

Artifacts from Iowa Mounds

The Middle Woodland mounds in Iowa have produced a variety of artifacts which were placed in the mounds as offerings to the gods, or the dead, or may have represented the property of some of the individuals buried in the mounds. Many of these objects were recovered before 1900 and, fortunately, have been preserved in the collections of the Davenport Public Museum; others were lost through the years.

Most of the pottery vessels were broken before they were recovered or broke during the process of excavation and have had to be restored. Middle Woodland Indian pottery is rather fragile and the weight of the earth in the mounds plus seasonal freezing and thawing made it more so.

The Indians made the pottery of the local clays, mixing the clay with water and adding crushed rock, which archaeologists call "temper" to make the clay easier to handle and reduce the shrinkage of the vessels and breakage during firing. A vessel was shaped by coiling the clay around until a roughly shaped pot was formed. Then a smooth stone or hand was placed inside and the exterior was paddled with a wooden paddle wrapped with cords. Most pots have rounded or bluntly point-

ed bottoms, rounded bodies, slightly constricted necks and very slightly flaring rims. Once the vessel was shaped all or part of the surface was smoothed and then decorated by drawing a blunt stick or bone through the clay or pressing a notched piece of shell or bone into the surface.

We have no good evidence of how the pottery was fired, but it could have been done in an open fire, covering it with an abundance of wood and bark. The variations in color from light tan to dark brown indicate that the firing temperature and conditions were not well-controlled. The temperature achieved during the firing probably was not very hot by modern ceramic standards. The vessels were therefore somewhat porous.

Most of the pottery from the Iowa mounds is not as fine as the finest specimens which are found in mounds in Illinois and Ohio which have been classified as Hopewell Ware. Instead it is more like the Havana Ware common in the Illinois River Valley villages and also occurring in the mounds. One specimen from a mound in Buffalo Township has a body decorated with plain and dentate stamped zones, a plain shoulder and a band of punctates below the rim. Another, from the Cook Farm Mounds, has a body decorated with a geometric pattern of incised lines, a band of punctates around the neck with diagonal dentate stamped lines and nodes above it.

Many potsherds or broken vessel fragments

with similar decorations have been found on village sites throughout Iowa. Much of this pottery suggests strong influence from the Illinois River Valley during the Middle Woodland period.

The stonework of the Middle Woodland period can be divided into two groups—chipped artifacts and ground and polished stonework. The chipped stone artifacts include knives, projectile points and scrapers. Most of these are made of locally available chert. The projectile points, the most diagnostic implements, are notched or stemmed. Occasionally a point or flake of obsidian does occur. This material, of course, is not native to Iowa and had to be traded in from the Rocky Mountains to the west.

Ground stone artifacts include axes and celts and the more impressive pipes. Axes and celts are made of selected waterworn pebbles which were roughly shaped by chipping and then pecked with a harder stone and finally finished by smoothing and polishing with water and sand. An implement of this type could be made in a few hours.

The platform pipes are typical of Middle Woodland sites. Some of these found in the mounds in Iowa were unfinished—roughly shaped but not drilled or smoothed, indicating that some of these specimens must have been made locally. Others may or may not have been the result of trade. More work in village sites and a study of village refuse may clear up this question. The

pipes must have been roughly cut, probably using sand and string, then ground and polished with more sand and water and finally drilled with sand and hollow reeds or tubes or stone drills. The most difficult part of the task was to drill the small hole through the thin platform to connect with the one coming down through the bowl. Some pipes are plain with "vase-shaped" bowls, but the more spectacular ones are those with the effigy bowls. A frog effigy, a bird effigy and an animal which somewhat resembles a dog were found at the Cook Farm. Another bird effigy was found at Toolesboro. Effigy pipes are not as abundant in Iowa as in Ohio where the finest examples are found. Pipes show some indication of having been smoked, but smoking probably was reserved for ceremonial occasions.

Copper implements and ornaments were made by cold hammering and annealing pieces of float copper found in the glacial till and copper obtained from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Copper artifacts were found quite frequently in Iowa mounds. Some celts were wrapped in textiles which thereby were preserved. Other copper implements include awls, beads and hemispheres. The function of the last is not known, but they do occur in other Middle Woodland sites. A similar hemisphere of silver was found in the Cook Farm Mounds. Items of silver are very unusual in Hopewell Mounds.

Other trade items found in the mounds are the shell dippers reported from the Toolesboro Mounds, the Cook Farm Mounds and mounds in Buffalo Township in Scott County. These artifacts, made by cutting open large marine shells, may have been traded as finished items or manufactured locally. Only in detailed studies of refuse middens will the answer be found. Beads of marine shell were also found at Toolesboro.

Bear canines were drilled and worn by Hopewell Indians. One was found at Cook Farm, others came from mounds below Maquoketa.

Red and yellow ochre were found in the Cook Farm Mounds. These minerals probably were used for body paint or when decorating skins. Other minerals include galena which probably came from northwestern Illinois and mica from the Appalachian Mountains. Why the Indians prized them is not known but they occur rather commonly on Hopewellian sites. Mica, of course, was cut into ornaments in Ohio.

The artifacts recovered from Hopewell Mounds in Iowa are typical of those found in similar sites elsewhere in the Midwest but they are not as abundant as in Ohio or Illinois. The quality of workmanship is not up to the high standards of the finer specimens found to the east. However, they do attest to the spread of the Hopewellian cult into Iowa and to the widespread trade contacts of the Indians at that time.