

**DOG SACRIFICES AMONG THE ALGONKIAN INDIANS:
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE FRANK BAY SITE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of six dog bundles from the Frank Bay site in Ontario. It is suggested that the dogs were sacrificed during an Algonkian feast around AD 1000.

INTRODUCTION

In a previous paper (Brizinski 1979) it was argued that the six Frank Bay dog burials were associated with a Feast of the Dead ceremony held by the Nipissing Indians in AD 1641 (JR 23:209-221). Since that time the authors have rejected the Feast of the Dead-dog burial hypothesis. It is now suggested that the dogs were ceremonially butchered and then bundled for interment sometime in the eleventh century.

The dog bundles (it would now appear that the dogs were not completely buried) are an intriguing cultural phenomena, and comparisons with earlier interpretations point out the precarious and tenuous nature of certain Algonkian culture change studies.

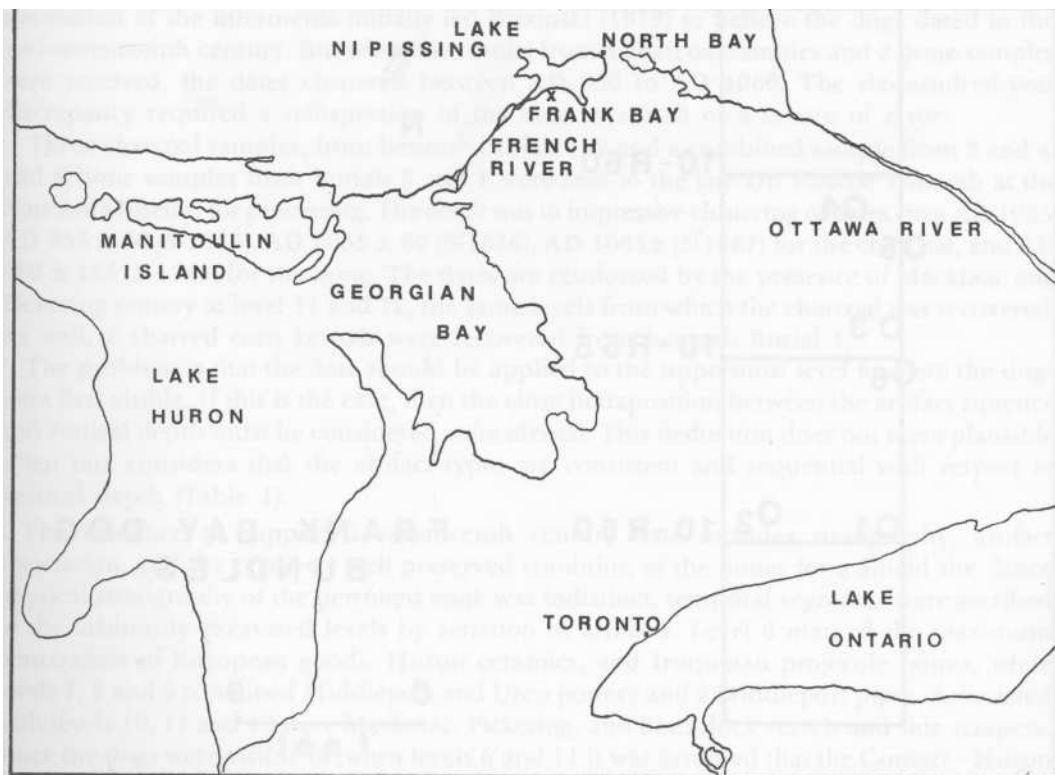


Fig. 1. The Frank Bay site in Ontario.

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LOCATION

Named after the bay on which the site is located, the Frank Bay site (Fig. 1) borders Lake Nipissing near the source of the French River and the mouth of Bass Creek. The site, situated on a sandy beach that is sparsely vegetated, lies in an area where easy access to marsh, riverine, and lacustrine environments provide an abundance of aquatic and terrestrial resources. Known by local collectors for its numerous trade goods, the site was initially excavated in the early 1950s by Frank Ridley. Ridley's (1954) excavations at Frank Bay established a well-defined chronological sequence for the Late Woodland period in Ontario as well as providing data for the material culture of the Archaic and Initial Woodland.

During the summer of 1978 the senior author excavated a portion of Frank Bay to explicate cultural events affecting Nipissing lifeways. Archaeological recoveries (Brizinski 1980) generally followed what Ridley (1954) had reported for his sequence, and six dog bundles were uncovered in the mid to upper strata of 2 five-foot squares (Fig. 2). These specimens may not be all that unusual for Frank Bay since Ridley (1954:49) noted the presence of 3 dog burials in his excavations.

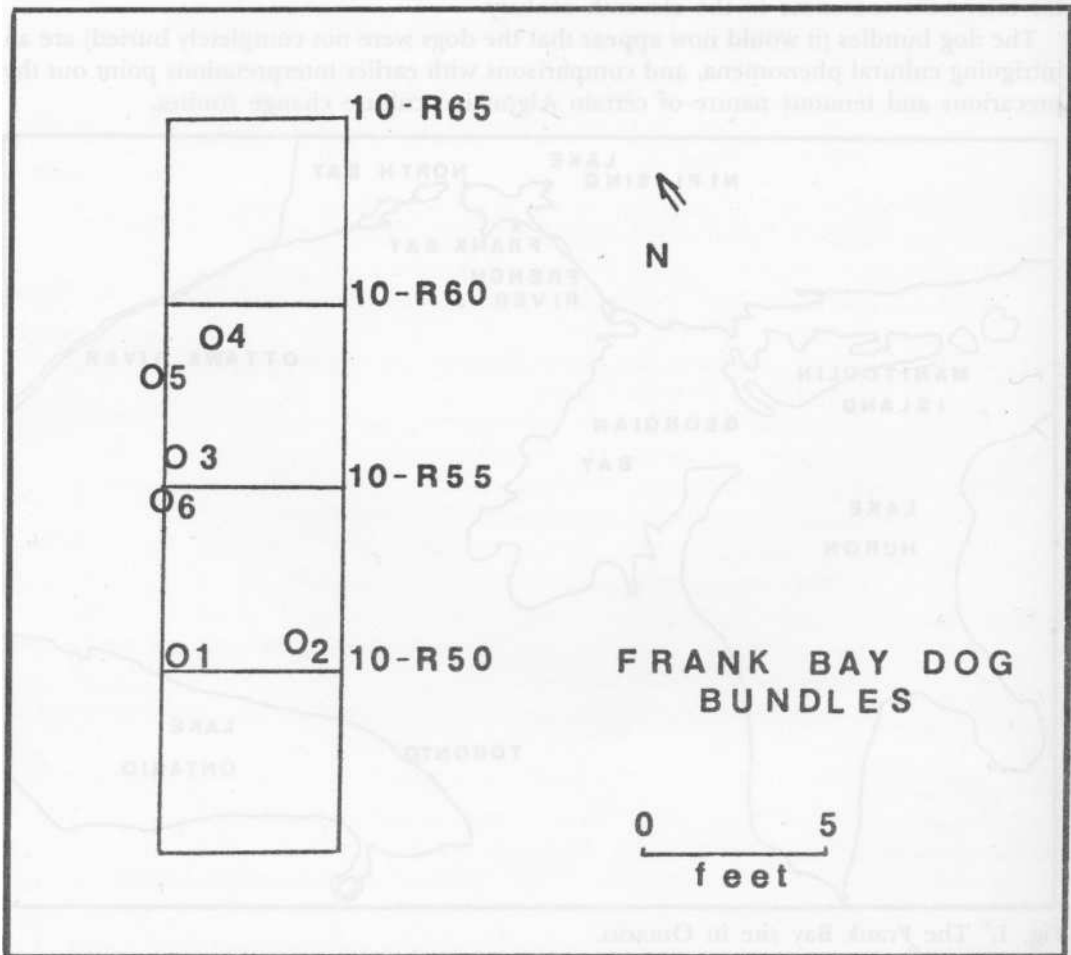


Fig. 2. Dog bundles in the 1978 excavation at the Frank Bay site.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SETTING

All of the dogs were found in a dismembered, unburnt condition. The presence of charred birch bark lying underneath two of the skeletons suggests that they were bundled in containers of this material. Stratigraphically, the dogs initially appeared at level 6 (20 - 24cm below datum) and persisted to level 11 (40 - 44cm). Red ochre was associated directly with several burials, and Burial 4 was accompanied by an exquisitely formed quartz crystal.

Surrounding the dog bundles was an abundance of charred bone refuse which is unusual considering the dearth of this material from adjacent sites. A superficial field inspection of these charred bones suggests the consumption of aquatic mammals such as beaver and muskrat.

In near association with 3 of the burials, at level 6, were a cache of glass trade beads, 2 triangular brass arrowheads, and a projectile point manufactured from Onondaga chert. As the dog bundles date to approximately AD 1000, these objects which were less than 6 inches away from the skeletal remains cannot be considered "grave goods" as was originally thought (Brizinski 1979). This illustrates one of the hazards in undertaking distributional studies on seasonally occupied sites.

DATING THE DOG BUNDLES

A conflict existed in dating the communally buried dogs. The stratigraphic and artifactual association of the interments initially led Brizinski (1979) to believe the dogs dated to the mid-seventeenth century. But when the results from 3 charcoal samples and 2 bone samples were received, the dates clustered between AD 950 to AD 1060. The six-hundred-year discrepancy required a reinspection of the data in search of a source of error.

Three charcoal samples, from beneath burials 1, 2 and a combined sample from 3 and 4, and 2 bone samples from burials 3 and 1 were sent to the late Dr. Roscoe Wilmeth at the National Museum for processing. The result was in impressive clustering of dates circa AD 1025: AD 955 ± 50 (S-1685), AD 1055 ± 60 (S-1686), AD 1065± (S-1687) for the charcoal, and AD 960 ± 165 (S-1949) for the bone. The dates are reinforced by the presence of Mackinac and Pickering pottery at level 11 and 12, the same levels from which the charcoal was recovered. As well, 2 charred corn kernals were recovered from beneath Burial 1.

The problem is that the date should be applied to the uppermost level 6 where the dogs were first visible. If this is the case, then the close juxtaposition between the artifact sequence and vertical depth must be considered coincidental. This deduction does not seem plausible when one considers that the artifact types are consistent and sequential with respect to vertical depth (Table 1).

The evidence to support a seventeenth century date includes stratigraphy, artifact association, and the relatively well preserved condition of the bones for a Shield site. Since physical stratigraphy of the pertinent zone was indistinct, temporal segments were ascribed to the arbitrarily excavated levels by seriation of artifacts. Level 6 marked the maximum penetration of European goods, Huron ceramics, and Iroquoian projectile points, while levels 7, 8 and 9 contained Middleport and Uren pottery and 2 Middleport pipes. Associated with levels 10, 11 and 12 were Mackinac, Pickering, and Blackduck vessels and side scrapers. Since the dogs were visible between levels 6 and 11 it was assumed that the Contact - Huron horizon represented the earliest possible time they could have been buried. However, if the carbon dates are correct, then it must be assumed that the dog bundles were not buried beneath the soil horizon but placed on or near the top of it, and then were covered with sand.

In summary, while an AD 1600s date was initially favoured for the ceremonial sacrifice of at least 6 Frank Bay dogs, the close clustering of 5 C-14 dates circa AD 950 to AD 1060 proves otherwise.

TABLE 1
STRATIGRAPHIC SEQUENCE AT FRANK BAY

Level	Ceramics	Lithics	European Goods	Proposed Date	Depth of Dog Bundles	Carbon Dates
1			iron	AD	1900	
2	Huron	triangular	trade items		1670	
3	"	projectiles	"			
4	"	"	"			
5	"	"	"			
6	"	"	"		1590	
7	Middleport				1500	
8	"	steatite			1400	
9	Uren	pipe			1300	
10	Pickering	side scrapers			1250	
11	Mackinac+	"			1100	AD 1025
12	Pickering	"			800	
13	pseudo scallop	end scrapers			600	AD 560
14	+ dentate	"			200	
15	"	"		10 BC		
16	"	"			200	
+	absent	bifacial tools			900	970 BC
		rhyolitic flakes			2000	

SKELETAL ANALYSIS

The faunal material recovered included major skeletal portions of 6 dogs. A few bone specimens from large mammal species (not domestic dogs) were also present. The dog skeletons, except for a single vertebral body, were not charred or calcined. number 2, an immature individual represented by several distal extremity bones, 1 cervical vertebra and a number of other bone fragments, fails to show butchering marks. The most striking evidence of bone alteration by sharp edged tools U. Tomenchuk, personal communication) are the cut marks on the atlas of number 1, the axis of number 5, the axis and fourth cervical vertebrae of number 4, and the axis of number 6. In these 4 dogs the cut marks lie transversely on the ventral surface of the body or a lateral process of the vertebrae (Fig. 3). The axis of Burial 6 shows numerous cut marks and sectioning off of the posterior surface of the axis.

The ventral surface of the body of the axis of Burial 5 shows numerous cut marks ventrally, on the elevated mid-line and both left and right borders; some of these marks line up as if made by the same stroke of the blade. Moreover, on the ventral surface of the body there are a number of irregular gouges in the bone surface which appear to be the result of the use of a somewhat dull point having been dug into the bone. In addition, there are cut marks on both left and right lateral surfaces of the body of the axis. This suggests that the cut marks could only have been made by the determined use of a blade to cut down the sides of the axis.

The axis of Burial 4 shows three cut marks on the left border and one on the right tip of the left transverse process sectioned off. Burial 3 has two cut marks on the ventral surface of its atlas.

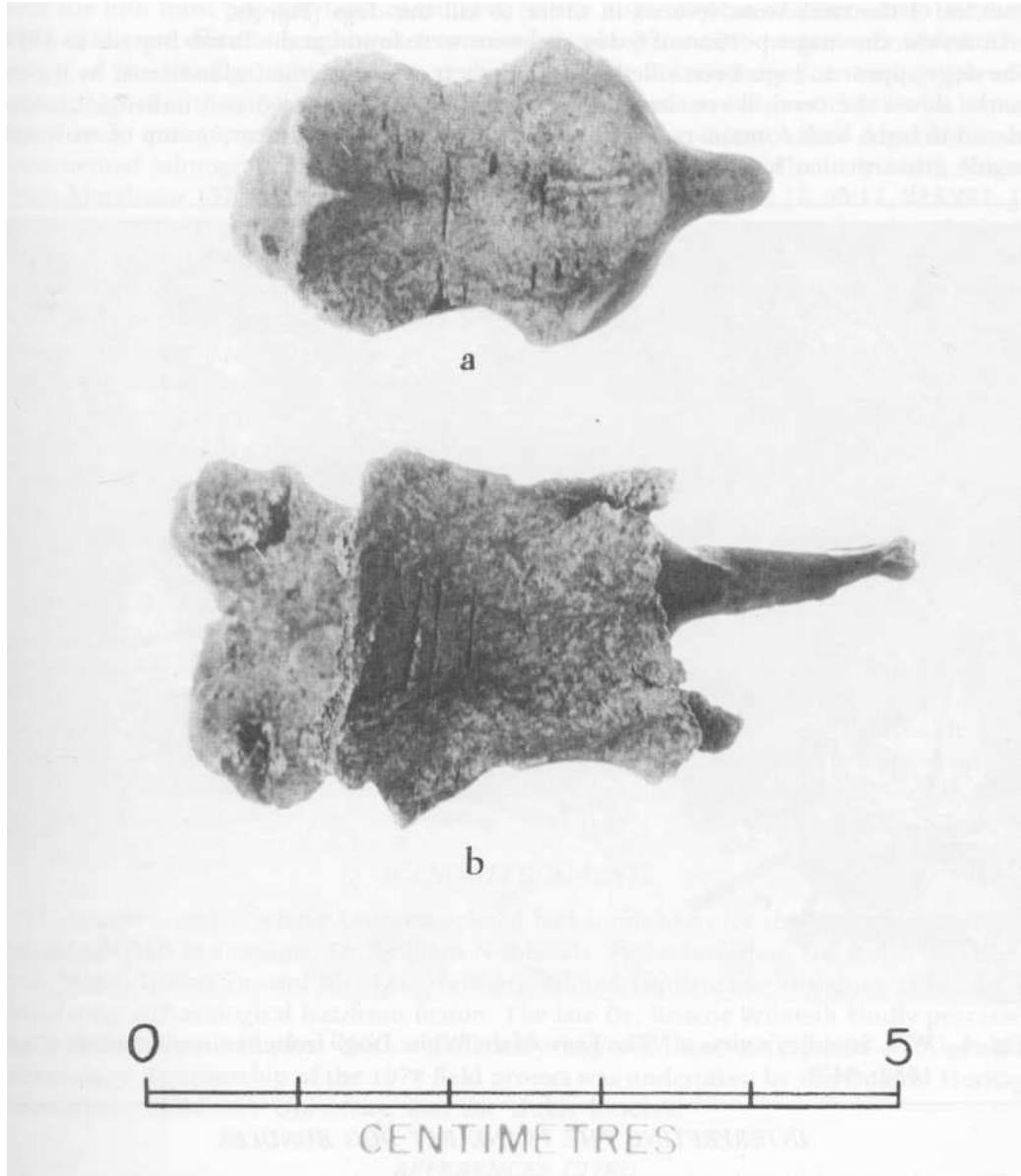


Fig. 3. a. Cut marks on cervical vertebrae of dog Burial 4. b. Cut marks on cervical vertebrae of dog Burial 6.

Other cut marks include evidence of butchering to remove the head of the right femur from its socket in Burial 3, and of the head of the right femur from its hip socket in Burial 5. Other significant cut marks occur near the angle of a rib in Burial 1, and just above the right knee in Burial 4.

The identical use of a sharp-edged tool on the necks of four dogs (the atlas and axis being absent from the other two burials) is presumably evidence that the great blood vessels and muscles of the neck were severed in order to kill the dogs (Fig. 4).

In review, the major portion of 6 dog skeletons were found at the Frank Bay site in 1978. The dogs appear to have been killed by having their throats slashed as indicated by the cut marks across the cervical vertebrae. They were then dismembered and individual bodies placed in birch bark containers. Finally, the bundles were placed near, on top of, or buried beside a hearth that had been used to cook food.



Fig. 4. W.T. Smedley's view of "The Feast of the White Dog" from *Picturesque Canada* (Grant 1882: 340).

INTERPRETING THE FRANK BAY DOG BUNDLES

The ethnographic—ethnohistoric record indicates the importance of man—dog relationships among indigenous groups. For the purpose of our study the relationships can be categorized into five general areas: transportation, clothing, hunting, food, and ritual (Driver 1976). To judge from the manner in which the dogs were slain and buried, their primary function was not as sled dogs or to provide their coats for clothing or to serve as hunting companions; their special status is also suggested by their youthful age, the fact that

some suffered from dietary deficiencies and that they probably were not killed during the winter (S. Thomas, personal communication). What remains to ask is whether the dogs were eaten, were food, or whether they were interred for ideological reasons. The evidence certainly favours the latter interpretation. This includes: (1) an abundance of charred mammalian bones representing food remains such as beaver and muskrat; (2) an absence of charred dog remains from the faunal refuse. At the Juntunen site (McPherron 1967) dogs were the fifth most popular food consumed; (3) the dogs may have been boiled, but there was a deliberate effort to keep the skeletons intact and separate; (4) the presence of red ochre with 4 of the bundles, and a quartz crystal (an object acknowledged as having "power" among Algonkians) associated with bundle Burial 4 are items usually associated with human interments; and (5) ritual sacrifices of dogs among the Great Lakes Algonkians are documented ethnographically (Jenness 1935:106; Jones 1939:68; Flannery 1940; Rogers 1962; Morriseau 1978:40), ethnohistorical (Kohl 1860:60; JR 13:31; JR 50:17, 285,287; JR 51:59; JR 53:79; JR 60:215,227; JR 64:187, 189; JR 66:219,237,241), and archaeologically (McPherron 1967; Prah 1967; Wright 1966, 1968; Devereux, personal communication). The reasons given for dog sacrifice vary from a personal desire to invoke "power" to a group's desire to appease or give thanks to a manitou. Also, dogs may have been sacrificed to heighten the status of certain feasts. Judging by the Juntunen dog burial (McPherron 1967), dogs may even have had an esteemed mythological standing in Algonkian folklore.

In summary it is suggested that the Frank Bay dogs were ritually sacrificed by Algonkians around the eleventh century during some social occasion. While this hypothesis seems reasonable in light of the available evidence, it must be cautioned that a number of assumptions—the dogs were sacrificed at the same time, the assemblage mirrors Algonkian culture, and the associated faunal material are related to the dog sacrifices, for example—can call the hypothesis into question.

In conclusion, if future research substantiates the hypothesis, investigators may want to consider the following questions: did the development of dog ceremonies among the indigenous Great Lakes cultures, the White Dog ceremony for example, originate with hunting and gathering groups rather than horticulturalists? Was the historic Nipissing Feast of the Dead ceremony, as documented in the Jesuit Relations (23:209-221) derived from an ancestral dog ceremony feast? Were different ethnic groups involved in the dog ceremony held around the eleventh century? What were the symbolic poses for the dog in Algonkian culture history?

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