Vol. XVI Number 1

Researches and Transactions

of

The New York State Archeological Association

•

AN EARLY HISTORIC NIAGARA FRONTIER IROQUOIS CEMETERY IN ERIE COUNTY, NEW YORK

Archaeology and Physical Anthropology of the Kleis Site

by Marian E. White
State University of New York at Buffalo

With Appendices by William S. Cornwell, Audrey J. Sublett, Barrie R. D. Gillings, Donald J. Beck, and Joyce Sirianni.

PUBLISHED BY
NEW YORK STATE ARCHEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
ROCHESTER, N.Y.
1967

the edge of the foundation. All are flat, elongate pieces of iron. Three are wider at the blade end; the fourth is approximately the same width at both ends. On the two specimens (C19979, C19931) where observation could be made, the blade end is sharpened on one edge only so that it forms an acute angle with the other flat unmodified surface. On these two also the dimensions of the iron itself can be observed. One (C19931) is 3 3/8 inches long and 1 1/4 inches wide (Plate X). The second, C19979, is 3 1/4 inches by 1 1/4 inches. The form of the 2 differs sufficiently to indicate that these either were not manufactured according to a standard form or there has been considerable re-working. Both lack symmetry along the longitudinal axis. The other two specimens (C19983, C19974) are about the same size. Making allowances for the wrapping, which largely obscures the metal, neither was precisely the same size or shape as either of the others. This difference in proportions cannot be attributed to attrition from use since the variation occurs in all dimensions and on used as well as unused surfaces.

The wrappings on two of the specimens are around the short axis. On one the entire small end is covered with wrapping that extends 1 3/4 inches toward the bit (Plate IX, c).

On the second, the wrapping covers an area 3/4 inch wide near the center of the long axis. There are unidentifiable fragments covering the remainder of the surface to the small end, suggesting that this might have been covered at one time. The wrapping is fibrous and on one specimen seems to have been composed of strips about 1/8 inch wide. The material may be from the inner bark of a tree. It seems likely that some sort of handle extended from the small end of the object. No percussion marks are visible on this small end on those specimens where it is exposed. Probably these tools were not intended for chisels. Rather, they were manufactured locally from axe fragments and used for scraping in a manner similar to that employed with a flint scraper. The use of scraping tools was probably on the increase due to the demand for beaver pelts in exchange for European goods.

Arrowpoints—Three arrowpoints in the form of isosceles triangles with straight sides and bases were cut from sheet brass. Each is 1 1/8 inches in length. The sides are beveled on both surfaces to produce a sharp cutting edge. No filing scratches are visible. The base is unmodified. There are no signs of use. The presence of brass arrowpoints in middens as well as burials on Early Historic sites attests to the gradual replacement of flint points for use with the bow in hunting and warfare.

Beads—Six hundred and seven glass and stone beads were found both as lots and as single occurrences. They represent a variety of use as well as form and color. One lot of these beads has already been considered in terms of its interpretation as part of the medicine bag in Feature 11. These beads are the only find which were clearly grave goods rather than personal adornment for burial. There were 578 beads in this lot.

Twenty-four other beads occurred in two groups; the remaining 5 were single scattered finds. One group formed a short necklace worn by the individual in Feature 3. These (C19914) were strung in the following order: red tubular stone, red tubular glass, blue pea glass, and red tubular glass. The total length of the string of beads is 4 5/8 inches. All 4 beads lay beneath the mandible and were apparently worn in the front without spacers. The thong must have been considerably longer to encircle the neck. The necklace was composed of both glass and stone beads with only one contrast of color and form, blue pea vs. red tubular.

Twenty tubular cane beads came from Feature 13, and they may have been a necklace also. They were found on the right shoulder, upper chest,

and in back of the neck. They were scattered in such a way that the number of strands could not be identified. The total length of these beads is 32 13/16 inches. A single strand of this length would cover those portions of the body where the beads were located. Similarity of the beads in color and diameter suggests that they were selected for this ornament.

The individual scattered finds of beads may have been sewn on clothing as decoration or put in the grave with the body. The scarcity of beads would argue against these being chance inclusions.

Analysis of these beads by frequency of bead type is obviously biased by their occurrence in lots which were presumably selected by the Indians according to their taste and customs. Although the Indians may have had limited choice of selection of glass beads from those which European traders imported and distributed, they did make the arrangements of colors and forms which we find in the burials. Round glass beads were in the majority and tubular glass beads in the minority. Color preferences were blue, white, and red in decreasing order. These frequencies are determined by the lot in Feature 11 and may not be a reliable sample of the beads at the site. There were 313 round blue beads, including several shades from pale blue through turquoise to a deep blue. Only 2 of these were melon, 1 with 2 yellow and 3 white stripes and the second with white stripes. Round white beads numbered 263. Some were uniform white throughout while others had a core of clear glass that sometimes had a faint brown or blue-green discoloration. Round red beads were only 6 in number and were evenly divided between those with and without black centers.

There were 33 red tubular cane beads varying in length from 2 1/2 to 5/8 inches. In thickness, their outside diameter ranged from 1/8 inch to 3/16 inch and the inner diameter from 1/32 to 1/8 inch. The ends are unfinished and scarred from old breaks as well as new. Several shades of red occur.

Only 2 stone beads were found. One (C19914) is more similar in appearance to the glass beads than to the second stone bead. The former falls within the size and color range of the glass tubular beads. The only obvious difference is observable in cross section where instead of being round, 7 slightly flattened planes form an irregular circle. The hole is not centered as in the glass specimens. The material is either catlinite, red slate, or red fire clay. The second stone bead is red slate, 2 inches in length, 1/4 inch in outside diameter, 3/16 inch in inside diameter, and rectangular in cross section.

Since trade beads are one of the most useful time markers, an examination was made of surface finds of beads from the village area of the Kleis Site and these were compared with the beads from the burials. The surface finds are in the collection of Richard Buchauer. It is immediately obvious that the relative frequencies of beads are very different in the 2 samples. For example, only 1 white bead (0.8%) occurs in the surface sample, compared to 43% from the graves. Round blue beads are the most frequent in each, 47% in the surface sample and 52% in the graves. A much greater variety comes from the surface, especially in star, melon, and tubular beads. The percentage of red tubular beads is questionable because of the large number of fragments.

From these differences it is clear that comparisons of bead samples must be conducted with caution. Tubular beads break more easily; seed beads are more difficult to notice than pea beads; bright colors are more clearly visible than dull. An experiment revealing the importance of different factors in bead recovery from an excavated Seneca burial was conducted

by Graham and Wray (1961). Yet it is important to take relative frequencies into account. Therefore, the following frequencies of bead types in the surface collection should not be regarded as random samples of the bead populations, and the sample of tubular beads is probably the most unreliable.

	Number	Per Cent
Red tubular cane	7	5.8
Other tubular	10	8.2
Blue round	57	47.1
Red round	5	4.1
Red round with black center	23	19.0
Melon	3	2.5
Star	11	9.1
Other round	3	2.5
Other	2	1.7
TOTAL	121	100.0

A comparison of the bead types at the Kleis Site with those from sites in the surrounding areas shows the closest resemblances to Seneca sites of 1630-1640 and Oneida sites of 1625-1637. Charles Wray has very kindly examined the Kleis specimens and has stated that they are closest to Seneca sites of the 1630 to 1640 period. The Oneida sequence of bead types utilizes information from the Seneca sequence, which was earlier presented by Wray and Schoff (1953) and is not entirely independent evidence (Pratt 1961). Five types represented at Kleis appear at Oneida sites earlier than 1625-1639 and 2 appear later. The 2 types that are earlier at Kleis are the round red bead with black center and the twisted red tubular. The round red bead with black center is found as early as 1590-1615 on Seneca sites and therefore does not conflict with a dating around 1630 for the beads from the Kleis Site. The twisted red tubular bead is uncommon and therefore not reliable for comparisons. In short, the conclusion can be reached with considerable confidence that the Kleis bead complex is found on neighboring sites assigned to the 1625-1640 period.

Discussion of Artifacts—The selection of objects placed with the deceased can be examined for factors related to cultural values and beliefs. The most pertinent ethnohistorical information comes again from Huronia where it is possible to identify 2 classes of considerations which the Jesuits noted in selection of grave objects by the Huron. Those accompaniments in the first class are ones deemed necessary or customary because of the societal view of death, burial, and afterlife. The second class is comprised of those related to the individual characteristics of the deceased.

Only a few of the gifts presented at death became grave objects and were placed with the primary burial in Huronia. Most were distributed among the living (Tooker 1964:130). Gifts placed in the grave were for the soul of the deceased to have in the afterlife. According to the Jesuits' interpretation of Huron belief, one of the two souls of the individual went to the village of the souls in the west (Tooker 1964:140). Here their existence was similar to their former village life with all its activities and values. The souls of the grave objects accompanied the deceased, some for his use and others to enhance his prestige. Archaeologically this manifests itself as the custom of putting certain artifact types in nearly every burial where grave goods were present. A container of food is an example of something needed by everyone in the afterlife. Axes, robes, and collars were valued in the afterlife and were included with the deceased so that he would not be poor (Tooker 1964:142). Other types of artifacts were included because they would be

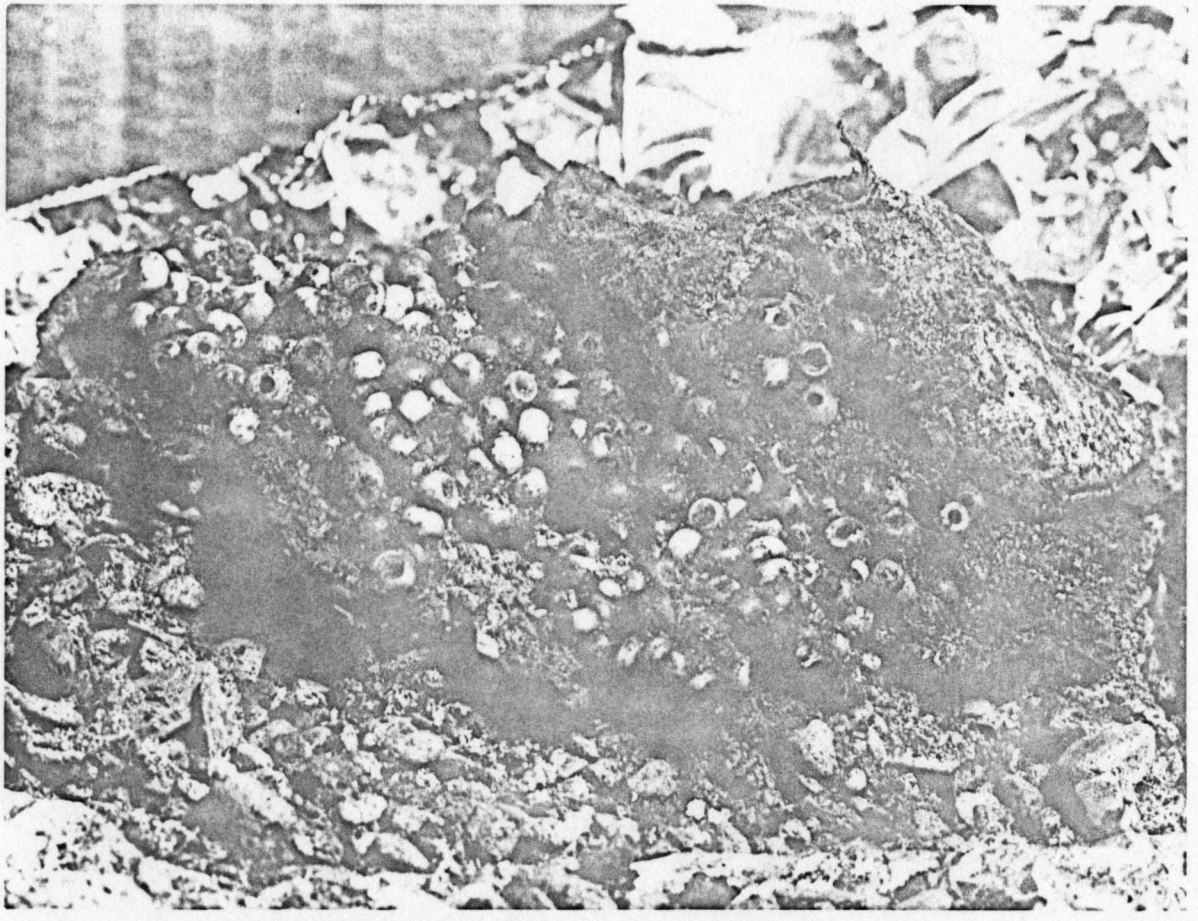

PLATE VI. MEDICINE BAG FROM FEATURE 11.
The oval form is discernible from the dark-stained soil.

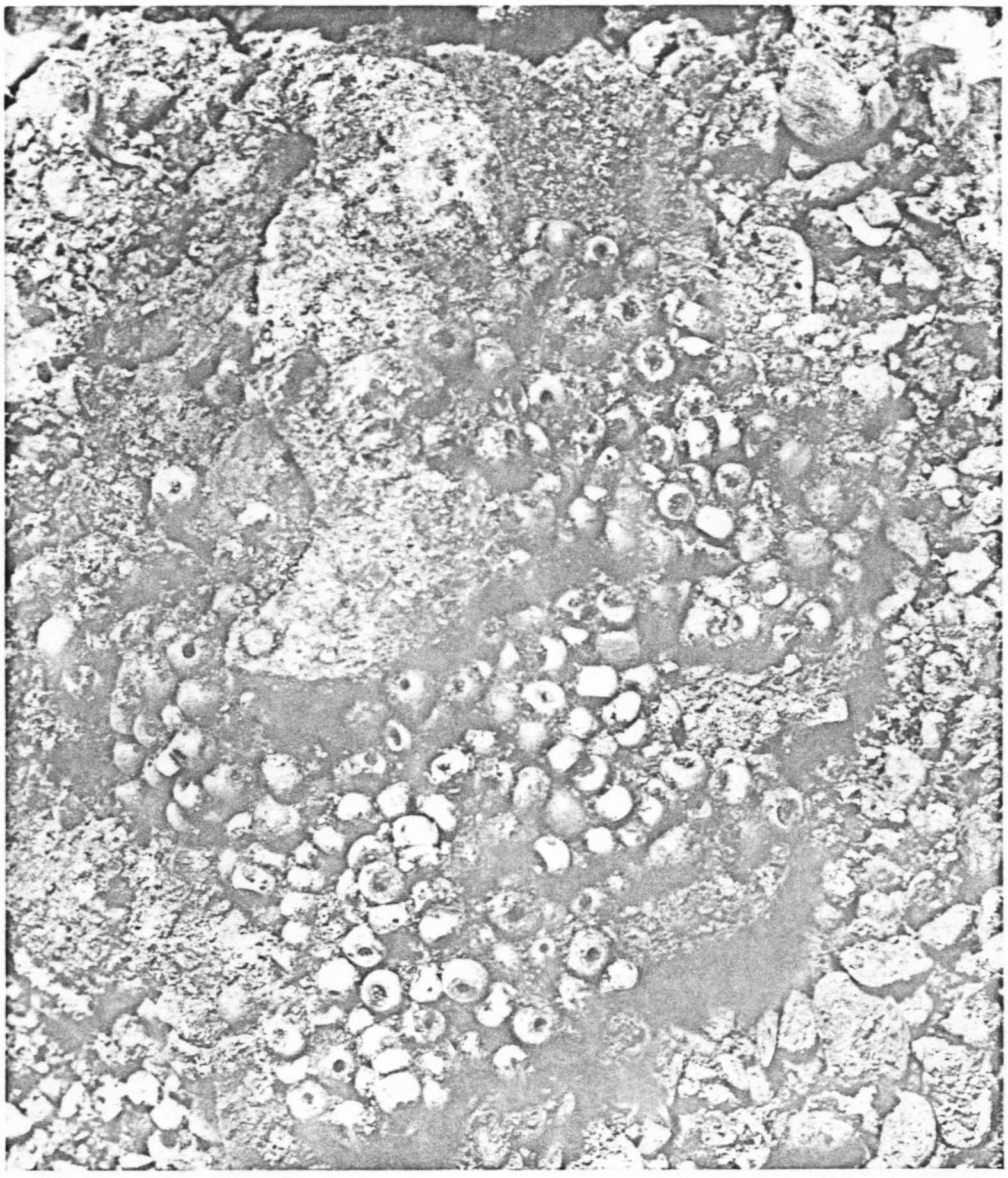

PLATE VII. MEDICINE BAG AND CANOE, FEATURE 11.
The side of the canoe is nearly exposed.