait of Fort Ancient man?

The presence of glass beads -- if these are glass -- indicates direct or indirect contact with white people, and that the burial probably took place no earlier than the time of the first settlement at Jamestown, unless, of course, they were of Spanish or French origin. It may be that expert examination will determine the approximate time when made. The question probably will never be answered as to whether they were obtained directly from white traders who were penetrating the interior from Virginia towards the close of the 17th century, or whether they had been secured through the medium of exchange with tidewater indians.

The finding of pottery sherds buried presumably with the woman would indicate that they were contemporaneous with the beads. We hope some time to secure photographs and a description of the type of pottery represented by the sherds.

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