Dish of grey ware with laurous black surface: Type 141 at Arkaima. It has a flaring rim and a ring-foot base and is decorated with a row of nicks on the rim and a stamped leaf motif around grooved circles on the base. Both the shape and decoration seem to be influenced by pottery of the Roman world. The dish occurs at the same time as Athenian imports. (After Wheeler et al., 1946, fig. 36:141).

From these and other such examples, we may infer that Arkaima must have had a dynamic local pottery industry that was assimilating new ideas and technology, and that Rouletted ware may have evolved here. The difference between Rouletted ware and these other new types is in their relative popularity. Sherds of Rouletted ware are far more abundant than any of these other types. For example, over four hundred sherds of Rouletted ware were seen by me in the preserved Arkaima collection, but less than forty of Type 141. In addition, Rouletted ware is distributed over a very large geographical area, while the other types are either confined to Arkaima, or appear in small quantities at a few other sites. Rouletted ware, therefore, must have been produced at Arkaima on a large scale both for domestic use and trade. It is quite possible that it was manufactured at other centers as well, where it could have survived for an even longer period of time. Nevertheless, the evidence so far indicates that Rouletted ware probably evolved as a distinctive ceramic type first at Arkaima, from where it was exported and perhaps copied at other places in the wider area of its distribution.

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Acculturation in an Urban Setting

The Archaeology of a Black Philadelphia Cemetery

MICHAEL PARRINGTON and JANET WIDEMAN

Archaeologists have traditionally been interested in the excavation of cemeteries, an interest spurred by the rich grave goods found in many burial sites. Grave goods represent an expression of the feelings of the living at the time of death, and also the burial customs of a particular society. Interpretation of the significance of burial offerings and customs may give an insight into the beliefs and world views of a society. The First African Baptist Church Cemetery site in Philadelphia, dating to the first half of the 19th century, afforded an opportunity to study the factors of acculturation among urban free blacks.

Historical Background

The cemetery was first discovered by archaeologists from John Milner Associates, who were monitoring excavation work being carried out for the construction of a commuter tunnel in center city Philadelphia in November 1980. When the interface of a wooden coffin was exposed by an earth-moving machine, the site was sealed over with concrete to prevent looting and further damage to the burial. Subsequent historical research established that the site had been used as a burial ground by a black church from 1824 until 1842. Research into Board of Health records revealed the names of over 70 individuals who were interred in the burial ground, which was associated with the First African Baptist Church, a group formed in 1809. There were many gaps in this information, however, as the Board of Health death records for this period are fragmentary and incomplete.

After the initial historical research for the site had been completed, the site was declared eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. As such, this determination afforded the site legal protection from any damage or destruction caused by federally funded redevelopment. When it became apparent, in 1982, that proposed improvements to the Vine Street Expressway and a proposal to build a high-rise office building would destroy the burial ground, it became necessary to excavate the site to prevent its destruction without an adequate record being made. The owners of the property, the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia, entered into a contract with John Milner Associates to carry out this work. Funding for the project was provided by the Redevelopment Authority, the Federal Highway Administration, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the William Penn Foundation and the Barra Foundation.

On most sites, because of time or financial constraints it is only possible to excavate a sample of the ar-
“it was difficult to relate the position of historic sites to the cartographic evidence.”

property to the east (lot 17). Thirty-five years later, in 1860, the Hexamer and Locher map of Philadelphia shows no trace of the First African Baptist Church. The eastern of their two former lots is occupied by a safe factory, and the western lot has become the back yards of houses that front onto Chester Street (Fig. 3).

This cartographic evidence showed clearly the location of the church property and its subsequent use as a safe factory. Over the course of a century and a half, however, modifications were made to the location of features such as streets, and it was difficult to relate the position of historic sites to the cartographic evidence. This was the case at Eighth and Vine Streets, where the entire area had been disrupted successively by the laying out of Ridge Avenue, the widening of Vine Street, and more recently the work of building the commuter tunnel. While the approximate location of the cemetery was indicated by the burial found in 1980, there was no way of knowing how much of the burial ground had been disturbed by the construction work for the tunnel, and by the various construction-related activities that had taken place there since it ceased to be used as a cemetery in the 1840s.

Excavating the Site

In order to determine the extent of the cemetery it was necessary to relocate some of the later historic features of the area. Using heavy machinery to strip off the blacktop which covered the site and to remove the layers of fill beneath (Fig. 1), a substantial stone wall aligned north-south was uncovered. The location of this wall coincided with the postulated position of the west wall of the safe factory. The discovery of this wall provided the datum point that enabled the precise location of the lots occupied by the First African Baptist Church to be determined. Comparison of the two historic maps showed that the west wall of the safe factory was aligned along the boundary between the two lots occupied by the First African Baptist Church.

Further machine excavations demonstrated that the area to the east of the wall was the basement of the structure, and it had been deeply disturbed. No burials had survived in this area, if indeed any had ever been made there. The presence of the basement did, however, prove that the wall was the west wall of the building and there was a good possibility of burials.

surviving in lot 16, to the west of the wall, which had always been an open area. The 1860 Hexamer and Locher map shows this area as backyard space (Fig. 3).

Machine excavations in what was determined to be lot 16 showed that the northern part of the lot was relatively disturbed. Concrete Boldasts, from when the area had been used as a parking lot, had penetrated three feet or so below grade level. There was also a great deal of building rubble mixed with mid-19th century ceramics over this portion of the site. This suggested that a structure had been demolished in this area, probably during the time period indicated by the ceramics. When the rest of the building rubble was cleared by hand, the remains of a structure measuring approximately 15 feet by 20 feet were found (Fig. 4). The only building known to have been in this area was that used by members of the First African Baptist Church as their place of worship. Consequently it seems probable that the remains uncovered were those of the church, demolished in the 1850s when the safe factory was built.

Machine excavations revealed further structural remains that effectively defined the south end of the lot, and the portion of the west side of the lot which had been disturbed by the tunnel cut. The remains of some disturbed burials, of which was only one-and-a-half feet below grade level, were also found. At this stage machine excavations were halted and all further work was carried out by hand. These burials were the first of over 140 which were subsequently excavated on the site, many more than were indicated by the Board of Health records. Some of them had been disturbed when the wall of the safe factory was built (Fig. 5). Others had been removed and reburied when three privies were constructed on the site in the mid-19th century for the use of the inhabitants of the Chestnut Street houses (Fig. 6). A few of the burials had suffered because of their proximity to the ground surface, and others had been partially removed when the tunnel cut was excavated along the west side of the cemetery.

5 Burial disturbed by the construction of the safe factory.

7 Excavation of a burial.

The majority, however, were reasonably intact, although the friable condition of the bones in many cases made excavation difficult (Fig. 7).

Other problems were caused by the nature of the soil matrix in which the burials were made. During the 18th century the Eight and Vine Streets area was part of an industrial site where ceramics and bricks were manufactured. The cemetery site itself was a clay pit until the late 18th-early 19th century, when it was filled in and the land reclaimed. The material used to reclaim the area was heavy clay fill, with an ample admixture of mid to late 18th century trash. As a consequence of this, the excavators removing the burials had the problem of exposing and defining bones that were encased in a matrix of dense, packed clay much harder than the bone. Despite these difficulties, it was possible, with painstaking effort, to define and then record and remove the bones successfully.

The excavation of the cemetery produced a valuable set of data on factors such as health and mortality among 19th century blacks in Philadelphia. The analysis of human remains by a physical anthropologist can provide information on the health and nutritional level of an individual, and also in some cases the probable cause of death. Initial work of this kind was carried out by Stephanie Pister in John Milner Associates' Philadelphia lab. More detailed research on the remains was undertaken by Dr. Lawrence Angel and his colleagues at the Smithsonian Institution. Of equal value is the information on burial customs forthcoming from the work. This aspect of the study produced some significant insights into the survival of African customs among free blacks in Philadelphia, and forms the focus of the remainder of this paper.

"Concern with the welfare of this 'vital force' . . . is focal to an understanding of traditional African attitudes towards death."

8 View of a burial interred according to the prevailing Christian tradition.

The Question of Acculturation

The excavation of the First African Baptist Church Cemetery offered a rare opportunity to study a segment of Philadelphia's population which had been neglected until fairly recently. One area of research that immediately suggests itself is that of acculturation. As Robert Schuyler has pointed out, one of the most interesting themes in Afro-American archaeology concerns "the survival of Africanisms in material culture" (1990:1). In many cases it is difficult to distinguish between the culture of ethnicity and the culture of poverty. Burial practices, however, tend to be stable and persistent in most cultural systems. Consequently, the excavation of a cemetery associated with a particular ethnic group should provide evidence for the survival of traditional customs.

Ethnographic evidence provides a wealth of information on African burial customs. Many of these stem from the notion of death as a gateway to the domain of the
In an urban environment, grave decorations are unlikely to remain sacrosanct. At the First African Baptist Church Cemetery, the graveyard area had been disturbed in the 1850s when houses and a factory were built there. In the second half of the 20th century the area became a parking lot, further disturbing the site. No evidence for the practice of grave decoration survived these impacts. The evidence was found for African burial practices was all found at the level of the actual burial, either in or outside the coffin.

Traditional European and American Christian burial customs are relatively simple in comparison to some of those documented for other cultures. Normally, the interment is made in a wooden coffin in which the deceased is laid out supine, with the hands near the thighs, and the head to the west. The majority of the burials at the First African Baptist Church Cemetery were consistent with the Christian tradition outlined above (Fig. 8). In a number of the burials, however, there were departures from this norm. In eight cases a single coffin had been placed in the coffin (usually a penny near the head. In six instances a single shoe had been placed on the coffin lid, and in two other burials a ceramic plate was buried with the deceased in the stomach area (Fig. 9). There was also one example where an individual appeared to have been buried on his side, and then sluiced into a face down or semi-prostrate position (Fig. 10).

Burial of a middle-aged woman with a Chinese porcelain plate.

Burial of a middle-aged man in a semi-prostrate position.

The Archaeological Evidence

The practice of placing coins over the eyes of a dead person to keep them closed is well-attested in many cultures. The fact that only a single coin was found in each burial would seem to preclude such an explanation, however. In the classical world, a single coin was customarily placed in the mouth of the deceased in order to pay Charon's fee for ferrying the dead across the River Styx. Honoring the custom relates to the First African Baptist Church Cemetery is uncertain. What is clear is that a widespread belief in the concept of death as a journey existed amongst blacks (Mbiti 1969:148-155; Handler and Lange 1978:183). In this context it may be that a single coin in a grave represented the return of the spirit to the African homeland or possibly to keep the spirit from wandering the living.

Shoes too can be seen in this symbolic light, as items required for this journey. Shoes also have connotations of power, as represented by a black folk belief that the dead should not be without them (a Monday) will keep the devil away (Puckett 1926:355). The shoe is also a symbol of dignity, and filled this role at weddings. Alternatively this custom could be seen as a symbolic act of shodding the dead and preventing their return to the land of the living.

"A significant number of non-Christian burial customs are evident in the archaeological record"...