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ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS OF THE OSAGE¹

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SINCE 1939 the writers have attempted, from time to time, to locate village sites of the Osage Indians, in the hope of determining the type of culture that was associated with that important tribe. The Oneota aspect of the Upper phase of the Mississippi pattern has been assigned to the Chiwere branch of the Sioux with considerable assurance,² but identification of the culture of the Dhegiha branch has remained largely in the sphere of debate and speculation. It is not, however, entirely a matter of speculation, for some evidence has begun to come in.³ The problem is by no means settled, but in view of the times, it seemed wise to present such data as we have been able to gather.

The Osage have been known to the whites since the time of Marquette, but the first visit of which we have record was that of Du Tisné, in 1719. He reported one of their villages "eighty leagues above" the mouth of the Osage River, and discovered, also, an Osage village in what is now Saline County, "thirty leagues distant from the Grand village" and "one league, southwest," from the village of the Missouri.⁴

There is no evidence, from either the French period (1673-1762) or the Spanish period (1762-1800), which can be translated into terms of modern geography to enable us to locate precisely the Osage villages. At the same time, there is no reason for doubting that the greater part of them were situated in, or very near, the present Vernon County throughout the eighteenth century. There is good reason, too, for believing that the Osage were the *sole* occupants of that region, not only throughout the eighteenth century, but until 1825, when they ceded to the United States the last of their claims to Missouri.

In 1769 Rui reported to Governor O'Reilly: "The River of the Big

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² Griffin, 1937a; Mott, 1938, *passim*; Berry and Chapman, 1942, p. 290 ff.

³ Hill and Wedel, 1936, pp. 67 f.; Griffin, 1937b; Wedel, 1940, p. 337; Harner, 1939, pp. 19 f.; Baerreis, 1940, pp. 108 f.; Dellinger and Dickinson, 1942, pp. 288 f.

⁴ Margry, 1879-1888, Vol. 6, p. 310. In our Fig. 1 "B" indicates the Missouri village to which Du Tisné referred, "D" an Osage village, "C" a late Missouri site, "E" an old Missouri village mentioned by early nineteenth century explorers, "F" the place where Lewis and Clark camped, and "A" a prehistoric Oneota site. Other symbols are explained in the text.

established, in 1808, parties of Osage settled nearby and apparently remained almost continuously until the fort was abandoned in 1827.²²

Of especial interest to us, however, is the Little Osage village in Saline County ("D," Fig. 1). We have discussed elsewhere²³ our reasons for assigning this site to the Osage, and recent investigations have served to confirm us in that theory.²⁴

The field work for this study was conducted during the summers of 1940 and 1941. Our parties numbered never more than three or four individuals. We surveyed, but not as thoroughly as we should have liked, parts of Vernon County and of the neighboring counties of Bates, Cedar, Barton, and St. Clair. We examined the collections of local amateurs and visited the sites to which they directed us.

On the basis of this surface survey we concluded that there were three cultural manifestations in the area: (1) Woodland, characterized, among other things, by reddish brown to dark gray pottery with grit or crushed limestone temper (some shell), rough finish, and cord impressions or cord roughening on the exterior; (2) Hopewellian, characterized by buff to gray pottery with crushed limestone temper, incised cross-hatch, punch-and-boss, dentate stamp, or roulette designs, or combinations of these elements, on the rims and sometimes extending onto the body of the vessel; and (3) Osage, represented by four sites ("W," "X," "Y," and "Z," Fig. 1), the cultural material from which is discussed here. *We found trade material only on these four sites.*

Site "W." This village site is on the western edge of Green Valley Prairie, where the prairie breaks to the south to Old Town Creek, and to the west to the valley of the Marmaton. It covers approximately fifteen acres. We excavated an area of 750 square feet.

Artifacts came mostly from the surface, where there was a relative abundance of material. The excavation yielded few specimens and pottery was entirely lacking on the site. Large, round or oval, crudely-made flint scrapers far outnumbered other types of artifacts. It is probable that flint served much better for scrapers than did the metal tools of the traders and was therefore retained longer than other traits. Other artifacts include: small, triangular projectile points, large, notched or stemmed implements or points, and beveled knives of flint; mano stones and pitted hammerstones of quartzite, limestone, and sandstone; bun-shaped pestles of sandstone and quartzite; whetstones or abraders of sandstone; grooved sandstone arrowshaft smoothers; pipes of red and white claystone, siltstone, and catlinite; and many pieces of ground

²² Cf., Gregg, 1937, pp. 57 f.; Thwaites, 1904, Vol. 5, p. 60; Vol. 6, pp. 59 ff.

²³ Berry and Chapman, 1942, pp. 291 ff.

²⁴ Garraghan, 1928, pp. 262 f.; Nasatir, 1930, pp. 532 f.; Gregg, 1937, pp. 30 f.

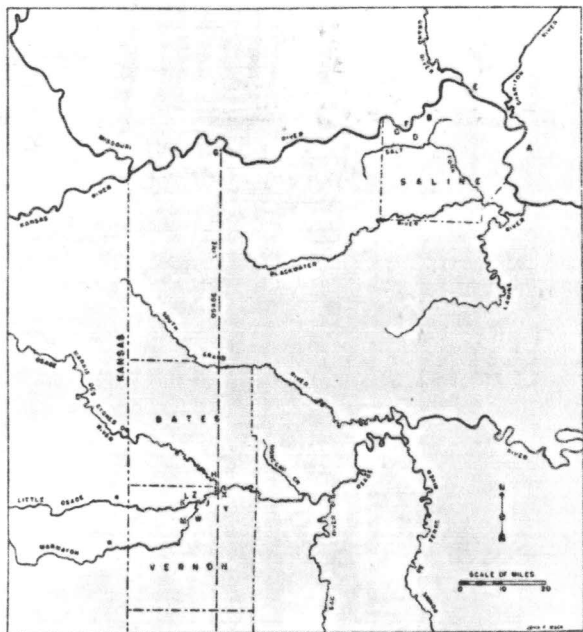
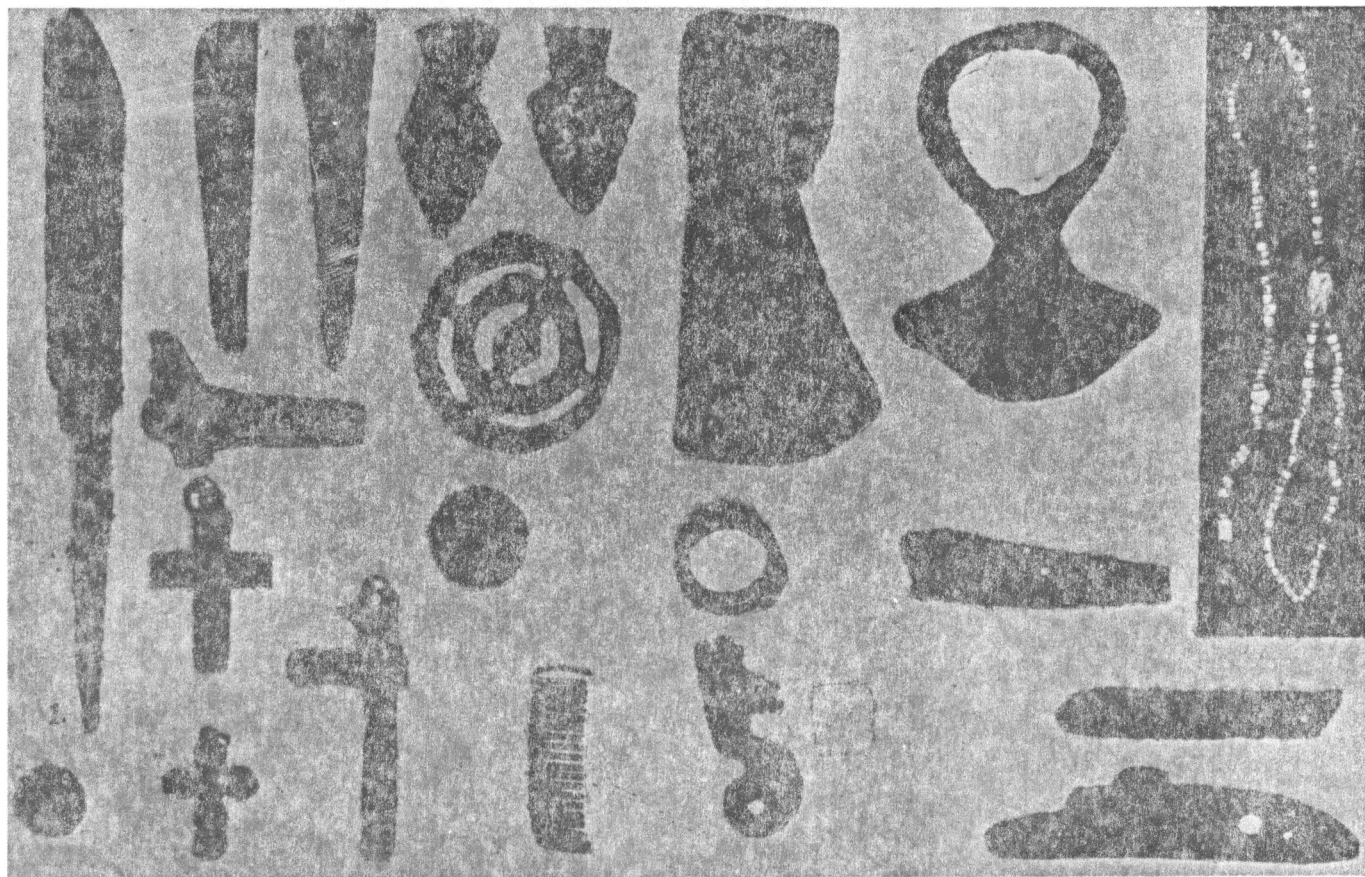


FIG. 1.—Missouri, west central portion, indicating location of sites discussed in text.



Trade goods from sites W, X, Y, and Z.

hematite. Deer bones were plentiful, but there were no bone implements. Antler work was represented by one knife handle.

Contact material was abundant and included flint-lock rifle parts; iron axes, hoes, knives, and awls; fragments of copper kettles, bells, wire, projectile points, spangles, small sheet disks, rivets, and crucifixes; copper or brass buttons; porcelain and glass beads; fragments of glass bottles; clay pipes; crockery fragments; and small silver ornaments.

Site "X." This village is on a well-known spot—Halley's Bluff—a timberland overlooking the Osage River. It has been a popular picnic ground for generations. The location of a so-called "Osage trace," or trail, is still marked by a shallow depression winding its way along the top of the Bluff. The site has suffered from vandalism, there being a common belief that an Osage village stood there and that many members of the tribe were buried there. One of the most interesting features of the site are the pits cut into the soft sandstone at the base of the bluff. At one time there were twenty-three of these, but only eight now remain, protected by the overhanging rock. A geologist described them seventy years ago, as follows:

They consist of a series of circular holes, twenty-three in number, dug down in the lower part of a thick sandstone, which forms the face of the bluff. The holes are five feet deep, on the average. They are larger at the bottom than at the top, being three feet across at the top, and five and a half feet in diameter at the bottom. They are only from one to three feet apart, and follow the course of the outcrop of the sandstone, which is north and south. They appear to have been made by some such instrument as a pick, faint marks of such a tool being still visible.²⁵

These pits are strikingly similar in shape and size to those at sites "Z" and "B" (Fig. 1.).²⁶

Our excavations consisted of a trench and several test pits on the camp site. These yielded very little cultural material, and we must depend, therefore, upon our own surface finds, upon the collection of the owner of the property, and upon information furnished by him. From his account, we conclude that the burials were primary and extended and that with them were found porcelain and glass beads, brass and iron ear ornaments and a catlinite pipe. Large stones were reported to have covered the graves.

Artifacts from the surface included small triangular flint points; large notched and stemmed flint implements; large, crude, flint scrapers; pitted hammerstones; mano stones; ground hematite; iron axes; and cut sheet-copper projectile points. No pottery was found.

Site "Y." This village covers about thirty acres, or more, on the highest part of an extensive ridge. The entire site, with the exception

²⁵ Broadhead, 1874, p. 152.

²⁶ Cf. Berry and Chapman, 1942, p. 295.

five acres of the site now remain, but old residents tell us that it formerly covered about thirty acres. Strip-mining operations for coal have destroyed the greater part of it.

During our two weeks' stay, an area of approximately 500 square feet was excavated. Fire pits and storage and refuse pits were discovered, evidently within house structures, but the soil was so hard and dry that it was impossible to determine the house outlines.

No pottery was found, and trade goods far outnumbered the aboriginal materials. Large, crude, flint scrapers were abundant. Other stone artifacts are enumerated in the accompanying table. A fragment of a two-piece bone handle and a perforated bear-claw ornament were the only bone work found. Contact material is given in the table.

Site "D." This site is located on the northern edge of the Petitesas Plain, in Saline County. At this point, the plain, bordered on the south by the Salt Fork, is two miles in width. At the northern edge there is a vertical bluff, at the foot of which, one-hundred feet below, lie the Missouri River bottoms. At one time the river probably flowed near the base of the bluff. The site covers about thirteen acres. At the base of the bluff there are springs which may have furnished the village with its water. The land has been in cultivation for many years, and the owner reports that about seven years ago he plowed the ground to a depth of nine inches. Since the cultural material seldom extends below that point, except in refuse pits, we worked most of the time in disturbed areas. Erosion, too, had done much damage.

Although no evidence of house structures was encountered, several features which were probably associated with houses were found. There was the lower part of a fireplace, circular in shape, with a burnt clay base and ashes in the slightly concave top. The owner reports that he turned up a great many pieces of burnt clay. We found one pit with apparently vertical sides, 41 inches wide and extending 42 inches below the surface. Within the pit were wood ashes; burnt clay; bones of animals and birds; charred grass, corn cobs, beads, and seeds; a few potsherds, copper spangles, iron knives, and flint chips.

Cultural material was not abundant, perhaps because the site has been a popular spot for relic collectors for a generation. No worked bone was found, but throughout the excavation we found the bones of deer, bison, dogs, wolves, ground-hogs, turkeys, and ducks.

Only 34 sherds were found, of which 33 were shell-tempered and one was sand-tempered. The color of the shell-tempered ware varied from gray to buff. One sherd had what appeared to be a cloth impression on it. The only rim sherd found had a flat, undecorated lip and was too small to allow any inference as to the vessel's shape or size. All sherds were very small and varied in thickness from $\frac{3}{16}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch.

DISTRIBUTION OF CULTURE TRAITS IN FIVE VILLAGE SITES, POSSIBLY OSAGE

<i>Traits</i>	<i>Sites</i>				
	W	X	Y	Z	D
Houses: containing 1-6 fireplaces, storage pits, refuse pits	x			x	x
Burials: primary, extended, some grave goods		x(r)			(r)
Pits: small storage pits	x			x	
bell-shaped, or vertical sides	x			x	x
rectangular refuse trenches	x		x		
Pottery: buff to gray, gray paste, smooth finish			x		x
rims, straight or slightly recurved			x		
handles and lugs, simple, undecorated			x		
decorations					
lip: punctuations, finger impressions, incising			x		
outer rim: incised lines			x		
shoulder: incised lines, punctuations			x		
design motif: hatching predominant			x		
temper: shell (quartz sand very rare)			x		x
Pottery disks			x		
Small, triangular, flint projectile points	x	x	x	x	x
Large notched or stemmed flint implements	x	x	x	x	x
Flint blades, elliptical, or leaf-shaped					x
Large beveled flint knives	x		x		x
Large, crude, oval or round flint scrapers	x	x	x	x	x
Small flint end scrapers	x		x	x	x
Sandstone cones			x		
Grooved sandstone arrowshaft smoothers	x			x	x
Sandstone abrading stones or whetstones	x		x	x	x
Sandstone and quartzite pitted hammerstones	x	x	x	x	x
Bun-shaped pestles of sandstone, quartzite, and limestone	x		x	x	
Mano stones of siltstone, limestone, sandstone	x	x	x	x	
Ground hematite of various shapes	x	x		x	x
Perforated stone disks			x		
Pipes: elbow type; of catlinite, siltstone, limestone, claystone, sandstone	x	x	x		x
Molds: geometric carvings on siltstone			x		x
Bone and antler: sharpened leg bone scrapers			x		
rib arrowshaft straighteners or wrenches			x		
split bone awis			x		
flat bone needles with eyes			x		
cylindrical, hollow bone or antler handles	x		x		
flat, two-piece bone handles			x	x	
small, polished, cylindrical tubes, beads			x		
"paint brushes"			x		
rib draw shaves			x		
unperforated bone disks			x		
hoes, of elk or bison scapulae			x		
flaker, of deer antler			x		
carved deer antler ornament			x		
Trade goods: flint-lock rifle parts, including flints	x	x	x	x	x
iron implements: axes	x	x	x	x	x
hoes	x		x	x	x
knives	x		x	x	x
awis	x		x	x	x
files	x(?)		x	x(?)	
arrow heads	x		x	x	x
copper objects: fragments of kettles	x		x	x	x
spangles	x		x	x	x
conical points			x	x	x
flat projectile points	x	x	x	x	x
bella	x		x	x	x
wire	x		x	x	x
sheet disks	x		x	x(?)	x
springs or coils			x		
crucifixes of copper and/or silver	x		x	x	
brass buttons	x				x
porcelain and glass beads; various shapes, sizes, and colors	x	x	x	x	x
fragments of glass bottles	x		x	x	
clay pipes	x		x	x	
crockery fragments	x		x	x	

(r) = reported.

Flint work consisted of small triangular points; large, stemmed, and leaf-shaped (elliptical) knives; large oval and small end-scrapers.

Ground stone was represented by sandstone abraders, whetstones, sandstone arrowshaft smoothers, granite hammerstones, ground hema-