THE WESTERN AREA ALGONKIANS

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Résumé. La découverte, sur un vaste territoire, de dépôts de céramique Blackduck, d'abord définie au Minnesota, coincide avec la présence de populations de langue algonquine de l'Ouest connues à l'époque historique, et peut être identifiée à une culture algonquine qui semble s'être développée à partir d'une ancienne base commune établie entre le lac Winnipeg et la vallée du haut Saint-Laurent.
The Western Area Algonkians are one of a number of regional populations who occupied the Northern Algonkian Sub-Arctic region during the Terminal Woodland period (ca. 500 A.D. to the Historic period). They lived between Lake Superior, west of Lake Nipigon and the height of the land and west to about the headwaters of the Mississippi River and north to Lake Winnipeg.

The impossible task of assigning tribal names to the innumerable groups and bands of Algonkian-speakers who are mentioned in the historic records as residing around the Upper Great Lakes has been circumvented by describing the late prehistoric developments indicated by archaeological recoveries in Ontario, under the language designation, Algonkian (Wright 1965:189). Three distinct areas of development in Ontario were initially recognized by Wright (1972); Eastern, Northern and Western. They embrace a similar lithic tradition but a divergence of ceramic traditions.

The Eastern Area is characterized by Huron-Petun ceramics produced by the Algonkian-speaking Nipissings and other Algonkian groups from the Lake Nipissing-Georgian Bay area (Wright 1968a). Ontario sites at the eastern end of Lake Superior with Peninsular Woodland, Stamped, Push-pull and Twisted Cord traditions out of Northern Michigan and Wisconsin have been placed under this grouping by Wright. The Peninsular Woodland Tradition is identified as a product of the Algonkian-speaking Fox and Sauk (Wittry 1963; Quimby 1966). The Stamped and Push-pull traditions occur in those areas of Michigan populated in the Terminal Woodland period by many Algonkian-speakers such as the Pottawatomi, Ottawa, Mascouten, Menomini, Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, Chippewa and Miami (Fitting 1965:149-150). The Twisted-cord tradition occurs in the northern part of the same area at the Straits of Mackinac (MacPherron 1967). I have classed these mixed
ceramic sites separately under Southern Area Algonkian. The Northern Area is characterized by Selkirk ceramics which MacNeish, Wright and others consider to be a product of the Algonkian-speaking Cree (MacNeish 1958:67; Wright 1968b). The Western Area is characterized by Blackduck ceramics which are considered to be the product of Ojibwa and associated groups. This pottery is characterized by globular, cord, fabric or net exterior surface vessels with splayed lips and cord-wrapped object impressed decorations with deep super-imposed encircling punctate and vertical brushing.

Some archaeologists have assigned the makers of this pottery in Minnesota, Manitoba and Ontario to the Stone Sioux or Assiniboine (Wilford 1955; MacNeish 1958; Hlady 1964). As this approach has become an integral part of archaeological interpretations in these regions, the fragile basis for this assignment must be dispensed with before proceeding.

Wilford, who first defined the Blackduck Tradition in Minnesota, simply believed that the makers were late in time and therefore it should be possible to identify the group historically (1945:328-329). Since the tradition of the Sioux have it that there was a late movement of Yanktonai Dakota from the headwaters of the Mississippi River to the Lake of the Woods and that this, in part, coincided with Blackduck ceramic recoveries, he suggested that those people must be the carriers. In support of this view, he pointed to some similarities of pottery with the Dakota, Mille Lac aspect. Evans has shown that the traits shared with the non-Siouian, Laurel ceramic tradition far exceed those held in common with the suggested Dakota grouping (1961:147). Not only is the assignment unsupported by trait affinities, it does not account for the time depth or the wide distribution
of the pottery.

MacNeish also proposed Siouian origins for the carriers of the Blackduck Tradition in Manitoba (1954:49; 1958:64). Both he and Wilford attempt to support the position on the basis of Alexander Henry the elder's description in 1776 of burial practices which are not unlike burials associated with Blackduck pottery. The historical references cited do not specifically refer to Assiniboine practices. In fact, Henry says in reference to the passage, "Though inserted here they have no exclusive relation to the Osinipoilles" (Bain 1901:306). Further, it is significant that the only Indian word used in the description is the Algonquin word "totem" (Evans 1961:149).

MacNeish also attempts to support the claim on the basis of surface recoveries of Blackduck ceramics from a location on the banks of the Assiniboine River near a fort built by La Verendrye for the Assiniboine (1954:49) and the presence of an assumed European copper hair pipe at the Stott Mound. Such vague and tenuous observations simply do not support the conclusions.

MacNeish after predicing the position on historic references then in an obtuse approach, based on the stratigraphic provenience of recoveries in southeastern Manitoba and Lowie's conclusions, based on linguistic evidence that the separation of the Sioux could not have been recent, considers the manifestation to be prehistoric Assiniboine, circa 1000 A.D. to 1350 A.D. (1958:55-59). While subsequent recoveries support the early presence of Blackduck manifestations in Manitoba and northwestern Ontario, they also indicate the continuing presence of the occupation until historic times (Mayer-Oakes 1970; Dawson 1974) contrary to MacNeish's view which
saw the carriers of the tradition moving west prior to a later Cree occupation.

Radiocarbon dates from Blackduck sites clearly indicate a substantial time depth and a continuity until historic times. From the Martin-Bird site at Whitefish Lake, west of Thunder Bay, for example, radiocarbon dates range from 480 A.D. to 1775 A.D. (1470±115, 480 A.D. S772: 660±70, 1290 A.D. S775: 175±40, 1775 A.D. S774). This site has European trade goods as do a number of sites on Lake Nipigon. In Manitoba at the Lord site on the Red River, a radiocarbon date of 780 A.D. (1170±90, 780 A.D. S652) attests to the early presence of the Western Area Algonkian in that area and trade goods from sites also attest to their continuing presence to historic times. In Minnesota recoveries indicate a similar disposition.

Notwithstanding MacNeish's proposed Assiniboine identification of the producers of Blackduck pottery, he goes on to suggest evidence for a sequence of ceramic development in Manitoba (1958:158-159). In Evans' examination of the same wares in Minnesota, he suggests an in situ development out of the Laurel ceramic tradition in Minnesota (1961:130-142) and the same sequence is recognized in northwestern Ontario (Dawson 1974:24). The Blackduck ceramic tradition, which marks the presence of the Western Area Algonkian, appears to have developed out of the Laurel ceramic tradition, in the area between Lake Nipigon and Lake Winnipeg, in northwestern Ontario, northern Minnesota and southeastern Manitoba. This area was historically occupied by Algonkian peoples with various different regional names, albeit with intrusions of Sioux in the western periphery of the region in late historic time, but an explanation resting on a late exodus of Sioux from the upper Mississippi does not account for the long prehistoric
time depth, whereas, an explanation resting on the early carriers of the Algonkian culture such as the Cheyenne does. These carriers of the Algonkian culture were in the region in proto historic times prior to moving out onto the plains (Grinnell 1962). Following in this established western movement, other Algonkian-speakers, such as, Ojibwa are recorded moving into the region in historic times. Archaeological recoveries are suggestive of this pattern of movement as are linguistic studies bearing on the home of proto-Algonkian peoples (Siebert 1967).

The high mobility of the Algonkian-speaking peoples is amply attested to in the historic records and cannot be explained simply in terms of dislocation resulting from European encroachment. Champlain wrote in 1615 that the Ottawa went in bands to trade more than four or five hundred leagues (Kinietz 1940:245). Taking the French league at 2.5 miles this represents a distance of 1000 to 1250 miles. Alexander Henry the senior wrote in 1761 of a small encampment of Indians called Makegons at the mouth of the du Moine River about fifteen miles below Portages de Deux Joachins on the Ottawa River (Bain 1901:25-26). This division of Musekey of Swamp Cree lived north and northwest of Lake of the Woods, a distance of well over 1000 miles. Umfreville in 1784 met a family of Indians in two canoes on the west shore of Lake Nipigon who recognized him from Fort Severn on Hudson Bay (Douglas 1929:15). This is a distance of some 450 to 500 miles. Father Claude Allouez visited the Nipissings (Nipisierinii) in 1667 at Lake Nipigon where they fled from their homeland on the shores of Lake Nipissing in 1650 (Thwaites 1896-1901). This is a distance of 450 to 500 miles.

The Blackduck ceramic tradition occurs across the Laurentian Upland from
Quebec to Saskatchewan. Sites date from as early as 500 A.D. to as late as the Fur Trade. The remarkable uniformity in the pottery over such a vast area and through such a long time span is unusual but also unusual is the fact that it is seldom recovered except in association with other ceramic traditions.

For example, at the Blackduck type site, the McCluskey site at Whitefish Lake, west of Thunder Bay, 6.7% of the analyzable rims are non-Blackduck rims; 2.8% are Laurel and 3.9% are Algonkian ceramics representing northern, eastern and southern affinities. Ceramics other than Blackduck from nineteen Blackduck sites examined in northwestern Ontario and eastern Manitoba range from 3.9% to 47.3%. The percentage of non-Blackduck ceramics increases roughly proportional to the distance away from the 'heartland'. They are characterized by ceramics typical of the Algonkian-speakers of the geographic region.

From twenty-five sites with ceramic components on Lake Nipigon fourteen had an Initial Woodland period component characterized by Laurel ceramics with pseudo-scallop shell, dragged and dentate stamped decorations on conoidal smooth surface vessels. Eight of the sites had Laurel ceramics exclusively, the others also had Terminal Woodland period ceramics represented by various Algonkian traditions.

The marked southern Michigan-Wisconsin influences noted by Wright at the eastern end of Lake Superior clearly extend to Lake Nipigon for six sites had Laurel and Peninsular Woodland ceramics, a sequence not unlike those recorded in Michigan and Wisconsin (Fitting 1965; Mason 1966; MacPherron 1967). Five of the sites had other ceramics, three had Blackduck ceramics, one had Stamped, Huron-Petun and Selkirk ceramics and...
one had Stamped and Push-pull ceramics. The latter site also had at least one Mississippi ceramic vessel. Such ceramics are not part of the Algonkian tradition but considering the presence of Winnebego Sioux in historic times at the southern end of Lake Michigan and the Algonkian peoples' pattern of acquiring females its occurrence is not surprising.

Three sites had Laurel and Blackduck ceramics, one of which also had Selkirk ceramics. Five sites had Blackduck ceramics, one in association with Peninsular Woodland ceramics and one with Selkirk ceramics. Two sites had Selkirk ceramics only, and one had Huron-Petun ceramics only.

With eleven of the seventeen Terminal Woodland components having Blackduck ceramics the area is clearly dominated by the Western Area Algonkians, but early in the prehistory it is evident that Southern Area Algonkian manifestations, represented by several Michigan ceramic traditions, are in the region. Northern Area Algonkian representation is also clearly present with Eastern Area Algonkian being marginal. The pattern suggests considerable area stability but with constant and continuous interaction. Further, there appears to be two or more related sequences reflecting differing areas of influence.

Looking to the south and southeast from whence the predominant influences appear to originate we see at the Juntunen site in the Straits of Mackinac the florescence of Blackduck pottery in association with Mackinac ceramics which, except for an out-rolled lip and twisted cord impressions, are genetically related to Blackduck ceramics. This ware occurs at the eastern end of Lake Superior at the Pic site although at the time of anlaysis it was lumped with Blackduck (Wright 1966). It is related to Heins Creek Wares, Madison Cord Impressed and Wayne Cord-marked of the Michigan Younge
Tradition from which many of the ceramic traditions recorded in Northwestern Ontario have their origin.

Other wares from the Door Peninsula in Wisconsin which developed out of the earlier Initial Woodland North Bay wares, appear to be identical to some of the variants of Blackduck ware, e.g. Heins Creek Corded Stamped. The Heins site is dated at 720 A.D. (1230±150 B.P.) (Mason 1966:28). Some of the ware is considered by Mason to be comparable to Leland cord-marked from southwestern Wisconsin which Wittry (1963:256) considers to be a variant of Illinois Weaver ware. Mason considers Heins Creek Corded Stamped and Heins Creek Cord-wrapped to be identical to Leven Stamped of Iowa. These latter ceramics occur on the territory which was occupied by the Algonkian-speaking Illinois and Miami.

The Algonkian culture appears to have developed out of an early widely dispersed common base such as North Bay, Laurel and Point Peninsular II, a base which extends from Lake Winnipeg to the upper St. Lawrence river valley in the ecologically similar Lake Forest, biotic province. Mason has called this the Northern Tier Middle Woodland Tradition (1967:338). Across this vast area the development of Terminal Woodland out of an earlier Woodland base is everywhere in evidence.

Ritchie has observed a similar situation in New York State where cord-wrapped stick decorated pottery was produced and shared by various groups whose linguistic affinities included Algonkians but whose tribal differentiation seems largely to have been a very late prehistoric phenomenon (1965:289). Here he is referring to the Algonkian-speaking Delaware or Munsee. A cursory examination of published literature on cord-wrapped stick decorated pottery in the east suggests their inclusion may belong more appropriately
in an Algonkian sequence rather than the Iroquois sequence.

Archaeologists have observed the overriding genetic similarities in corded pottery of one sort or another which extends from the Atlantic slope to the plains in traditional Algonkian country (Ritchie 1944:326; Byers 1961:47-48; MacPherron 1967:276-278). In the Woodland period parallel development is everywhere in evidence with increasing regionalization in the Terminal Woodland period. Sites with such pottery sequences, it is suggested, are a product of a single ethnic group which in the late prehistoric times appear as independent bands of Algonkian-speaking peoples. In northwestern Ontario and adjacent territories the Western Area Algonkians in historic times are known by the generic term Ojibwa and identified by the presence of Blackduck tradition ceramics on archaeological sites.
References Cited


