CHAPTER XIV

MISCELLANEOUS ARTIFACTS

In considering the whole range of artifacts made by primitive man we find many whose purpose is either wholly unknown or only partially understood. Some of these are relatively rare in occurrence and when found are in such varying associations as to give no clue as to their tribal or cultural source and but little hint as to the purpose of their manufacture. Such artifacts are usually denominated problematical forms. Again there are artifacts the use of which is known but which are of rare occurrence in Kentucky either because they existed in relatively small numbers or because from their nature they have been destroyed by natural decay. The form and material of some of these artifacts would not permit their being included in any of the preceding chapters and they are therefore now considered under the title of Miscellaneous Artifacts.

Chief among such artifacts may be mentioned:

a. Boats stones
b. Bird stones
c. L. gorgets
d. Spatulate forms
e. Whet stones
f. Paint cups
g. Bow-string sizers
h. Bar amulets
i. Pointed pendants
j. Ceremonial axes
k. Decorated cylinders
l. Pictograph writings

Boat stones are a well recognized type of artifact but are not common anywhere and are only occasionally found in Kentucky. They have been picked up on the banks of streams, plowed up in fields under cultivation, and in one case found near an ancient camp site. So far as the authors are aware, they are never found in caves, in mounds, or in any association with graves. They are made of a variety of material: granite, slate, sandstone, serpentine and other hard stones. They are carefully made and highly polished both inside and out. Some are drilled with two holes and some are undrilled. They are generally concave but are sometimes flat on one side and concave on the other. The name has been given to them from their crude resemblance to a small boat or canoe. Because their number is so

relatively small and yet their occurrence extends over the whole central and eastern United States, they have long been a problem to archaeologists.

In as much as they are never found in association with graves, it would seem conclusive that they were not objects of ornamentation or of veneration. Since there seems to be no way to ascribe to them any utilitarian purpose, and since their great variation in form would seem to preclude their use as a tool for any special purpose, they have generally been regarded as ceremonial artifacts. The patience and skill shown in their manufacture seem to argue a ceremonial significance. Here is indeed a problem—a highly developed ceremonial object, yet not an object of veneration; rare in occurence, an object not to be kept in camp, dwelling or cave, not valued as a tribute to the dead, yet carefully made and painstakingly finished. The suggestion has been made by several writers that here was an object made to be destroyed—sacrificed—not kept!

What we believe to be its real use, however, is suggested by the practice of the medicine man in many historical tribes who uses a small woven grass or wicker basket or tiny birch-bark canoe under certain circumstances. If one has a disease, or bad luck on a hunt, or a known enemy who might do him damage, he applies to the medicine man who prepares a tiny grass basket or bark canoe into which he ties some figure representing the "spirit" of the disease or of the enemy who may cause trouble, or a small effigy representing the one responsible for the bad luck, and after he "makes medicine" and goes through his incantations, the minature basket or canoe containing the effigy is given to the patient to be by him destroyed. When it is so destroyed, the disease will leave him, the spell of his bad luck be broken, or his enemy rendered powerless to do him injury. It has been suggested that these tiny baskets or bark canoes are the historical replicas of what were boat stones in prehistoric times.

While such an explanation may appear to be highly fanciful and scientifically unproven, yet all the evidence available supports such a theory. Boat-stones are rarely found—because they were made to be destroyed. How could primitive man de-

stroy anything? It is natural to suppose that there were but two ways which would appear to him to be complete, namely, by the use of fire or of water. He could burn up his enemy's image or he could drown it in a stream.

It is an interesting fact that of the very few boat-stones found, many have been discovered on the banks of streams, on sand bars or on islands in the river. When found elsewhere as in fields or on camp sites they show unmistakably that they have been subjected to the action of fire. Again, there has been reported from New England the finding of a number of boat-stones in the gravel of certain of the swiftly flowing rivers of the state of Maine. This gravel was dredged from the river bottom, together with sand and silt, for commercial use. The sand being washed and screened, the gravel was saved for concrete construction work. From an immense pile of such material taken from the Penobscot River, upwards of twenty boat-stones were discovered. This would lend color to the idea that the boat-stone was “destroyed” by being thrown into the river where it has remained uninjured for centuries. Whatever else may be said, the boat-stone remains one of the very interesting problematical forms whose use and cultural association may never certainly be known.

Somewhat more elaborately made is the type of artifact commonly designated a "bow-string sizer." This stone of serpentine, flat on one face and convex on the other, has two cylindrical holes drilled through the thicker portion. These holes are of different sizes. On the flat face of this stone there is a concavity some three-quarters of an inch above the main surface of the body, which projection contains a well worn deep groove extending from one hole to the other.

It is certain that the manufacture of leather strings for the bow, for lacing tents, for making clothing, and for general household use, was an important problem for early man. Skins could be cut into thin strips with comparative ease by the use of flint knives but such cutting must have left them somewhat rough and with more or less of a square cross-section. It has been suggested that this stone was used to work down leather strings by pulling them back and forth through the holes and thus rendering them smooth and of uniform size. While this explanation

may or may not be correct, it is certain that this type of stone artifact is quite rare and in all cases very well made. It is evident that it was a highly prized instrument although today we may not be certain of its use.

The name "bird-stone" is applied to a very numerous class of ancient artifacts of quite a variety of forms, all of which show more or less certainly the shape of a bird. Many of these representations are highly conventionalized and the real likeness to a bird in some cases is not easily discerned. They appear in a variety of materials, banded slate being the most common, while sandstone, granite, porphyry and other stones are also used.

Bird-stones have been the subject of a vast amount of speculation and investigation and many articles have been written concerning their distribution, significance and use. Moorehead has made a very complete study of their occurrence and finds that they are to be expected in New York, Western Pennsylvania, Central Kentucky and Tennessee, and in an area extending northward to include Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and central Canada. In fact their distribution seems to indicate that this form of artifact had its origin in a fairly definite area which included Ohio, Indiana and southern Michigan, and that its use spread from this central area. They are practically unknown outside of the larger area mentioned and as Moorehead has pointed out they tend to illustrate, probably better than any other of the problematical forms, the theory that they may all have spread from a common center of distribution.

Various writers on the subject have attempted to classify bird-stones, closely related to the so-called "bar-amulets" and practically without exception they all have a flat or nearly flat base which is drilled at either end. These drillings are generally characteristic of this type of artifact, each being made by the intersection of two conical holes, one hole drilled from the base and the other from the end or side. It is clear that the purpose of these drillings was that the stem might be attached in an upright position to some flat surface on which the base rested.

The use of the bird-stone is of course entirely conjectural. Some writers have asserted that they were worn on the head by married women to denote pregnancy and were an appeal to

the "Thunder Bird" for protection. Others insist that they were worn by conjurors or medicine men as a badge of office since in later historical times the medicine men still wore as such a badge of office a bird skin dressed and stuffed and mounted over their left ear on their head-dress; this skin is believed to have replaced in historical colonial days the birdstone of prehistoric times.

Some authorities have drawn the conclusion from suggestions of the early missionaries among the Indians that bird-stones were attached to the prows of the canoes used by those who hunted water-fowl on the rivers and streams to bring them good luck. Still others believe that this practice was extended to the use of bird-stones as amulets, to be attached to bows, spears, and even to arrows. From this mass of contradictory theories suggested by various writers it as at least evident that the bird-stones must be placed within the problematical class of artifacts.

Thus far archaeologists have not assigned bird-stones to any distinct culture, yet there seems to be a general agreement that they are among the oldest if not the oldest of all the problematical forms. While bird-stones are not numerous in Kentucky, they are occasionally found. So far as our records show they are plowed up in the open fields and so far as is known they are not found in association with graves or with mound sites.

Closely related to the bird-stone is the" bar amulet." This stone is usually a straight bar, sometimes more or less modified, some four to six inches long, and drilled in a manner quite similar to the bird-stones. They are made of banded slate, brown or black slate or shale, or other similar material. They occur sparingly in Kentucky, sometimes in association with graves, and in as much as they have been found occasionally on the left side of skeletons, it has been suggested that they were worn on the left wrist to prevent the bow string when released from injuring the skin. While this seems a reasonable explanation of their use, yet many bar amulets have been found in such association as to make the theory doubtful. They are in general well made, highly polished and indicate as high a degree of workmanship as the bird-stones.

"L" shaped gorgets usually described as geniculate are rare but occur sparingly over the greater part of central United

States eastward to New York and into Canada. Kentucky has produced a number of specimens, all of which are of highly polished banded slate. In one such form the sides are flat and the cross section of the specimen about square, while the other, a typical modification, has the convex side ground down to a fairly sharp edge as if it was to be used as a knife. It could not, however, have served such a purpose, as the stone is far too soft.

The real purpose of the geniculate form of gorget is wholly unknown its occurrence being so rare and its association so indefinite as to offer little evidence as to its use. The most plausible explanation seems to be that their form represents horns and that they are attached to the head-dress of important personages. Catlin has explained how the Mandans and other tribes of the Northwest accorded the right to wear horns on the head-dress only to the most honored and distinguished chieftains, as a recognition of their high character and prowess in battle. It may be that the geniculate form of artifact was used in prehistoric times as such ornaments on the head-dress of a relatively few persons—hence their rarity.

Two quite rare forms of pendants are of banded slate, flat on one side, polished, dagger-shaped, and with a groove cut in the upper end for suspension. They were probably worn as ornaments and they form a distinct class of problematical forms.

We have encountered a few specimens of the spatulate form of artifacts sometimes called "spuds." These, like many other problematical forms, are comparatively rare. Apparently they are most numerous in the south, although they are found northward to Canada. They are usually found in mounds, and sometimes in graves. Many are made of materials quite soft, such as slate, shale, and even cannel coal, which would seem to preclude all possibility of use as a tool. Others are made of very hard stone such as greenstone and granite as shown in figure 171. There are many forms of the spatulate objects, but the two figured are the most common. The long form with the flared blade is generally without perforation but often has a number of grooves cut on the edge of the blade and sometimes notches cut on the handle. The form with the broad blade and short stem often has a drilling through the stem as shown in the figure.

There is considerable literature relative to the problematical use of these forms. Some have doubted that they are genuine prehistoric artifacts but the exploration of Moore in the south which revealed so many specimens in mounds and graves has set at rest forever any doubt as to their genuineness. Moore found

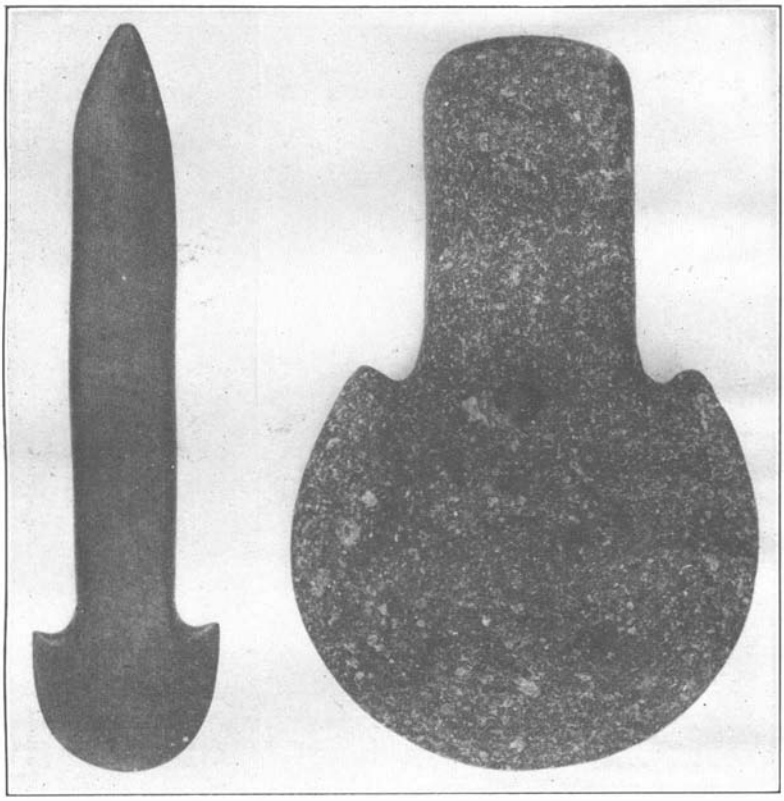

FIG. 171. SPATULATE FORMS.
A rare type of artifact often called a "spud."

specimens that bore evidence of having been used with handles. He therefore regarded them as a form of ax and because of the high character of the workmanship and the lack of evidence that they were used for rough work, he considered them as a form of ceremonial mace.

In fact, most writers agree that probably the larger number of the single specimens found in graves, especially the southern forms, properly belong to the ceremonial class of artifacts, although there seems to be evidence that in the north, especially in Michigan, cruder implements of this form were actually used as spades or axes. There is also evidence that cer-

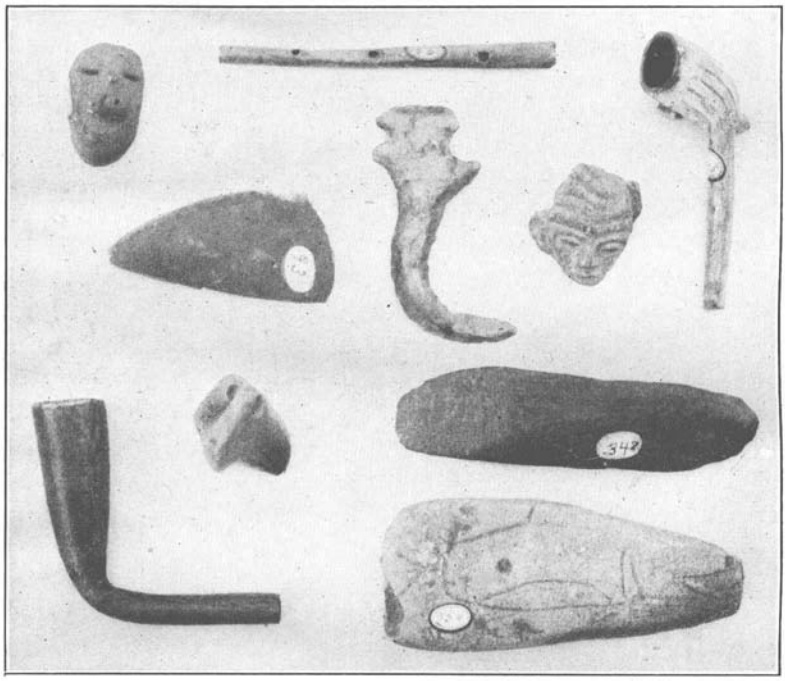

FIG. 172. MISCELLANEOUS AND PICTOGRAPH FORMS.
Showing three stones engraved with a fish image, a flint hook, two trade pipes of colonial days, a turkey-can of bone and pieces with representations of the human face.

tain of the northern tribes even in early historical times used a "spud" of the long handled variety to remove the bark from trees in the manufacture of canoes.

A rare type of stone artifact, "decorated cylinders," are commonly from two to three inches long and about an inch in diameter. They are made of sandstone and generally have at the center of each end-face a small hole drilled a short distance — perhaps a sixteenth of an inch deep. These cylinders are

decorated over all of the surface with a system of grooves cut of such a size and depth as to leave the surface covered with ridges. A characteristic of the cylinder is that the ridges are not continuous but end abruptly to start again after an angular offset. These cylinders are found in graves and on mound sites but are quite rare. It is believed, however, that they are perhaps more common in Kentucky than in any other area. Their purpose is entirely unknown. In general they are too short to have been handles and they show no evidence of such use.

Early man in Kentucky did very little pictographic writing that has remained to the present time. However, he did in certain cases scratch or cut on stone some curious bird and other animal figures which seem to have no purpose except a crude attempt at drawing. These engravings occur most frequently in village sites along the rivers and the design is generally that of some aquatic form. Figure 172 shows three stones which although engraved in a very crude way are yet unmistakably attempts to represent a fish. A number of such drawings have been found along the Ohio River and are now in the hands of private collectors. Others painted in colors on prominent cliffs and trees in Eastern Kentucky, crudely representing beasts, birds and fish, as described by Dr. Jillson in his "Big Sandy Valley," are now quite obliterated.

Banner-stones and slate gorgets were discussed under the subject of ground stone artifacts and there is a rare form of stone object called the "double-crescent" which may properly belong to such classification but which we are here considering in the miscellaneous group. They are occasionally found in southern Kentucky and Col. Bennett H. Young figured several from this state. One such double crescent is made of banded slate. It measures seven inches in its largest dimension, is quite thin, highly polished, and has the cylindrical drilling in the center common to all banner-stones. This specimen is well made but is not exactly symmetrical. A smaller specimen which is of quartzite is double drilled as if it was to be worn as a gorget.

Of all artifacts made by early man, those that are most subject to decay are naturally among the rarest. This is particularly true of articles of dress made from skins or from

woven fabrics. However, about 1894, Col. Bennett H. Young discovered in some of the caves in the famous cave region of Kentucky, particularly in Salts Cave, much evidence of ancient occupation including articles of dress, wooden implements, woven fabrics in the form of bags, many sandals or slippers and other more or less perishable objects. These articles were carefully preserved by him and later came into the possession of the

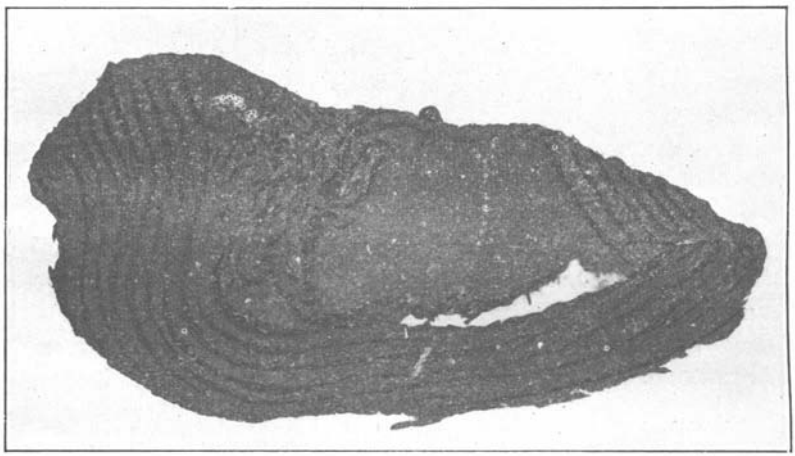

FIG. 173. AN ANCIENT SLIPPER.
A sandal of fiber found in Salts Cave.

American Indian Heye Foundation, New York City. In one of the series of monographs published by this Foundation, these discoveries of Col. Young have been discussed by William C. Orchard.

After the recent death of Professor J. C. Norwood of the University of Kentucky, for many years State Inspector of Mines, there were found among his effects other specimens of woven sandals which he had taken from Salts Cave. Figure 173 shows one of these sandals. It is made of the coarse fibrous material of Typha (cattail) which is a native of Kentucky and grows abundantly in the cavernous limestone region. The specimen figured shows very clearly the method of weaving and the special compartment for the great toe, and is very similar to the specimens described by Orchard which came from the same cave. While this sandal shows such use as to have worn

out the sole which probably lead to its being discarded, yet the salts of the cave have so preserved the vegetable fiber that it still retains its form after scores and perhaps hundreds of years.

Much may be learned from a study of such specimens as to the development of the textile art in prehistoric times. Salts Cave alone presents several forms of weave, the fiber from a

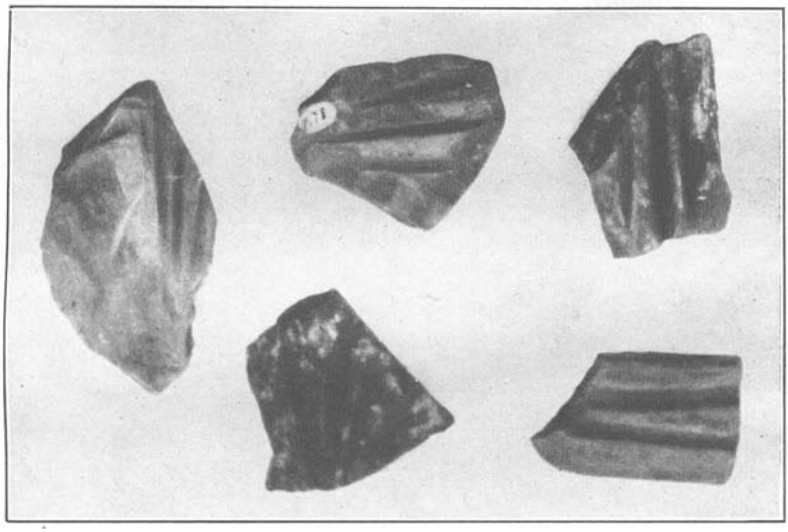

FIG. 174. WHET STONES.
Used for sharpening and polishing pointed objects.

number of plants, and specimens of fiber prepared for weaving which had not been used. Such artifacts are necessarily rare archaeologically and could exist today only because cave conditions tend to prevent natural deterioration.

On ancient sites there are two other types of artifacts often found—"whet-stones" and the so-called "paint-cups." The whet-stones shown in figure 174 are from Fox Field and are to be picked up rather commonly on the village site. Many are quite large, too heavy to carry, others small and of convenient form. All are of sandstone and show unmistakably that they were used to sharpen or polish pointed objects.

The paint cups in our collection were taken from graves. They appear to have been hollow limestone concretions which were roughly spherical in form. The user had worked them

down to a smooth surface on the outside, and the inside shows evidence of grinding. They are generally considered to have been small mortars used to grind or mix pigment. On one specimen a groove has been cut for attachment. Whatever their actual use, they were valued as offerings to the dead, the specimens being all taken from graves.