

THE McCLELLAHAN OSSUARY: A STUDY IN DATA RETRIEVAL FROM A LOOTED, EARLY HISTORIC SITE

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ABSTRACT

The McClellahan ossuary is evaluated as to demography, cultural affiliations, and skeletal pathology in a test case of information retrieval in the context of extensive disturbance. The results indicate that even in such extreme instances meaningful, though limited, data can be recovered.

INTRODUCTION

The McClellahan ossuary (AjGx-8) is located in Esquesing Township several miles north of the town of Milton, Ontario, at map reference 855247, Map 30/M12W, Edition 4 ASE, Series A 751, on a small knoll (Figures 1, 4-5), and has been known as the "Milton ossuary no. 2" in the past. The area was under cultivation until recently. A larger historic ossuary was excavated in the same field by Mr. P. Hartney, formerly of the University of Toronto (Figure 1), and a prehistoric village site which lies west of and in between the two ossuaries was investigated by an Erindale College field school under the direction of Dr. A. Mohr, University of Toronto (Figure 1). Excavation of AjGx-8 was undertaken in September 1971 as a rescue operation, as the site was being looted to such an extent that complete destruction seemed imminent.

EXCAVATION

The ossuary area was gridded into five-foot units and excavation proceeded from the outside units towards the centre in order to isolate the ossuary edge. Once the edge had been defined the feature was sectioned from east to west. No artifacts or skeletal remains were encountered outside the ossuary edge. No work from on top of the feature was permitted, so as to avoid bone breakage through ground pressure, and all backdirt was screened through one-quarter inch mesh screening; looter's shovels, however, had left the majority of the bone in fragments. The extent of the looting became apparent when a candy wrapper was uncovered only one inch above the ossuary floor in the northwest quadrant.

FEATURES

The ossuary is circular, measuring 7 feet 6 inches in diameter and 11 inches in depth, although an original depth of 19 inches before both looting and ploughing is estimated (Figures 2-3). A sub-floor pit, measuring 17½ inches in diameter and 20½ inches in depth, was uncovered in the southwest quadrant of the ossuary (Figures 2-3), and this feature may be the only undisturbed area of the site. The pit contained a bundle burial composed of 3 adult females, 2 adult males, and a juvenile whose sex cannot be determined; such a deliberate (and separate) interment represents a discrete action with possible social implications such as a family grouping. The sub-floor pit was outlined by a black organic stain inch wide, possibly the decayed remnant of a hide or skin wrapping for the bundle.

CULTURAL REMAINS

Shell beads are the dominant artifact class at McClellahan, followed distantly by copper (Table 1). The presence of a blue glass bead, trade copper, and iron fragments place the ossuary

in the proto-historic or the historic period, and the assemblage is fairly typical of an Ontario Iroquois ossuary of the early historic period. Since no carbon samples were recovered and the glass bead is not presently dateable (see below), a more precise chronological ordering is not possible.

TABLE 1
ARTIFACT CLASSES AT McCLELLAHAN

Class	Number	%
Shell beads	908	98.5
Copper	9	0.9
Iron	2	0.2
Glass bead	1	0.1
Shell pendant	1	0.1
Projectile point	1	0.1
Totals	922	99.9

Shell Beads (Figure 8, c-t)

Of the 908 shell beads recovered, 878 (96.7%) are discoidal, 14 (1.5%) are barrel-shaped, 12 (1.3%) are cylindrical, and 4 (0.4%) are trianguloid. Diameters of the discoidal beads range from 6.0 mm. to 18.4 mm. with a mean of 8.7 mm.

Copper

Nine small pieces of trade copper comprise the sample, however only one fragment can be identified as to probable function. This specimen, approximately one-third of which remains, appears to be a bracelet and measures 32.8 mm. in width and 1.0 mm. in thickness.

Iron

Two small, badly rusted, fragments of iron were found on the ossuary floor near its centre. Their original shape, size, and function cannot be determined.

Glass Bead (Figure 8, b)

A single blue glass bead occurred on the ossuary floor adjacent to, but not necessarily associated with, the sub-floor bundle burial. It is wire-wound and falls into the W1b12 category (Kidd and Kidd, 1970: 62). Unfortunately this type is common to several centuries and a multitude of areas, and cannot be used to provide even an approximate date for the McClellahan ossuary.

Shell Pendant (Figure 8, a)

This broken specimen, which may have served as either a pendant or a gorget, is fragmentary and identified on the basis of a portion of a drilled suspension (?) hole measuring an estimated 4.7 mm. in diameter.

Projectile Point

The single lithic artifact is of bifacially chipped Delaware chert and is broken at a distance of 34.3 mm. from the base. It is basally thinned, has straight blade edges, is side notched, and the base is convex. Width at base is 35.2 mm.; notch width is 5.1 mm.; and notch depth is 3.0 mm. Thickness at point of breakage is 5.9 mm.

DISCUSSION

Little can be stated about the McClellahan ossuary in interpretive or comparative terms. It is reasonable to regard the site as being early historic in time because of the presence of European copper, iron, and the glass bead. Despite looting, one can observe a high ratio of native artifacts to European imports; this ratio changes at later Ontario Iroquois ossuaries such as Shaver Hill where over 400 trade items were uncovered (Stothers, 1973: 23) - this site dating *circa* 1600 to 1625 A.D. (ibid). A copper trade knife and an iron bar celt were recovered from the early historic Sopher ossuary (Noble, 1968: 200), paralleling the small amounts of the same metals at McClellahan.

Bundles containing two or more individuals are also found on other Ontario Iroquois ossuary sites, such as the three bundle burials adjacent to the main Shaver Hill ossuary (Strothers, 1973: 37).

The "false floors" characteristic of most Neutral ossuaries (Noble, 1968: 223; Ridley, 1961: 56) provide some clue as to McClellahan affiliations: This characteristic is not present, thus the site is probably Southern Division Huron. This interpretation is further supported by McClellahan's geographical situation, and indeed the adjacent prehistoric AjGx-1 village site is Southern Division Huron (Mr. W. D. Finlayson: personal communication).

PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Within the ossuary proper no bones whatever were found in articulation, probably as the result of the severe looting; only the undisturbed bundle burial exhibited relationships between skeletal elements suggestive of articulation, and even this feature has had some shovel damage to the long bones protruding above the level of the ossuary floor (see Figure 7). The skeletal material is here presented by anatomical components, and cultural inferences and a discussion of the bundle burial follow the morphological and pathological analyses. It should be noted that the data from the bundle are included in the main body of the analysis.

Cranial Remains

It appears that skulls and mandibles formed a primary target for the looters, as there were notably few large portions left intact; no fragments were large enough to yield standard morphological observations such as those employed by Anderson (1968) for the Serpent Mounds material. The majority of the fragments comprise parietal and occipital vault pieces, one immature occipital bone derives from an individual less than two years old, and at least one adult is represented by the other occipital fragments.

Teeth provide the majority of information available for the facial area, and Tables 2 and 3 show caries and *pre mortem* tooth loss. Small sample size precluded the inclusion of other dental observations. Caries is high in deciduous teeth and moderately high in permanent teeth. This incidence of dental caries is higher than Middle and Late Woodland populations for most southern Ontario sites (see Cybulski, 1968: 24). *Pre mortem* tooth loss is correspondingly high for the McClellahan population. At the early historic Sopher and Ossossane ossuaries *pre*

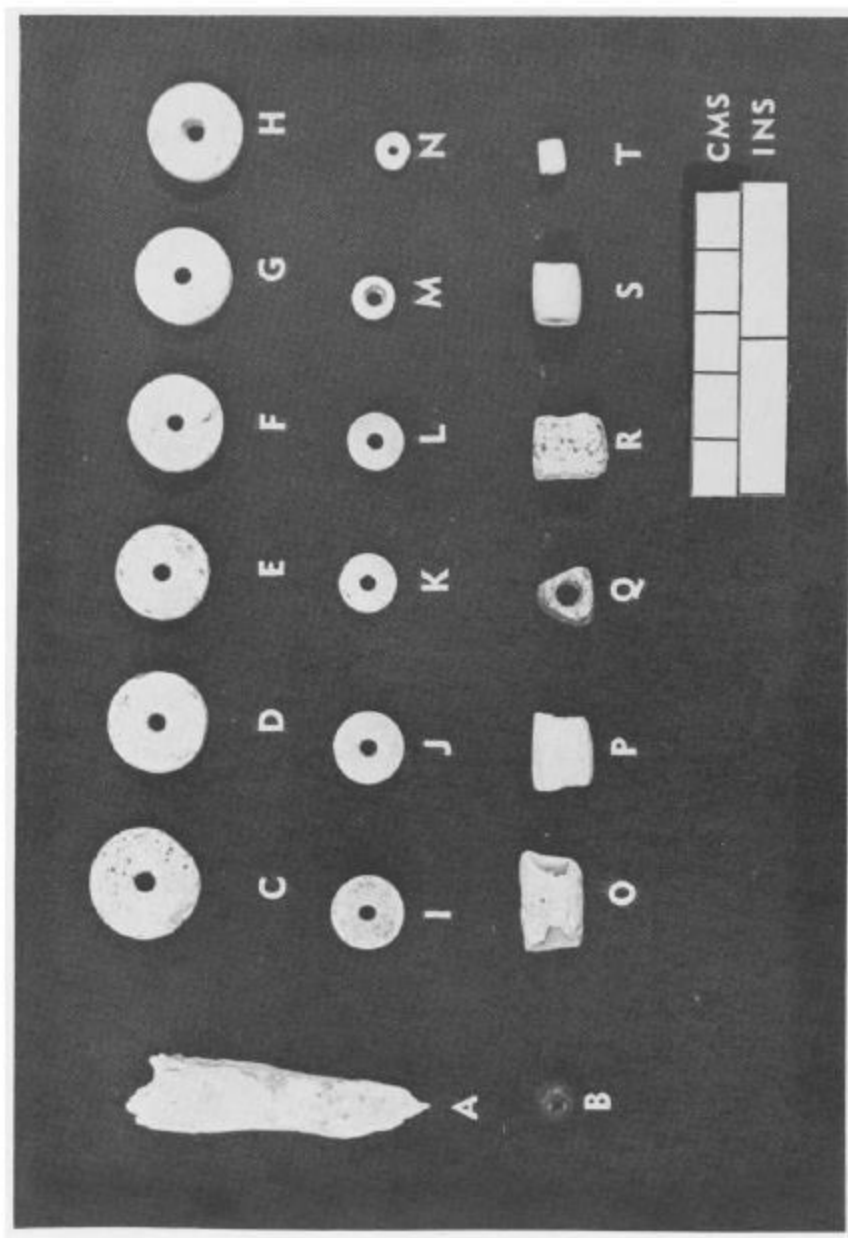


Figure 8

Cultural remains: a) shell pendant;
b) glass bead; c-t) shell beads