

CATLINITE BEADS: *LES AUTRES DIAMAS DU PAIS*

William Fox

Archaeological evidence is combined with 17th-century documents to record the production of red stone beads by Anishinaabe communities in southern Ontario for exchange with neighboring Iroquoian populations as far away as the Seneca in upstate New York. A transition from local red siltstone to exotic catlinite appears to have been influenced by the mid-century Iroquois Wars, while the symbolism inherent in these items may have been related to the introduction of European diseases.

INTRODUCTION

The title of this article alludes to a report by François le Mercier in the *Jesuit Relations* of 1654 of a “large Porcelain collar, a hundred little tubes or pipes of red glass, which constitute the diamonds of the country” gifted to a peace delegation of the Five Nations Iroquois (Thwaites 1899:110-111), as cited by Ian Kenyon (1984:6), and proposes that red stone beads of the period were as highly prized as glass. Indeed, the grinding of multi-layered glass beads to remove blue and white glass layers that obscured the red glass beneath them has been argued to have been done to imitate red stone beads (Boyle 1904:13, 25, 468; Lennox and Fitzgerald 1990:436). If this was the objective, it suggests the equal or greater value accorded to red stone specimens (Fox, Conolly, and Hawkins 2023:100).

Across North America, stone beads are extremely rare until well into the Archaic era. In the Northeast, the earliest widely distributed beads are primarily of marine shell, as well as a limited number of native copper specimens which date to the terminal Archaic, some 3000 years ago (Donaldson and Wortner 1995:14, Figure 7, 40, Figure 38). These bead forms continue to be produced and widely distributed in the lower Great Lakes region throughout the early and middle periods of the Woodland era, but become rare during the subsequent Late Woodland period (Fox 2008:13). Stone beads are equally rare, being recovered in small quantities at St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages in southeastern Ontario where discoidal forms manufactured from black or grey steatite and yellow mudstone are reported (Pendergast 1966:35).

RED STONE BEADS

Archaeological evidence indicates that Iroquoian populations were aware of red pipestone, including catlinite, since the early 16th century (Boyle 1888:13, 28-29, Figure 27; Fox 2002:138; Witthoft, Schoff, and Wray 1953:92), although the production of red stone beads did not begin until the end of the century (Fox 2014). Evidence for the latter consists of an unusual assemblage of steatite beads from the Wendat/Anishinaabe Ball village dating to Glass Bead Period 1 (ca. 1580-1600) (Kenyon and Kenyon 1983:59-60, 66) (Figure 1). Geochemical analysis by pXRF indicates that a series of natural grey- to black-colored steatite disc beads display the same chemistry as red to pink specimens, strongly suggesting that the latter beads were thermally altered (heated) to produce the unnatural red color. Furthermore, a fragment of red siltstone from the Ball village evidences stone bead production, anticipating the early-17th-century industry that developed in the Blue Mountain region (Fox 1980) and eastern Wendake (Sykes 1983).

Excavations at the subsequent village of Cahiagué that dates to the first decades of the 17th century (Heidenreich 2014; Manning et al. 2019) have produced some of the earliest evidence of red siltstone bead production with an assemblage dominated by discoidal forms but including tubes (Sykes 1983:234-238, Plate 69). This industry blossomed at sites of Glass Bead Period 3a during the 1630s: the Petun/Odawa Hamilton-Lougheed village of Ehwaé and the Jesuit Mission of St. Pierre and St. Paul (Garrad 2014:208, Figure 5.1, 357, Table 7.4) (Figures 1-2). This Odawa tubular-bead industry (Fox 1980:97, 1990:464; Garrad 2014:348, Plate 7.1) ended abruptly when the Petun and Odawa abandoned the Georgian Bay region in 1650, moving to Michilimackinac by 1652 (Garrad 2014:502, Figure 11.1). This termination is reflected in early-17th-century Seneca village assemblages which include tubular red siltstone beads (Sempowski and Saunders 2001:271-272, Figures 3-217, 544-545, 7-224), and where the latest site producing a red siltstone bead is the Warren village, dating to 1630-1650 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Sites referenced in text (image: Andrew Stewart).



Figure 2. Red siltstone beads from the Neutral Lake Medad site (unless otherwise stated, all photos by William Fox, enhanced by John Howarth Photography).

The earliest catlinite bead documented in the Blue Mountain region is a tubular specimen recovered from the 1616-1642 Graham-Ferguson village (Fox 1980:95, Figure 8.1; Garrad 2014: 357, Table 7.4). This famous red pipestone, one of several types available in the Midwest (Tremblay and Noel 2021:43; Wisseman et al. 2012), was quarried at a site in southwestern Minnesota (Woolworth 1983). At roughly

the same time, Norwood chert from the northeastern shore of Lake Michigan began to appear on Petun/Odawa sites in the 1630s (Fox 1992a:54). The timing is remarkably close to the date recorded in Odawa oral history for the expulsion of the Mascouten and the establishment of the Odawa Nassauketon settlement at Arbre Croche on Little Traverse Bay (Assikinack 1858:307-308). This first Odawa settlement in the Lake Michigan basin was adjacent to the Norwood chert quarry (Fox 1992a:56) and closer to the catlinite source area (Figure 1).

Fifty-four catlinite beads from Neutral sites in the collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (Fox 2020) range from a tubular specimen 81.4 mm in length to a discoidal bead 3.3 mm in thickness. The majority of the beads are tubular in form with round to rectangular or triangular cross-sections. Six specimens display edge notching, three of which have zigzag-incised faces (Fox, Hawkins, and Harris 2023:181) (Figure 3). Similar to the arrival timing of these exotic items on Petun/

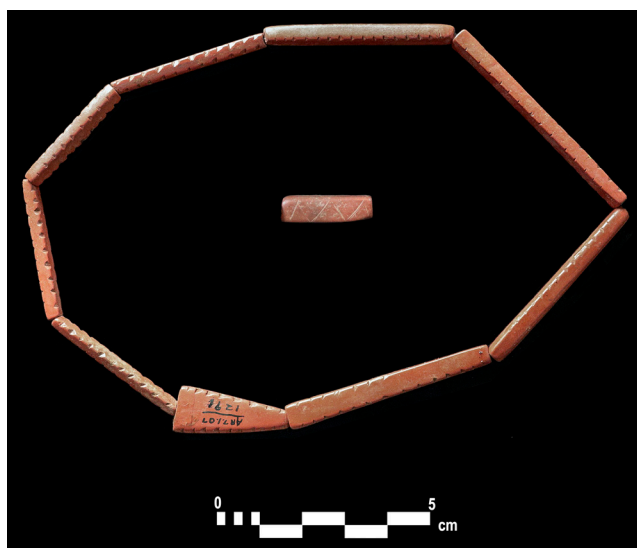


Figure 3. Catlinite beads from late 17th-century Seneca sites.

Odawa sites of the Blue Mountain region, the earliest Neutral catlinite specimens derive from graves 11 and 49 at the Grimsby cemetery (Kenyon 1982:76, Plate 77, B, Q, S [the latter is triangular-sectioned with edge notching]) dating to the 1630s (Kenyon and Fox 1982:9, 12). Likewise, the earliest catlinite beads among the Seneca include four specimens, one displaying edge notching, from the Warren site (ca. 1630-1650) (pers. obs.).

Following the Blue Mountain diaspora, local Odawa were joined by Odawa from Thunder Bay (Michigan), Manitoulin Island, and Michilimackinac in a move to Rock Island in the Green Bay area to avoid Iroquois attacks (Mason 1986:16). They were joined by some Petun (referred to as “Huron” in the French records and then Wyandot) before traveling south to the Upper Iowa River region, as documented by Nicholas Perrot (Fox 2002:146). There they met with the Ioway tribe who were described as poor by Father Louis Andre in 1676, noting: “their greatest Wealth consists of ox-hides and of Red Calumets” (Thwaites 1900:203), a reference to their direct access to the catlinite deposits.

An early Plains-style pipe of catlinite identical in form to several from the 1640s Lake Medad Neutral village (Figure 4) was recovered from the Hogback site, a 17th-century Ioway cemetery on the South Fork Root River in southeastern Minnesota (Wilford and Brink 1974:11, 12, 36, 37, 74 Plate 8b). Interestingly, an Ontario Iroquoian-style stone panther effigy pipe was recovered from a grave on the Upper Iowa River in northeastern Iowa (Laidlaw 1915:60, no. 5), just to the south (Figure 1).

By the end of the century, many Odawa had returned to the straits region of northern Lake Michigan, including St.



Figure 4. Catlinite “plains style” pipe from the Neutral Lake Medad site.

Ignace where Michigan State University rescue-excavated the Lasanen cemetery, which Charles Cleland (1971:144) proposed “could be the St. Ignace Ottawas who were Cadillac’s hosts at a Feast of the Dead between 1694 to 1697.” The cemetery produced “152 catlinite artifacts... recovered from 11 burial pits,” including pendants, tubular beads, and most importantly, evidence of manufacturing activity (How 1971:41). Fifty-six tubular beads vary from rectangular to circular or triangular in cross section, while an additional three display edge notching (How 1971:46-48, Figure 28). Lengths vary from 13.5 to 58 mm (How 1971:50-51, Table 4), similar to mid-17th-century Seneca specimens, while perforation diameters are comparable (Fox, Hawkins, and Harris 2023:182). Edge notching appears to grow in popularity through time at Seneca sites in New York and Ontario (Fox, Hawkins, and Harris 2023:182-183). An increasing number of French males on Seneca village sites (Fox 2023:112) and their integration into these and other Indigenous communities may be reflected in a unique multi-drop necklace found around the neck of a young female on a mid-17th-century Seneca site (Figure 5). The donor, if not producer, of this gift had likely seen this style of necklace worn by European women.

THE COLOR RED

Ian Kenyon (1984), in a masterful review of glass bead chronology as reflected in bead color trends during the 16th-17th centuries, considered the significance of the color red

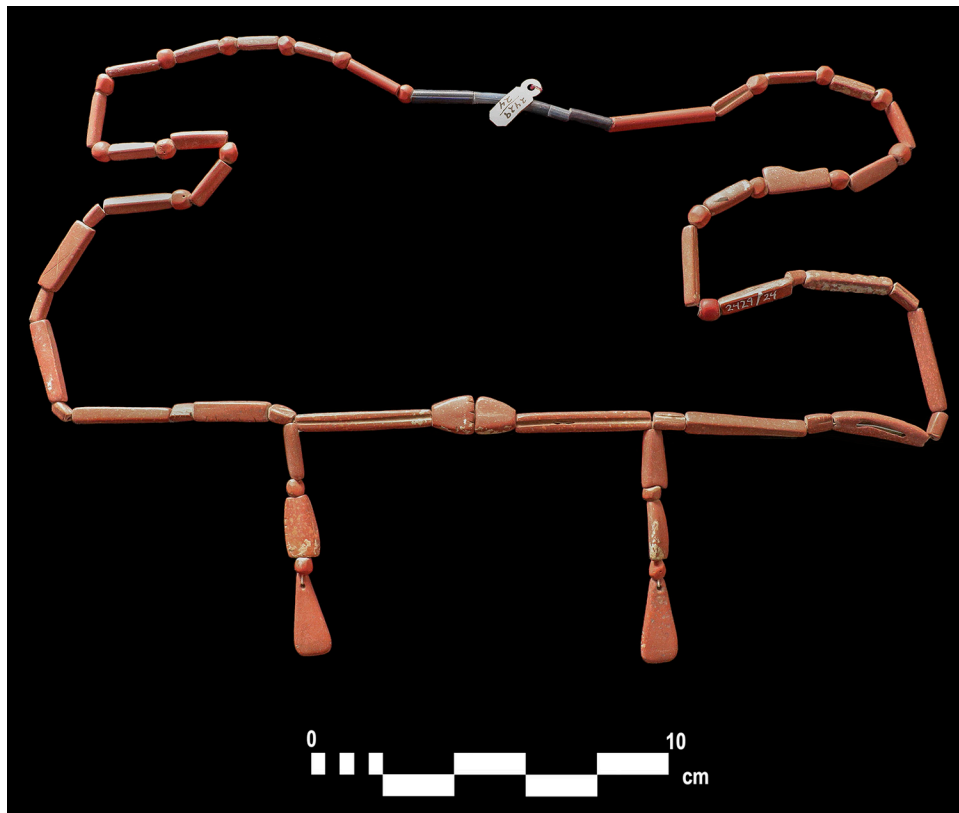


Figure 5. Catlinite and glass bead multi-drop necklace from the Seneca Power House site.

to Indigenous communities of the Great Lakes region. He documented the grinding of multi-layered glass beads to reveal underlying red layers beginning in the second or third decade of the 17th century (Kenyon 1984:11, Figure 2). But why this focus on red, as opposed to white and/or blue? George Hamell (1983:7), in an extensive consideration of glass bead color symbolism among Northeastern Indigenous groups, states that “‘redness’ connotes the animate aspect of life.” He further notes that “berries and fat are symbols of physical and spiritual well-being... While serving to signal spatial and temporal liminality in myth and ritual, berries are also a substance by which these threshold states-of-being are positively resolved” (Hamell 1983:7). He provides numerous ethnographic and ethnohistoric references concerning the spiritual and ritual importance of red berries – particularly strawberries – to Iroquoian peoples, including their medicinal use for “physical and spiritual renewal” (Hamell 1983:9).

The transition in steatite bead color from natural black and grey to manufactured red at the turn of the 16th century and the acquisition of red siltstone during the subsequent decades of the 17th century coincide with the intensified interaction of northern Iroquoians with Europeans and the transmission of various diseases (Fox 2023:112). The “red

shift” in glass bead color documented by Kenyon (1984:4-6, Figure 1) from ca. 1620 to 1651, as expressed in Ontario Iroquoian bead assemblages, coincides with one of the worst periods of European transmission of various diseases, including smallpox, documented during the fourth decade (Trigger 1987:526-534, 588-595). The Iroquoian perception of the spiritual nature of these ailments is reflected in the Huron/Wendat accusations of Jesuit witchcraft (Trigger 1987:534-538), and their earlier (1626) branding of Recollect Father Joseph de La Roche Daillon as an “Atatanite” – one who utters spells or a witch in modern parlance (Fox, Hawkins, and Harris 2023:104; Langdon 1981:4). The inclusion of red glass tubes in Ontario Iroquoian and Odawa mortuary sites (Fox, Hawkins, and Harris 2023:99-100) is consistent with the reported presence and importance of strawberries along the road to the spirit world or “heaven road” of the Seneca and “their inherent power of physical and spiritual renewal” (Hamell 1983:8-9). Red tubes are all but gone in the Seneca glass bead sequence by 1670, and are replaced by pea-sized round red beads which disappear by the end of the century (Wray 1983:44-45). Among the Seneca collections, catlinite beads appear to be most abundant at the Dann and Marsh village sites which date ca. 1650-1675, and are in decline by 1680 (pers. obs.).

THE SERPENT AND THE NOTCHES

In addition to red stone, there is another medium in which incised serpentine images and edge notching occurs on 17th-century Iroquoian sites, i.e., “tally beads,” what old-time collectors called the tubes fashioned from mammal long bones found at Neutral village and mortuary sites, such as the Dwyer ossuary (Smith and Murphy 1939:6, Plate IV) (Figures 1, 6). Ridley (1961:49, 53) refers to these as “large bone tubes,” recovered primarily from the Sealey, Walker, and Dwyer sites. Additional decorated and notched specimens have been recovered from the Walker site (Wright 1981:201, Figure 58, 9-10) and the Hamilton (Lennox 1981:395, Figure 45, 2-4) and Bogle 1 (Lennox 1984:283, Figure 25, 6) Neutral village sites. Walter Kenyon (1982:19, Plate 9, 48, Plate 35, 54, Plate 48, 115, Plate 106) refers to these items as “sucking tubes.” All of these finds date to GBP 3 (ca. 1632-1651) (Kenyon and Fox 1982:7), a time of extreme social stress for the Neutral who were “destroyed” in 1651 (Jackes 2008:368). Significantly, the GBP 2 (ca. 1600-1632) Neutral Christianson village yielded none (Fitzgerald 1982), leading Lennox and Fitzgerald (1990:423) to note that “these tubes are restricted to the Neutral. Also, within the Neutral sequence, these tubes are a sensitive temporal indicator, being recovered from sites belonging to the A.D. 1630-1650 era” and opine that “it may be that these tubes represent [a shamanic] implement developed as an attempt to combat the psychological and physical trauma initiated by the post-A.D. 1634 epidemics.”

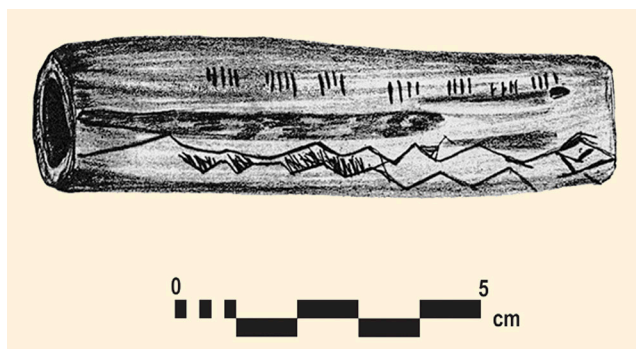


Figure 6. Incised bone “sucking tube” from the Neutral Dwyer ossuary (image: Ethel Smith).

Yet another medium used to depict serpents is native copper, which Hamell (1983:7, 16-17) equates to the color red and describes its ritual use “through reciprocal exchange with the Under(water) World Grandfathers.” Mishipezheu, the great underwater panther, owned the native copper of the Great Lakes and controlled hunting success and weather, particularly storms on the lakes. He was assisted by the horned serpents (Fox 1992b:5). Native-copper serpents of

various sizes (Figure 7) are widespread from protohistoric Oneota sites on the Iowa River (Wedel 1959:72) to early historic sites in the Lake Michigan basin (Bluhm and Liss 1961:115, 126-127, Figure 66; Brose 1970:211, Plate XXXV, h; Quimby 1966:42-43, Figure 16), and include a small specimen from the ca. 1630-1650 Ludlow-Vanderlip site (Kenyon 1972:1), a satellite settlement to the Neutral Sealey village.

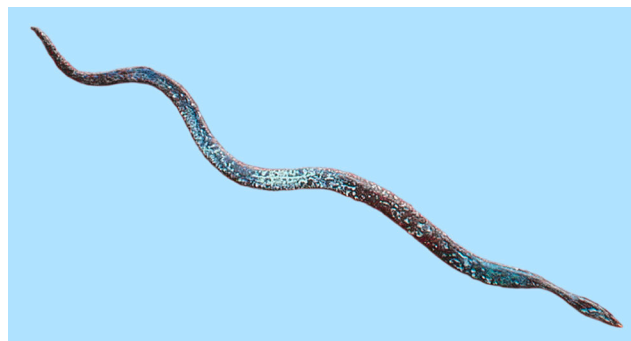


Figure 7. Native-copper serpent effigy from the Sault Ste. Marie region (courtesy: William Ross).

CONCLUSION

A trickle of tubular catlinite beads entered the lower Great Lakes region beginning in the fourth decade of the 17th century and became a flood in Seneca and other Five Nations communities following the mid-century Ontario Iroquoian diaspora. This appears to follow the termination of red siltstone beadmaking at village sites in the Blue Mountain region and the removal of the Wyandot and allied Odawa population to the Michilimackinac area in 1650. The juxtaposition of red stone beads with or without edge notching and rare incised serpentine motifs, and possible bone “sucking tubes” with or without edge notching and rare serpentine incisions, with a native-copper serpent on Neutral Iroquoian villages during the fourth and fifth decades of the 17th century, is striking and may be correlated with the disastrous epidemics sweeping Iroquoia during the 1630s, in particular. It is tempting to see the notching as a record of events, perhaps shamanic attempts at spiritual/medical healing, returning victims to health and well-being, or if unsuccessful, setting them on their way along the serpentine “ghost road” (Bender 2022).

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