

PATAWOMEKE: AN HISTORIC ALGONKIAN SITE

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PREFACE

The site of the village of Patawomeke has been known historically for many years, but not until Judge W. J. Graham of the United States Court of Customs and Patent Appeals began investigation in 1935 was there any intensive archaeological excavation made. Following Judge Graham's death, the U.S. National Museum continued excavations under the direction of Dr. T. Dale Stewart. These investigations were carried on during the summers of 1938, 1939 and 1940. Through the courtesy of Mr. Setzler, Dr. Stewart and Dr. Wedel and the U. S. National Museum, the writer was able to study material from the site and to take part in the field investigation of the 1940 season. Two months were spent at the museum in the spring of 1940 examining the collection presented to the museum by Mrs. Graham and a portion of the material obtained by Dr. Stewart in 1938-1939. Following the close of the 1940 season the unexamined material of the previous excavations and the newly obtained material was shipped to the University of Chicago where the detailed study was completed.

Comparative remains were studied from the site of Moyaone, where the writer spent a very enjoyable week in pleasant surroundings, through the courtesy of Mrs. Alice Ferguson. Material from the Shepard site in Montgomery County, Maryland was examined through the cooperation of Mr. Gates Slattery of Washington, D. C. and the U. S. National Museum.

Through Mr. Setzler, Mr. Judd, Dr. Stewart and Dr. Wedel, the opportunity to study the material was secured, for which the writer wishes to express his appreciation. Mr. Krieger, Dr. Bassler and Dr. Kellogg of the U. S. National Museum were of great help in the matters of European trade material, minerals and mammalian remains, respectively. The direction of Dr. Fay-Cooper Cole and the fossil identifications of Dr. Cary Crons of the University of Chicago and the help of Mr. Charles Fairbanks of Ocmulgee National Monument are also greatly appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

Location of Site: The site of Patawomeke is situated on Marlboro Point, one quarter of a mile from the junction of Potomac Creek and the Potomac River in Stafford County, Virginia. What appears to have been another section of the site was located a short distance away on a promontory, locally known as Indian Point, at the junction of Accokeek Creek and Potomac Creek. The latter section of land has been subjected to erosion for many years, so that very little remains of what local people say was once an extensive point. On the remnant of Indian Point is a shallow, much disturbed cultural deposit, the pottery of which differs little or not at all from that of the main site of Patawomeke.

The larger site lies on the edge of a wooded bank approximately thirty feet above Potomac Creek. It occupies a low ridge, possibly two feet higher than the area immediate to the village the greatest height of land bordering on the water. Marlboro Point is in general around fifty feet in height, but rises to 100 feet in low swells a mile to the north and northeast. Below the site on the beach edge and just above high tide is a fine spring, possibly the major reason for the location of the village at this spot. Captain John Smith, after his visit to the Chesapeake area said: "Their buildings and habitations are for the most part by rivers, or not farre distant from some fresh spring" (Smith, John p. 30).

Physiographically the region is part of the embayed or depressed section of the Atlantic coastal plain. The Piedmont plateau begins approximately ten miles to the west where Fredericksburg is situated on the fall line. At present much of the point is open farming or grazing land, but in the past possibly possessed a cover of scrub pine, oak and accompanying vegetation, as the higher land to the northeast does today.

Problem and Procedure: Although to the writer's knowledge no formal evidence has been compiled and presented in the literature, students of archaeology and history have long recognized the archaeological site located at the junction of Potomac Creek and the Potomac River to be the site of the historic village of Patawomeke, visited by Captain John Smith in 1608. Such an identification of an archaeological manifestation with a site of known historic people -- in this case, a people known to be of Algonkian linguistic affinity and a member of the Powhatan political confederacy -- offers an excellent opportunity to utilize the direct-historical approach in archaeology (Wedel, W. R.; Heizer, R.F.). As Wedel has pointed out, archaeological remains of historically identified people can be compared with those of prehistoric groups and through such comparisons cultural and chronological relationships established (Wedel, W. R., p. 1). The excavation of and study of material from Patawomeke represent the beginning of the application of such a method in the Chesapeake area.

It is proposed, first of all, in this thesis simply to present the archaeological characteristics of Patawomeke. With this accomplished, other sites -- when more thorough investigations of them are

Dress Complex

Beads: Thousands of shell beads were recovered from the ossuaries and occasional specimens were found in the village refuse. Disc beads made up the greater portion of the collection. The smaller disk beads averaged an eighth of an inch in diameter and a thirty-second of an inch in thickness while larger forms measured one-half inch by one-sixteenth inch; the former were particularly numerous. Marginella beads, made by rubbing a hole in one side of the shell, were nearly as numerous as the small disk type. Cylindrical forms approximately five-sixteenths of an inch in length and an eighth of an inch in diameter were also common; this is the type often called wampum. Spherical forms with flattened poles, averaging a half-inch in diameter, and larger curved cylindrical shapes, an inch and a half by a half-inch also occurred. The larger cylindrical specimens occasionally exhibited multiple perforations: either the regular longitudinal perforations were met by others from the side (resulting in four holes.) Large flattened, roughly rectangular forms with rounded edges and concave ends were also present.

A peculiar hemispherical type with a concave depression on the flat side was found. A necklace consisting of beads of this form was found in situ. The hemispherical forms were grouped by twos, back to back, with the couples separated by small disc roundelles. Spherical forms were also discovered in situ, separated by alternating disc-shaped roundelles.

Spherical pottery beads were fairly common, twelve coming from the general refuse and several from the ossuaries. Most were slightly over a half-inch in diameter although larger specimens nearly an inch in diameter occurred. Perforation was made by moulding about a smooth reed or stick. One specimen possessed concave depressions half-inch wide and an eighth of an inch deep at the perforated ends. One cylindrical pottery bead was recovered; it was three-quarters of an inch long and a half-inch in diameter.

Many small cylindrical bird bone beads were found. Usually these were not polished, the cut ends not even being smoothed, but occasionally care had been taken in their manufacture and finely finished forms did occur.

Two pipe stem fragments which had been smoothed at the ends, apparently intended for beads, were among the Graham collection. One was of a native-made pipe, the other of "White-trade pipe." The exact provenience of either is not known.

There are many references to beads, particularly a variety white in color, in the works of the early writers. Smith in speaking of the women of Powhatan's village of Meronocomoco says: "(....) many of their heads bedecked with the white downe of birds; but every one with something: And a great chain of white beads about their necks" (Smith, John, op. cit., p. 49). When Smith was at the village of the Tockwoughs in 1608, the Sasquesahanocks made him the center of some sort of ceremony in which "(...) one ready with a great chain of white beads weighing at least six or seven pound, hung it about his necke" (Ibid., p. 61).

Strachey says of the Virginia inhabitants in general: "Their eares they boare with wyde holes, commonly two or three, and in the same they doe hang chains of stayned pearle bracelets, of white bone or shreds of copper, beaten thinne and bright and wound up hollowe. (Strachey, Wm., op. cit. p. 67. Possibly a reference is made here to bone beads.)

Powhatan's habit and the Virginia purse in the British Museum are both decorated with shell beads. The habit is a cloak of skin with close spiral designs and two animals, possibly deer, made by sewing marginella beads to the outer surface. The purse has many small disc and cylindrical shell beads sewed to the outer surface. Hanging from the narrow strips at the end of the purse are large spherical shell beads with flattened poles (Bushnell, David I., 1907, pp. 31-44).

An amusing reference is made in Smith to the town of Cuscarawoake, "(....) where is made so much Rawranoke or white beads that occasion as much dissention among Salvages, as gold and silver amongst Christians" (Smith, John, op. cit., p. 58).

The court records of Stafford County on April 11, 1666 say that peake taken from Captain Thomson, the Indian, was brought into court and appraised by Mr. John Hesbeard and Mr. Thomas Crogg, the apoyntment, who valued the said peake at 1700 pounds of tobacco and cask. Then various provisions for distribution of the peake or the equivalent in tobacco were made (Notes of W. J. Graham on the Court Records of Stafford County, Virginia, U. S. National Museum). This peake, a term for shell beads probably of the wampum type, very possibly came from the village of Patawomeke.

Gorgets: Gorgets of both shell and stone were found. Those of stone were manufactured from thin pieces of mica schist and were generally of crude appearance. Two specimens of the latter are included in the U. S. National Museum material, both being irregular in outline and having single central perforations, and one possessing notches or "tally-marks." Apparently related to the gorgets in form, but not perforated, are two mica schist objects, one from the Graham collection and one from the U. S. National Museum material. The Graham specimen is roughly rectangular with one concave side; the other is also roughly rectangular but with rounded corners and has two sets of five notches each on opposite sides.

The Graham collection includes two complete shell gorgets and two fragments, the U. S. National Museum collection has one complete specimen. All were circular in form, two possessing a double perforation with a connecting groove and one a double perforation with no groove, and two having single perforations. Designs were present on three and consisted of triangles arranged around the

Worked Sherds: These were generally rectangular in shape with the breaks partially rounded by smoothing. Sizes ranged between two and three inches. Fourteen were found lying in a small pile in the refuse of the defensive ditch. Five others were recovered in the general digging; two of these were Rappahannock Fabric Impressed. These sherds would have made excellent pottery smoothers and the striations present on the pottery indicated the use of some such implement.

Mortuary Complex: Three large ossuaries and several smaller burial pits were excavated in the combined digging. One of the ossuaries worked by Judge Graham was nearly thirty-five feet long and ten feet wide and contained well over 500 individuals. The bone pit excavated by the U. S. National Museum was oval, twenty feet in length, ten feet wide, three feet deep, and contained over 100 individuals.

Most of the detailed data are known from only one ossuary but the other ossuaries and pits would appear to have been similar to it. Predominantly, the bones were bundled by individuals and represented all stages of post-mortem decay. Most skeletons were completely disarticulated and arranged in an orderly pile with the long bones laid parallel. Apparently the whole skeleton was present including the joints exhibiting many cuts made in severing muscle attachments. One individual was disarticulated purposely, the bones of all ribs and phalanges. Some bundles contained articulated arm or leg bones, or vertebrae. Whole skeletons articulated completely, but exhibiting an unusual position, were present. The body was placed in the pit lying down, but with lower legs flexed unnaturally forward at the knees so that the feet touched the abdomen. At both ends of the ossuary which was excavated in detail were piles of cremated bones representing several individuals.

Ages of the individuals ranged from infancy to advanced adulthood. Both sexes were present.

Accompanying the burials were a considerable number of grave goods. Thousands of shell beads made up the bulk of the artifacts, but clay beads, clay and stone pipes, shell gorgets, bone awls and bone beads were found. Occasionally beads were placed inside the skulls, indicating that decomposition had progressed far before burial. Some of the ossuaries contained trade material in the form of glass and copper beads, copper and lead buttons, a bronze spur rowel, copper "hawk bells", iron scissors and a Dutch copper abacus counter dating from about 1600.

Smith gives the following information concerning burial practices:

In their temples they have his image [Okee, their God] evilly favouredly carved, and then painted and adorned with chaines of copper, and beads, and covered with skin, in such manner as the deformitie may well suit with such a God. By him is commonly the sepulcher of their Kings. Their bodies are first bowelled, then dried on hurdles till they are dry, and so about most of their joynts and necke they hang bracelets, or chaines of copper, pearle, and such like, as they used to weare, their inwards they stuff with copper beads, hatchets and such trash. Then lappe they them very carefully in white skins, and so rowle them in mats for their winding sheets. And in the Tombe which is an arch made of mats, they lay them orderly. What remaineth of this kind of wealth their Kings have they set at their feet in baskets (Smith, John, *op. cit.*, p. 35).

Strachey says:

For their ordinary burialls they digg a deepe hole in the earth with sharpe stakes, and the corpse being lapped in skynnes and matts with their jewells, they laye upon sticks in the ground and so cover them with earth; the buryall ended, the women, (being painted all their faces with black coale and oyle) do sitt twenty-four howers in their houses, mourning and lamenting by turnes, with such yelling and howling as may expresse their great passions (Strachey, Wm., *op. cit.*, p. 90).

The first quotation refers to the death house in which bodies were kept before burial. The second seems to be a description of the manner of burial after the emptying of a death house. Apparently more than the bodies of Kings were kept for some period prior to burial since total disarticulation is present in so many individuals. Also several skulls were found in which "mud-daubers" had built nests, and as this was in all probability impossible after burial, the skulls must have been kept in a tissueless state above ground for some length of time.

An isolated case of an individual burial was reported by Judge Graham. This was associated with a dog burial and was probably a single bundle burial.

Trade Material

✓ The majority of the trade material was recovered by Judge Graham. Glass beads were most numerous in this category of artifacts and may be listed as follows: opaque black (numerous); opaque greenish-blue (numerous); opaque red with black interiors (eight); white with alternate red and blue stripes (one); translucent dark blue (two); opaque white (four). These types were small and more or less disk-shaped and averaged an eighth of an inch in diameter. A larger type was cylindrical, usually a half-inch long and an eighth of an inch in diameter, and was made in solid colors of red (numerous), blue (numerous), white (one), and black (nine). This last type appears to have been made in long sticks, as macaroni, and broken up as desired.

Three tabular copper beads an inch and a quarter long and made of rolled sheet copper were recovered. Smaller beads, an eighth of an inch in length, were manufactured in the same manner. One barrel-shaped copper bead, a quarter of an inch long, was massive and possibly might be of native manufacture.

Three copper and two lead buttons were found in one ossuary. Small copper "hawk bells" between a half-inch and an inch in diameter were fairly common, fifty-five being found. One short length of

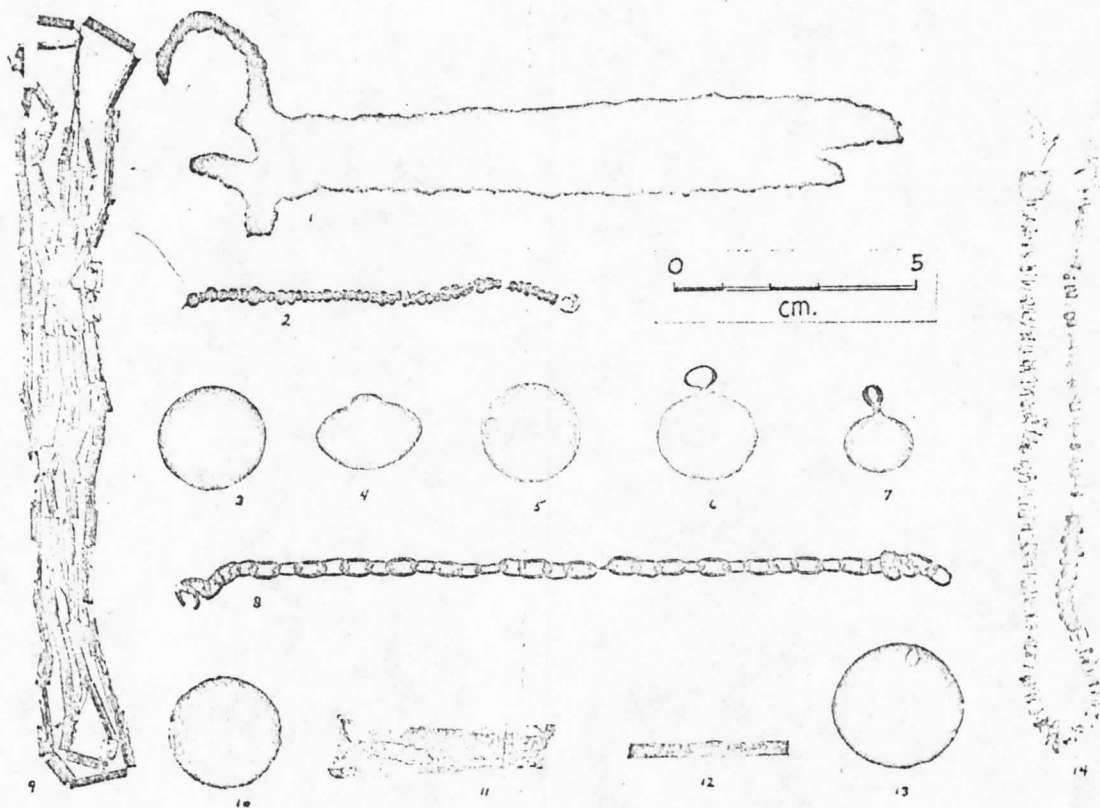


Plate 3. a. 1, iron scissors; 2, blue glass beads; 3, 4, copper or brass buttons; 5, 6, 7, copper bells; 8, copper chain; 9, cane type of glass beads; 10, lead button; 11, fragment of European pipe showing rouletting and initials; 12, rolled copper band; 13, copper abacus counter; 14, shell, glass and copper beads.

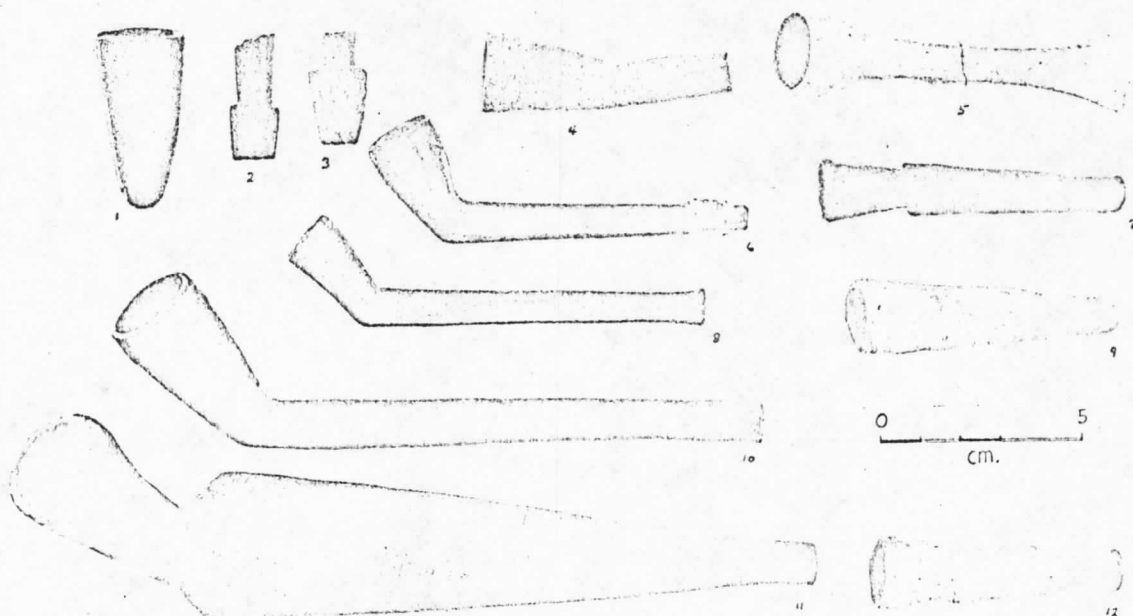


Plate 3. b. 1, conoidal steatite pipe; 2, 3, expanded rectangular bits; 4, pottery pipe with dentate stamped decoration; 5, pottery pipe with expanded triangular bit; 6, steatite pipe with remnant of copper ornament on bit; 7, pottery pipe with stem of triangular cross-section; 8, pottery pipe with simple swollen bit; 9, plain tubular pottery pipe; 10, pottery pipe with roulette decoration made by metal tool; 11, pottery pipe with expanded stem of diamond shaped cross-section; 12, tubular pipe with swollen stem and simple swollen bit.