

A "Killed" Woodland Vessel from a Ross County Burial Mound

James L. Murphy
The Ohio Historical Society
Columbus, Ohio

An unusual example of a deliberately "killed" Late Woodland mortuary vessel occurs in the Raymond Williams Mound (33-RO-149), Franklin Township, Ross County, Ohio. The mound was brought to my attention by Harold Rippeth, Coalton, Ohio, and we visited the site in the summer of 1978.

Howard Yates and Mark Hartman, neighbors of the Williamses, had partially excavated the center of the mound in April, 1977, finding the materials described below. Martha Otto and Bert Drennan of The Ohio Historical Society examined the mound and artifacts recovered shortly after the discovery, and the following account is based upon information contained in an Ohio Archaeological Inventory site form prepared by Drennan as well as personal observations.

The Williams mound is about 5 feet high and 50-60 feet in diameter, lying on the ridgetop west of the Scioto River and south of Snake Hollow, 5 miles southeast of Chillicothe. The area excavated in the center of the mound measures approximately 14 by 12 by 3 feet, with some deeper potholes. There is also a trench along the east side of the mound, 1.5 feet deep and 5 feet long.

The most interesting item recovered by the Yates and Hartman boys is the relatively complete grit-tempered vessel shown in figures 1-3. The cordmarked pot is approximately 7 inches high and varies in thickness from 4.5 to 6.5 mm. A distinct collared effect is produced by channelling around the rim, immediately above the bowl neck, although the bowl cannot be said to possess a true collar. The thickened rim is about 1 cm wide. Maximum thickness here is 9.2 cm. Cordmarking is rather coarse—1.0 to 1.8 mm wide—and the pot cannot be fitted very well under the rubric of "McGraw Cordmarked" (Prufer, et al. 1965). A post-Hopewellian assignment would seem logical for this vessel, and "Peters Cordmarked" is a more appropriate ceramic type designation. Although incomplete, the bowl is well enough preserved to leave little doubt that the hole in the base, some 3 cm in diameter, was intentionally made to "kill" the vessel, in a manner similar to other deliberately broken mortuary offerings commonly found in Hopewellian mounds of the Scioto-Paint Creek area. If the assumption that this is

a "killed" mortuary vessel is accepted, then it is significant that the bowl represents a rather plain utilitarian ware, in contrast to the elaborate, specialized mortuary vessels of Middle Woodland Hopewell.

Unfortunately, precise provenience of the vessel and the other artifacts from the mound is not determinable. When one looks at the associated flint artifacts, the classic corner-notched Snyders blade (Fig. 4) immediately suggests Middle Woodland (Illinoian Hopewell) affinities. In fact, the bifacial blade is made of light-colored fossiliferous Mississippian chert probably from the Illinois area. (There is some difference of opinion on this: the OAS form identifies the lithic material as "Coshocton Flint," but it most certainly is not Upper Mercer flint nor even Pennsylvanian in age.) The Snyders blade is 89.0 mm long, with a maximum width of 57.6 mm, and a thickness of 7.1 mm. Two other flint artifacts found in the mound are a trapezoidal, straight-based blade of gray Illinoian flint (Fig. 5), with length of 133 mm, width of 55 mm, and a thickness of 8.1 mm, and a triangular blade (Fig. 6) 74.6 mm long and 28.6 mm long and 28.6 mm wide. The triangular blade is also of gray fossiliferous chert probably from the Mississippi or Illinois valley. The only other artifact retrieved from the mound is a crudely pecked celt (Fig. 7) 16.3 cm long and 7.1 cm wide, made from a glacial erratic igneous cobble.

Although Snyders blades would be dated around 250 B.C. to A.D. 100 in the Illinoian Valley (Montet-White, 1968:179), they might date somewhat later in Ohio. Even if the Snyders blade from the Williams mound be a trade item, there is also the possibility that it was not directly associated with the pottery vessel but an earlier "relict" accidentally deposited in the mound fill. The other flint artifacts are less diagnostic but presumably are contemporaneous with the Snyders blade, since they all appear to be made from Illinoian cherts.

It is interesting to note the proximity of this hilltop burial mound to the Late Woodland component at the "Voss-McKenzie Site" (Prufer, 1966: 282-283). It may well be that the mound represents a burial manifestation directly related to the Voss-McKenzie site across the Scioto River. In any case the

Williams mound represents does indicate a striking carry-over of rather sophisticated mortuary offerings from Middle to Late Woodland times.

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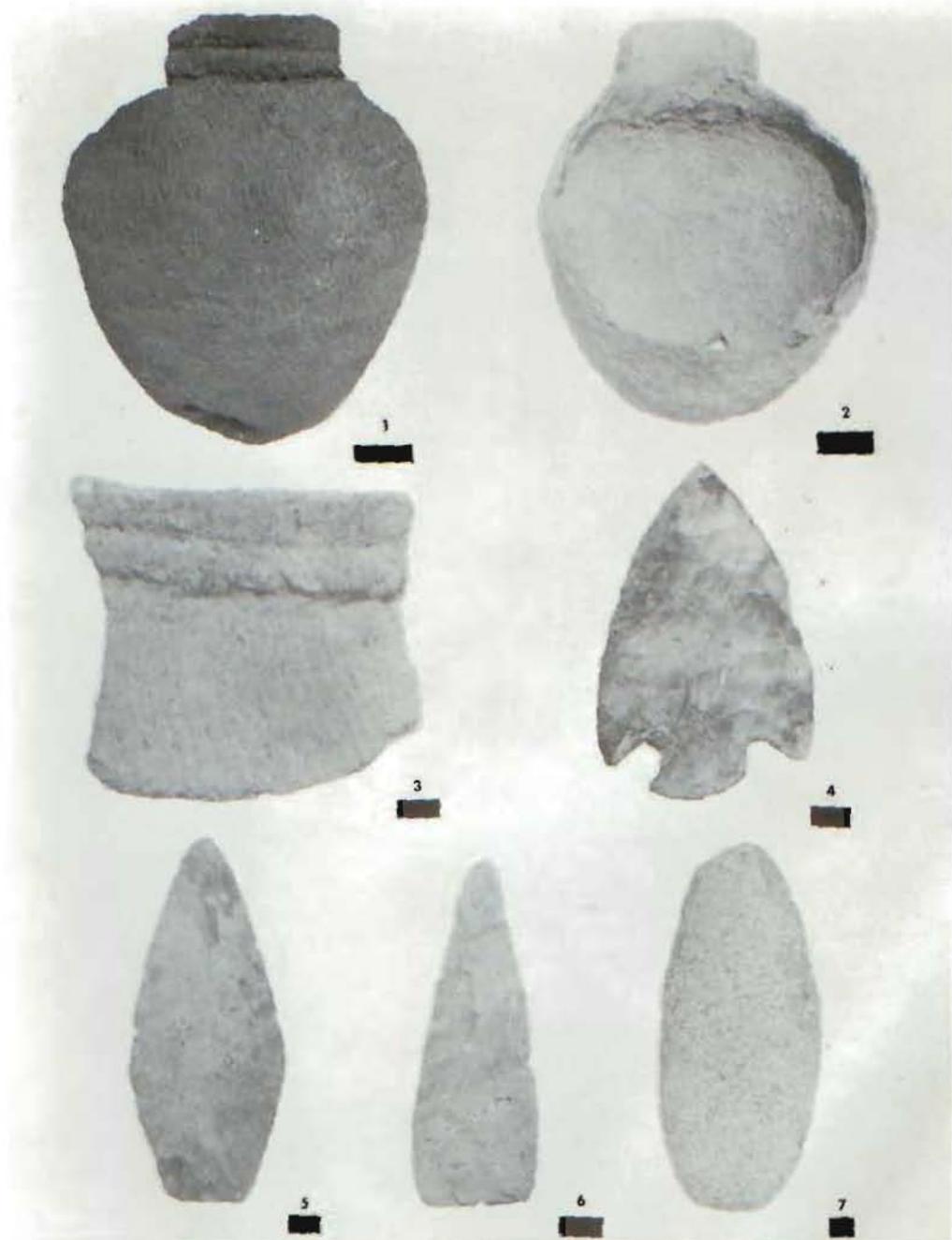
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Explanation of Plate

Fig. 1, 2. Exterior and interior views of "killed" Woodland vessel. Fig. 3. Rim sherd of "killed" vessel. Fig. 4. Middle Woodland Snyder's blade of Mississippian chert. Fig. 5. Pentagonal blade of Mississippian chert. Fig. 6. Triangular blade of Mississippian chert. Fig. 7. Crude celt of glacial erratic igneous rock.