

## THE ARCHÆOLOGY OF THE POTOMAC TIDE-WATER REGION.

BY

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(With Plates XV-XIX.)

The U. S. National Museum has undertaken to publish a series of bulletins upon the natural history of the region around Washington. Already the birds and plants have been studied and the results given to the world.

The natural history of any region includes its human fauna, and the series of bulletins under consideration would be incomplete without an account of the peoples that have here resided. Our business in this brief introductory chapter is with the aborigines. And, since it is not possible to confine the inquiry to the ten miles square called the District of Columbia, the Potomac drainage shall be the ground covered. Even this region must be narrowed, for we shall ascend no tributary further than those rapids that mark the limit of tide-water, and mark also the location of the principal cities, such as Georgetown, Fredericksburgh, Richmond, etc.

In time, our limit shall be the end of the first half of the seventeenth century on the hither side, but the other limit shall be pushed far enough back to admit all of those geological inquiries that have become involved with the history of man.

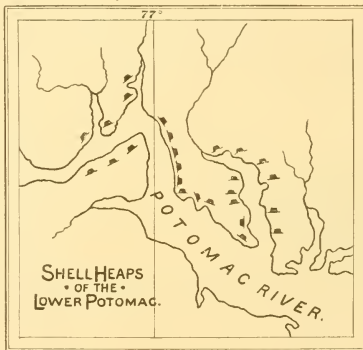
It is possible to commence our study at either limit, taking up, first, either the geology of what is called the Columbian period or studying the last Indian tribes that left this arena just after the settlement of the royalists in Virginia and the Catholics in Maryland. For the purposes of elimination the latter plan will be adopted.

The tribes of Indians along the Potomac tide-water region have been well studied by Mr. James Mooney, and his map, which is here produced (see Plate XV), shows their locations and boundaries.

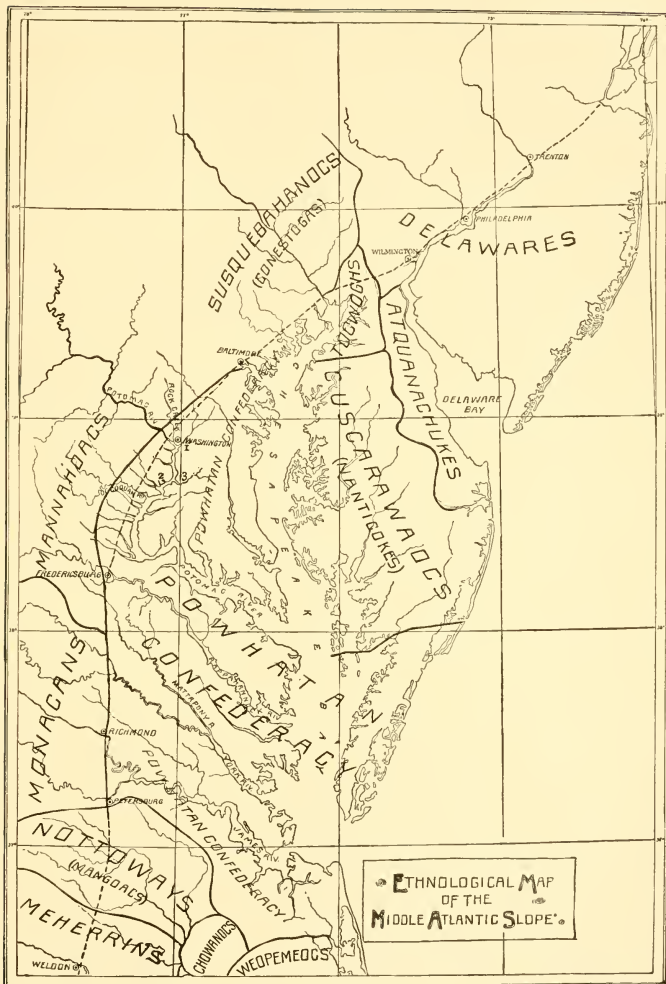
The central portion of the area was the home of the Powhatan confederacy, belonging to the great Algonkin stock, which rivaled in extent the domain of Charles the Sixth. On the north and the south they were hard pressed by members of the Iroquoian stock, while on the

west and just above the line of cascades wandered the Mannahoacs and Monacans, of unknown stock, but for many reasons believed to belong to the Dakotans.

Only a few years after the white occupation of the Potomac Valley did the Indians remain. Save such miserable remnant as are now to be seen at Pamunkey, in Virginia, they were driven off by the early settlers, leaving but two foot-prints—the shell-heaps and the dwelling sites. The Chesapeake Bay is salt water and is the home of the oyster, where the supply of this valuable food product is still abundant. The brackish water of sufficient saltness to suit the oyster extends up the Potomac River to within 50 miles of Washington. Consequently, from the point named to the mouth of the river, wherever there was a cove adapted to the abundant growth of the oyster, there camped the Indians and left shell-heaps, which in some places are of enormous extent. It is fortunate that we have among our scientific explorers in Washington Dr. Elmer Reynolds, who has lost no opportunity in examining the Potomac shell-heaps. A map of a portion of the Potomac, prepared by Dr. Reynolds to show the frequency of the shell-heaps along those portions of the river favorable to the growth of the oyster, is here given.



In the fresh-water portion of the lower Chesapeake drainage—that is, in the region between salt water and the cataracts—stone implements are found in the greatest profusion. It is easy to account for this, when it is remembered that the whole country hereabouts furnished abundant natural food supply. All the old local historians go into ecstasies over the shad, herring, sturgeon, wild duck, turkey, and deer, not to mention the great variety of small game, grain, fruit, and maize. To one accustomed to exploration among the mounds of the Ohio Valley or in the West Indies the stone implements are in appearance disappointing. While here and there polished axes are found, the polished implement is the exception, not the rule, especially on higher ground.



1. Nacochtank (Anacostia).

2. Tauxenent (Mt. Vernon).

3. Moyaones.

LOCATION OF INDIAN TRIBES IN 1607.



Again, comparing the chipped implements with those from regions abounding in flint, obsidian, and the finer varieties of the silix group, a large collection of them has a somewhat rude appearance. (See Plates XVI and XVII.) All this is due, however, to the material. The ancient Potomac dweller was restricted in his material to bowlders of quartzite found in quantities inexhaustible all over his area, to veins of milky quartz outcropping here and there, and to an occasional quarry of soapstone. It is not meant to be here asserted that all Potomac implements are made of these materials and are rude, because there exist in some of our local collections specimens of exquisite workmanship from finer substances.

A map, originally prepared for the Smithsonian Institution by Mr. Louis Kengla, is herewith appended. (See Plate XVIII.) This has been perfected to date for the writer by Mr. S. V. Proudfit, who is most familiar with the location of camp-sites, workshops, etc., around Washington.

In addition to the collection of the Smithsonian Institution there are many private cabinets of great value illustrative of this part of the subject, notably those of Mr. Mann S. Valentine, in Richmond; J. D. McGuire, esq., of Ellicott City; Mr. O. N. Bryan, of Piscataway, Md.; and in Washington, of Mr. S. V. Proudfit, Dr. Elmer R. Reynolds, Dr. W. J. Hoffman, Hallet Phillips, esq., Messrs. Ernest Shoemaker, De Lancy Gill, F. D. Finckel, and Nathaniel S. Way.

Our knowledge of the culture status of the peoples of this region is considerably enlarged by the discovery of earthenware which, though mostly in a fragmentary state, serves perfectly, when placed beside the ceramic products of other sections of the country, as an index of comparative advancement. A study of the distribution of the varieties of ware promises to assist materially in settling questions of tribal distribution.

Mr. W. H. Holmes has made a careful study of this field, and has, in addition, by taking casts from impressions upon the pottery, restored a number of the primitive woven fabrics of the tide-water people. Plate XIX gives a number of illustrations of the forms and ornaments of the pottery and four examples of the weaving.

The most serious problem that faces the archæologists in this area has been proposed by Mr. Thomas Wilson, of the Smithsonian Institution. It is no other than that of existence of two periods of occupation in the Potomac region—the one palæolithic and ancient, the other neolithic and modern. As the present writer understands the question, the facts are as follows: While the camp-sites along the water-courses yield abundance of finely-chipped arrow-heads, spear-heads, knives, etc., and also polished implements, soapstone vessels, and pottery, the hills back from the river are wanting in the smaller, finer forms, but abound in coarser, flaked *artefacts*, mixed with broken implements and spalls.

To render the question more intricate, the coarse "turtle-back" or "palæolith" is also found among the finer implements of the low lands, and the finer implements occasionally are found in these upland sites thought to be palæolithic.

The question is now fairly up for examination and discussion, and it is being discussed with all the zeal which the advocates of the two theories can exert. It is to be seen whether Piney Branch hill and the other hill finds are workshops and the rude suburbs of the more wealthy and refined lowlanders, or whether in the presence of these rude, flaked pieces we are looking upon the earliest devices of a people that existed and passed from this valley many thousands of years before it was inhabited by John Smith's Indians.

The last problem to be taken up is that which relates to geology. We are fortunate in this matter to have the guidance of Prof. W. J. McGee, who is both geologist and archæologist and has studied quaternary formations especially. As yet the question of relics deep down in the gravels has not arisen here. The problem of palæolithic man is rendered the more difficult by the fact that the formation of the crust compels us to look for his relics on the surface or in the loam, and not as in other locations beneath the soil.

Combining the researches of the geologist, the prehistoric archæologist, and the historian, it is designed by the technical section of the Anthropological Society to reconstruct the aboriginal record of the Potomac tide-water as the introductory chapter to the occupation of the region by the whites.

NOTE.—While this paper was passing through the press Mr. William H. Holmes made an extended investigation of the so-called Palæolithic Hill on Piney Branch, and his results will be found in the January number of the *American Anthropologist* for 1890.



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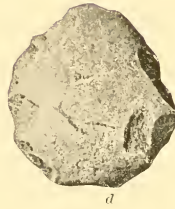
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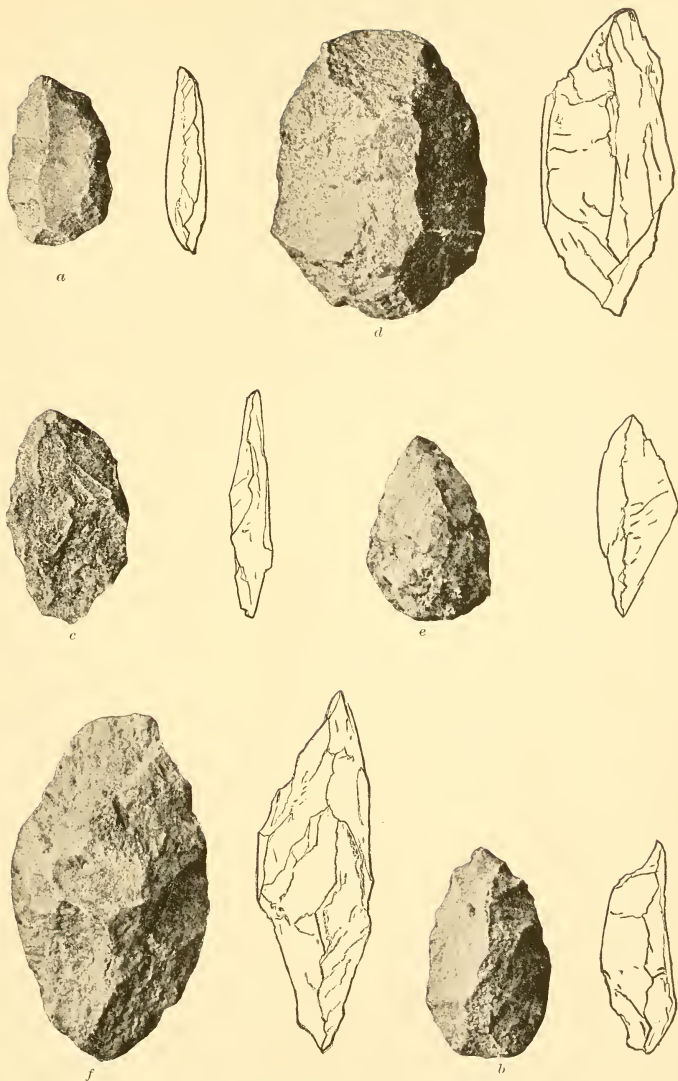
MAP OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, SHOWING ANCIENT VILLAGE SITES, ETC.





RUDE CHIPPED IMPLEMENTS FROM THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.  
(Half natural size.)





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