The Littlefork Burial: New Light on Old Copper

Jack Steinbring
University of Winnipeg

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/jmas
Part of the Archaeological Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/jmas/vol37/iss1/4
The Littlefork Burial: New Light on Old Copper

JACK STEINBRING*

ABSTRACT - A richly furnished child burial of late Old Copper affiliation in Northern Minnesota is described. The mortuary offerings include a pair of large, decorated bone harpoons, and a pair of diagnostic Old Copper projectile points attached to dart shafts. The primary burial is flexed in a shallow pit with evidence of red ochre. Typological comparisons suggest a tentative date of 1,000 to 750 B.C.

Seventeen years ago a discovery was made west of International Falls, Minnesota which might well have altered historical trends in the study of Old Copper had the find become known previously. On May 27, 1953, Rodney C. Houska, an amateur archaeologist from Rainer, Minnesota, found a child burial eroding from the south bank of the Rainy River just upstream from the mouth of the Littlefork. The burial contained two copper-pointed dart shafts, two large decorated bone harpoons, and several unclassifiable artifact fragments. The human bones and some of the artifacts have since been lost, and the entire site remained obscure to archaeology until now. The details of this find, the nature of its remaining content, and some interpretive effort are well worth attention, even after seventeen years.

Ten days after he discovered the site, Houska reported the details in a letter to Dr. Lloyd C. Wilford at the University of Minnesota's Anthropology Department. The letter is dated June 7, 1953. It conveys these essential facts:

... "Then I started looking along the edge of the bank. At one spot I noticed a funny sort of bone sticking out of the dirt. ... I finally figured out that it was the bony plate from a sturgeon. I could see more bone, so I took out another piece, this was a section of bone harpoon. I didn't have any kind of digging implement, so I used my jackknife. I carefully dug the dirt around the whole section and then dug down. There were two copper arrowheads with the shafts still in them and two broken bone harpoons. The harpoons were in a very bad state of preservation except for the points that were in contact with the copper. The wood could just be seen as an outline in the clay leading up to the socket. The copper was badly corroded. There were a few other bones mixed with the harpoons and copper arrowheads. Also a rounded stone was right in the middle of it. All of this stuff was in a small area six inches deep. The next Sunday I went down and dug around below the bank and surroundings. I found one more section of harpoon and that was all. Evidently the high water had washed away any other equipment or bones that were buried there. This stuff was only sixteen inches down from the top of the bank and only in six inches from the edge of the bank."

I know that a person is not allowed to dig in graves, etc., but the next high water would probably have washed this away anyhow.

I have kept the wood fibers that were in the arrowhead sockets intact. One shaft and arrow point were 25⅝ inches long altogether. Actually nothing was left of the shaft except a discoloration in the clay, remnants of the wood in the sockets were evidently preserved by the copper compounds.

I am sending down to you the bones, etc., that were with the arrowheads. I have the copper arrowheads and sections of the bone harpoons packed in cotton and in a metal box by themselves. If you are ever up in this country, I would be glad to show them to you. I wish you would write me and tell me what these bones are. There are two rib bones, one straight bone, two sections of the sturgeon plate, one human molar tooth, a horseshoe shaped bone, and two sections of bone which appear to be some ornament or something. You can keep this stuff if you want it."...

On October 13, 1953, Wilford replies, indicating that the bones are "all those of a small child." Expressing interest in the artifacts, he notes that it is surprising to find such good ones associated with a child.

In a later, undated letter (probably early spring, 1954) Houska requests information on another box of bones which he is sending down to the University. These bones were found by a friend and were unrelated to the Littlefork find. Wilford responded promptly on March 20, 1954, identifying the bones as being human, and those of an adult. He also indicates that, since they are no longer useful, they are being discarded.

In June of 1954, Wilford visits the Littlefork Burial Site and finds it under water. It is, of course, unlikely that any part of it remained after Houska's initial discovery. There is annual flooding at this location, sometimes extremely destructive. In June of 1970, the writer accompanied Houska to the site. It was again under water, and the precise location would have been several feet out from the bank edge at that time.

The absence of an adequate state archaeological survey, the priorities of the University of Minnesota's Anthropology Department, and a lack of money combined to obscure this discovery. Then in early 1970, an archaeological field school from the University of Winnipeg commenced excavations in the area. Work started at a multi-component site on property owned by Houska. In the course of these investigations, knowledge of the Littlefork burial developed, and a thorough exam-

* Jack Steinbring received his B.A. degree from Oshkosh (Wis.) State College and his M.A. degree from the University of Wisconsin. He is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Chairman of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. At present he is pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Minnesota.
In view of the fact that the Littlefork burial includes the remains of a sturgeon in the laboratory, it is interesting to observe that the lateral scales in the decoration would be correctly inclined so as to represent the fish actually facing in the direction of the harpoon point. The decoration of harpoon No. 1 is zoned and cross-hatched.

The decorative treatment of harpoon No. 2 consists of a longitudinal band of cross-hatching and a linear series of three connecting triangles. These triangles consist of incised zones, filled by parallel oblique incisions. This contrasts with the entirely cross-hatched pattern of No. 1. The selection of cross-hatching as a strengthening technique for No. 1 is significant in that it conveys rather perfectly a realistic impression of sturgeon scales, not possible through the use of simple parallel lines. The latter, in fact, might have obscured the intention.

The archaeological occurrence of related harpoon types ranges from Northwestern Manitoba (Mayer-Oakes 1970:33) to New York (Ritchie 1965:232). If one accepts the MacNeish chronology for Southeastern Manitoba (1958:55), the archaeological gradient for this type of harpoon is from northwest to southeast along a northern Great Lakes axis. Its occurrence in the lowest level (6) of the Whiteshell component at Cemetery Point on the Winnipeg River (MacNeish 1958:129, 131, 134) would at present suggest a primary locus northwest of the Upper Great Lakes. At least two later foci are represented in clearly superposed occupations at Cemetery Point, and a terminal site date for the preceramic Whiteshell focus of 1500 B.C. seems reasonable. The harpoon from this Whiteshell horizon occurs in the lowest of two levels, so must antedate the end of Whiteshell occupations there. Its position in regard to the suggested beginning Whiteshell date of 3,000 B.C. cannot be assessed, but general comparisons suggest that it is closer to the terminal date. MacNeish believes that the harpoon from level 6 was used in spearing sturgeon (1958:129).

Southeasterly occurrences along the gradient are invariably later in time, with notable typological correspondence to be found in the northern counterparts of Middle Woodland culture. Ritchie reports several specimens from Point Peninsula and related manifestations (1965:231, 232, 257) and distinguishes these from a smaller, more variable harpoon classification (1965:246). Most of the former cluster in the Kipp Island phase, for which Ritchie suggests (1965:228) a beginning date of A.D. 500. Ritchie also suggests that they were used in spearing fish, but adds the possibility that they may have been used for aquatic mammals as well (1965:245). While they would seem to postdate the beginning of Kipp Island in the east, their northwesterly distribution includes Arvilla (Griffin 1952: Figure 46, Johnson 1964:17) and McKinstry Mound 1 (Wilford 1955). The specimen from McKinstry-1 is very similar in size and shape to those of the Littlefork Burial, but is undecorated. It also exhibits extreme surface decomposion and warpage, as though it might have been exposed for some time before being used as a funerary inclusion. McKinstry No. 1 is the type station for Laurel and is located about 200 yards south of the Littlefork burial.

In view of the fact that the Littlefork burial includes

Copper objects, it is interesting to note that three hammerd copper harpoons similar in form to the bone ones in the Littlefork burial are known. One is reported for Pittsford, New York (Moorehead 1910: Vol. II, Fig. 606), and another for Wauwatosa (Milwaukee), Wisconsin (West 1929:207, 216). These multibarbed types are respectively 234 mm. and 320 mm. in length, and both are of substantial thickness. A third, single barbed specimen was recovered at the Morrison's Island Site in Quebec (Kennedy 1967:104, 120). It is a striking fact that 49 bone harpoons of the unilateral, multibarbed type are also reported for this Old Copper-related site (Kennedy 1961:125). This strongly suggests that both of the copper, multibarbed types are safely placed within the Old Copper technological tradition rather than in the utilitarian copper assemblages of very sharply diminished size which appear in the north between 500 and 1000 B.C. While the latter now appear to commence in pre-ceramic times (Steinbring 1970:4), they are mainly associated with the northern counterparts of Middle Woodland, especially Laurel (Wright 1967:153, Mason 1967: 320, Janzen 1968:141).

Copper Projectile Points
The two socketed projectile points are remarkably similar in both shape and size (Figure 4). Specimen No. 1 is 75 mm. long with a maximum width of 18.5 mm. at the shoulder. Specimen No. 2 is 82.0 mm. long and 18.5 mm. in maximum width, also at the shoulder. There is a slight basal deterioration on both, so that maximum length is actually an available length. The measurement is judged to be quite near the original length, but it is possible that they may have been more nearly equal when made. Both specimens satisfy the criteria for the Wittry sub-type IB-1, described as follows (Wittry 1950: 15, 16):

"(I)B1. (Socketed, rolled socket) Characteristic features: The blade is leaf shaped, both faces are gently rounded. The shoulders are rounded and not prominent. In cross section the socket is oval. The base is squared or gently rounded. Near the base in the floor of the socket, there is a hole for the insertion of a rivet. In some instances this rivet is still in place in the form of a small conical peg. Square rivet holes may indicate the use of square pegs. Some of the specimens of this type occur with punched lines or dots on the front face (Winn 1942: 49).

B2. Characteristic features: The same as B1 except the rivet or rivet hole is lacking.

B3. (Harpoon) Characteristic features: The same as B1 but with a barb on one edge of the blade."

Unfortunately, Wittry's description does not comment on the longitudinal dorsal plane, as is done for the IA type. In the case of the IA, this plane is usually continuous (always for Wittry's sample), but it is now clear that a dorsal socket bulge interrupts the plane on a few IA's and apparently in quite a few IB's. The Littlefork specimens both have discontinuous, longitudinal dorsal planes with a very noticeable socket bulge. The description of this distinctive, regular, and intentional stylistic attribute of the IB's is practically absent from the literature. However, from an examination of major collections in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Manitoba, and Ontario, the writer is in a position to convey at least a tentative impression on it. The attribute appears to have a distinctly northern distribution, with the largest observed number coming from northern peninsular Michigan. They are also observed in northeastern Minnesota, and there is a spotty, linear, Canadian distribution north of Lake Superior extending all the way to Allumette Island in the Ottawa River. The attribute is so rare in Wisconsin that Wittry failed to consider it in his observations of more than 2,600 specimens.

The presence of rivets and the condition of the shafts are commented upon by Houska in a letter dated November 7, 1970:

"... "When I found those copper points, the wood fibers and rivets were in place. I had the two copper points in a small box. After I showed the points to Dr. Wilford and he wasn't interested in carbon-dating them, I didn't take as much care of them. The wood fibers fell out and I imagine the rivets came out too. After Dennis (Christianson) got my collection, he put the copper points with the other copper and I imagine the wood fibers and rivets were lost. The rivets were small, about the size and shape of large carpet tacks." ...

Through his earlier letters, and through recent interviews with Houska, it has been possible to prepare a stylized reconstruction of the Littlefork Burial (Figure 1). Houska unhesitatingly established the positions and orientations of the harpoons and the copper projectiles. All were parallel to each other, and had apparently been placed on top of the body. The burial had an essentially east-west alignment with the head toward the east. Each of the harpoon points was directed toward the east, with

The Minnesota Academy of Science
the forward ends near the head and the basal parts probably in the vicinity of the pelvis, or lower rib cage. Between the harpoons, and parallel to them, was one of the copper-pointed projectiles, again with the forward end oriented toward the east. It was this copper point which directly caused the preservation of cranial bones and the points of both harpoons. Immediately to the south (inland from the Rainy River bank) was the remaining copper pointed-projectile, this time with the forward end directed toward the West. This reversed direction accounts for the more extensive preservations of Harpoon No. 1, and also fixes its relationship to No. 2 in the funerary placement. In his letter of November 7, 1970, Houska adds that the copper-projectile points were “perfect, as though new.” They appear to have been of a highly sharpened character with the extreme edges present only as discolorations in the clay matrix.

**Decorated bone object**

Among the artifacts from the Littlefork Burial acquired by Christianson is a small section of animal bone, rather square in cross section, and bearing incised decorations similar to those of the large harpoons (Figure 5). The decorations consist of parallel markings in both zoned and open arrangements, and small holes have been drilled into the piece for a short distance on three sides. The incised decorations are in a triangular motif reminiscent of Lamoka (Ritchie 1965:66, 68), as would be those of Harpoon No. 2. The bone has not yet been identified, but it appears to be a section of ulna. The function of this object is unknown.

**Unidentified stone object**

In his first letter, Houska remarked that there was a “rounded stone right in the middle of it (the burial)”. Recently (1970), he has elaborated further on this:

> “... It was a rounded stone about the size of a walnut. The stone was a hard, fine grained, reddish colored rock, very smooth surface and no peck marks. ...”

The description suggests that it might have been a polished pebble of the red jasper regionally expressed in Archaic lithic types. The material is an oolitic jasper sometimes referred to as jaspilite or “jaspery taconite” (MacNeish 1952:27). In the Rainy River area it arrives only through intervention by man, since the sources lie to the east and south at locations totally inconsistent with glacial transport. Unfortunately, the specimen has been lost.

**Miscellaneous lost items**

Of the nine objects (including human bones) listed in Houska’s first letter, and sent by him to the University of Minnesota, none can be found. Despite Willford’s accurate and precisely followed file, which yielded every item of correspondence, two thorough searches of the departmental collections have failed to produce the specimens. These searches were personally initiated by Dr. Elden Johnson, State Archaeologist and professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota.

At present it is theorized that some of the human bone may have been taken before cataloging for instructional use, and that the remaining materials may have been discarded without supervision when the adult bones were received and identified one year later.

**Sturgeon plate**

Several dense lenses of sturgeon remains had been found by Houska, both in the vicinity of the Littlefork burial and nearer the river’s outlet at Rainy Lake. In relation to the sturgeon plate in the burial, it is of special interest to note that the mouth of the Littlefork is even today a recognized locus of seasonal sturgeon concentration. The prehistoric beds of sturgeon bone in the immediate vicinity of the Littlefork Site (at apparently comparable depths) suggests that the area’s current fame may have been anticipated in antiquity.

**General assumptions**

It would appear that the Littlefork burial was of a primary type, probably flexed for insertion into an oblong, shallow pit which was scooped out from a surface about 16 inches below that of today. The accumulation of annual flood increments probably compacted the feature to its 6 inch thickness at the time of discovery. The maximum diameter of the burial pit was probably slightly more than 25½ inches (overall length of the dart shafts), and had an east-west alignment. The minimum diameter cannot be judged, but it seems likely that slightly more than 6 inches of horizontal, north-south pit distance remained upon discovery. A six-inch space would but barely accommodate the parallel arrangement of artifacts over the body.

The two identical copper projectile points, presumably attached to foreshafts, represent a northern variant of the Wittry subtype IB-1. They thus conform to a specific technical classification established for a large artifact population. The classification has a demonstrated,
critical application throughout the Great Lakes region (Johnson 1964:8, Steinbring 1966:573, Dawson 1969:3). This writer concludes that the Littlefork projectile points are best assigned to that historical span of copper technology in the North American interior commonly known as the Old Copper Culture, or Complex. Griffin's chronological placement of 3,000 to 1,000 B.C. (1961:128) remains consistent with most current data, saving the possibility that northwestern peripheral manifestations may occasionally occur at slightly later times.

Radiocarbon dates for specific Wittry types are extremely rare. Until the recent identification of early lanceolate styles in copper (Woolworth 1963:18, Steinbring 1968:5), general agreement had centered on an earliest occurrence for socketed diagnostic forms (Griffin 1961:125). Wittry (1950:40) had concluded that sub-type IA-1 was older than sub-type IA-2 on the basis of functional elaboration and distributional characteristics. The IB's exhibit elaborations over the IA's, and, while there are some attribute overlaps, they probably do follow the IA in time. The IA is known from an excavated context at the Osceola Site (Ritzenthaler 1957:195). A radiocarbon date of 1500 B.C. for Osceola provides us with the earliest hard date for the sub-type IA-2. There are no firm dates for the IB's, but a small variant of the IB-1 was excavated from the village sector of the Riverside Site (Hruska 1967:240). While no date is available for the village sector, five dates ranging from 510 B.C. to A.D. 1 are available for cemetery features. The small size and poor workmanship of the specimen suggest that it might reflect deterioration of the classical IB standards. It would seem reasonable to set a final date of 750 B.C. for the IB-1's of the Littlefork Burial, definitely prior to Laurel ceramics which become common in the region following that date, and which are associated with a burial mound complex. Small utilitarian copper is frequent in Laurel, occasionally in shapes reminiscent of Old Copper types. The Arvilla Site (Johnson 1964:18, 19), combines Laurel attributes with Old Copper types. It seems to be specifically connected with McCollum (through copper discs), and generally with all major cemetery sites (through crescents). Undoubtedly the Arvilla Site is an important one for the interpretation of a northern transitional situation. The bone harpoon from McKinstry No. 1 would at the very least suggest a limited gap locally between Old Copper and Laurel.

The pair of large, multibarbed harpoons also forms an exotic funerary accompaniment for a small child. Rich burial accompaniments for little children are rare in North American archaeology. In most cases, where objects are found, they would be in the nature of personal adornments, not funeral paraphernalia. Commonly, nothing is found with small children, and in the great majority of cases, they are not individually buried. A probable use of the harpoons in exploiting sturgeon is suggested by the decorative treatment of No. 1, the inclusion of a sturgeon plate in the burial, and the central location in an historically dense sturgeon area. Hammered copper toggle head harpoons are common in the regional collections, and have been excavated at Riverside (Hruska 1967:244), and at Houska Point (Steinbring 1970:4). Mason (1965:161) reviews the occurrence of toggle head harpoons in northern Middle Woodland culture, and suggests that the Riverside copper specimens may mark the earliest Archaic occurrence. The rare existence of multibarbed copper harpoons, and the extensive numbers of copper toggle head types would tend to suggest a late Old Copper assignment for the Littlefork Burial, probably not much earlier than 1,000 B.C.

Incised decorations on the Littlefork bone have parallels in Lamoka (Ritchie, 1925, 1926). Literature on the Archaic, however, offers no immediately useful comparisons on the richness of the Littlefork burial. The Frontenac Island site, contemporary with Lamoka at about 2000 B.C., (Ritchie 1945:47) yielded 159 burials, of which 34 were pre-adolescent children. Twenty five of these child burials contained no grave goods. Only five of the remaining nine contained objects which might be classed as other than personal equipment or adornment. In only one case (#19) was the accompaniment substantial. It yielded no objects comparable to Littlefork, and no pairs. There were lavish adult burials, however, with one (#78) yielding a magnificent incised antler comb in the form of a paired bird motif. Paired

![Figure 4. Copper projectile points from the Littlefork burial. These specimens are presently in the Koochiching County Historical Museum, International Falls, Minnesota.](image-url)
objects do occur among the adult burials, but usually in the form of awls or fishhooks, and usually also in accompaniment with other objects in different multiples. Lamoka has provided only extremely limited mortuary knowledge.

Two Ontario sites provide interesting correspondences with Littlefork though they have been assigned to the late Middle Woodland Kipp Island Phase (Ritchie 1965: 235). The Brock Street burial (Kenyon and Cameron 1961:41) consists of a single primary, flexed adult male interment furnished with numerous and elaborate objects. Among the funeral paraphernalia are two unilateral, multibarbed antler harpoons, two polished slate pendants, and two antler flaking tools. There are other objects in different multiples, but the harpoons (basically similar to those at Littlefork) are judged to closely resemble a pair from another Ontario site, the Port Maitland Site, in Welland County. The Port Maitland site is a child's burial, which, in addition to containing a pair of unilateral, multibarbed antler harpoons, yielded a very rich assortment of grave furniture (Ritchie 1965:233), numbering 43 objects altogether. The Port Maitland site is the most westerly of those assigned by Ritchie to the Kipp Island phase. A third, more westerly Ontario site is thought by Ritchie to be related to Kipp Island, partly on the basis of a pair of barbed antler harpoon points very similar to those in the other Ontario burials. This is the Williams site in Kent County, Ontario. It consisted of two skeletons, one a child.

Of the eleven components of the Kipp Island phase, only three are listed by Ritchie as being related to habitation sites. One of these is the Williams site, which contained no pottery, and for which there is no precise excavational data. The Kipp Island site (type station) and the Jack's Reef site then appear to be the only ones of Kipp Island phase which meet these three criteria:

- Have obvious habitation units
- Contain Pottery
- Have Hard dates

In view of the fact that traits present in many of the so-called Kipp Island phase burials are not really distinguishable from Archaic ones (beaver incisor tools, adzes, use of red ochers, pendants, anulcosa shell beads, plummets, etc.), one might hesitate to accept a late Middle Woodland assignment until clear dates are available. From the diagnostic Old Copper inclusions at Littlefork, a rarely occurring child burial form of basic (and possibly continuing) Archaic assignment may center to the west with late connections to Kipp Island in the east.

While Old Copper sites are rare, Old Copper burials are not. All of the Old Copper sites excavated to date are primarily cemeteries with original burials usually estimated in the hundreds (Ritzenthaler estimated 500 original burials at the Osceola site, and 200 for the Oconto site, and at least 63 were excavated by Hruska at the Riverside site). Except for the rich copper ornamentation in adult burials at the Reigh site (Ritzenthaler 1957:284), the Littlefork site marks the most lavish individual accompaniment for the entire span of Old Copper. The decorative art in bone represents not only the sole example of its kind in Old Copper but also is outstanding for the whole of the Eastern Archaic.

Speculation on the continuity of Archaic culture in northeastern North America has gained strength in recent years (Jennings 1968:112, Willey 1966: 72, Harp 1963:259, Byers 1959:250). Mobile Algonkian hunters and fishermen of the Canadian Shield, all the way from the Northern Ojibwa northwest of Lake Superior to the extinct Beothuk of Newfoundland have been suggested as historic expressions of this tradition.

Chronological gaps in the eastern comparisons of Littlefork may actually reflect such continuity. These gaps appear at least somewhat ameliorated by chronologically intermediate units arrayed along a northern Great Lakes axis. No evidence for a specific regional continuity in the Western Great Lakes region as yet exists, but there are good indications that the Juntunen site exhibits indirect reflections of it. As McPherron points out (1967:298), Juntunen has “the appearance of a crossroads sensitive to developments in a number of directions.” An individual, adult male bundle burial of this site contained a “personal kit” with objects directly comparable to Littlefork. Among a considerable variety of “magico-religious” items were three unilateral, multibarbed bone harpoons with squared barbs. They are identical in style (although undecorated) to those of the Littlefork burial. Also discovered in the kit was the parasphenoid (plate) bone of a gigantic sturgeon. A mass of iron oxide was present, and the remaining larger objects included a copper awl, several bone awls and
wedges, some cores and flakes, on otter skull, and two ground stone objects resembling pestles. Of further interest is the fact that a round plaque of bone had been removed from the right side of the man's head, post mortem. This trait, along with the general combination of burial gear, would seem to form an almost incontestable equivalence to the Brock Street burial. If Ritchie is correct in assigning the Brock Street burial to the Kipp Island phase, however, a substantial gap in time must be dealt with. The richly accoutered burial at Juntunen is not earlier than A.D. 1280. Again, McPherron (p. 280) looks to the west for antecedents, finding them among other places, in Kthio and McKinstry No. 2 of Minnesota. McKinstry No. 2 is a mound containing Blackduck pottery, and is immediately adjacent to McKinstry No. 1 (but on a lower terrace).

Finally, in connection with Juntunen, it is interesting to note that the site yields a total of 776 pieces of copper ranging from unaltered chunks to finished artifacts. This is "the largest collection for any period from any site in the United States, and one certainly unique for its period" (McPherron 1967:164). A more extensive recovery of copper has been claimed for the Allumette Island site in Quebec (Kennedy 1967:111), but the site has not been reported since its excavation in 1961. The Juntunen copper includes only a very few artifacts (awls and "butter knives") which might be attributable to Old Copper. The fact that most objects are very small apparently influenced an interpretation of discontinuity ("New Copper"). The preceramic miniatures at Houska Point and the complex blend of related trait clusters over the northern Great Lakes axis might suggest an involved pattern of continuity with shifting centers. It actually seems possible that the heavy role of ceramic analysis in the interpretation of Middle and Late northern Woodland manifestations may to some extent obscure more general, historical configurations. The very plasticity of ceramic process may yield to the archaeologist a kind of variability not consistent with the main threads of material cultural order. However, when James V. Wright, at the 1969 meetings of the Canadian Archaeological Association in Ottawa, suggested that we "analyze Laurel without the pottery," he encountered no support.

These comparisons started with the Littleforsk Burial of Old Copper affiliation at 1,000 to 750 B.C., and have led to a Lake Superior site of very late prehistoric times. The Juntunen burial with attributes comparable to Littleforsk is a key one for the site and McPherron's interpretation of its promotes linkage with the historic Midewiwin, or Grand Medicine Society of the Ojibwa (Hoffman 1891). While 3,000 years intervene between the Littleforsk burial and the historic Ojibwa of the Rainy River, the Ojibwa would offer, as Jennings (1968:112) points out, a modern Archaic stage culture. The Ojibwa are lake and river adapted, and have a traditional ecological adjustment to the Canadian Shield. In the ethnographic present they are primarily hunters and gatherers, with a heavy emphasis on fishing, especially of sturgeon. Except in rare and peripheral instances, the Ojibwa never made pottery. Among the Northern Ojibwa of Manitoba a tradition of copper working is known (Steinbring 1967:355), and the birchbark pictography of the Ojibwa, which embraces all of the incised decorative attributes of the Littleforsk harpoons, is a celebrated North American aboriginal phenomenon.

Recently (1970) the writer collected an instance of twin infanticide among the Northern Ojibwa. It occurred in 1908, and might allow for a bit of archaeologically in­terpretation of its promotes linkage with the historic Ojibwa burial. The twin in question was the second born and was smothered a few days after birth. Rationalization around this centered on order-of-birth ritual, identical twins not being distinguishable for these important purposes. To avoid the dangers of faulted ritual, the second born was killed immediately. The practice is said to have stopped with the introduction of hospital birth which involved the use of tags for identification. While the writer has failed in all attempts to confirm this practice in the work of other Algonkianists, he is still compelled to offer the remote possibility that the dead child at Littleforsk, provided with pairs of elaborate, specially made artifacts, was for its own short life the cherished survivor of twins.

Acknowledgments

All illustrations, including the skeletal reconstruction on the cover, are the work of Edward Sawatzky of the Department of Anthropology, University of Winnipeg.

References


The Minnesota Academy of Science


*Journal of, Volume Thirty-seven, No. 1, 1970–1971*