

2011

## The Material Culture of Oquaga in the Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum

Karim M. Tiro

Xavier University, [tiro@xavier.edu](mailto:tiro@xavier.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/  
umpress\\_people\\_standing\\_stone](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/umpress_people_standing_stone)



Part of the [Other American Studies Commons](#)

---

Tiro, Karim M., "The Material Culture of Oquaga in the Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum" (2011). *The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation From the Revolution Through the Era of Removal*. 3.

Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/umpress\\_people\\_standing\\_stone/3](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/umpress_people_standing_stone/3)

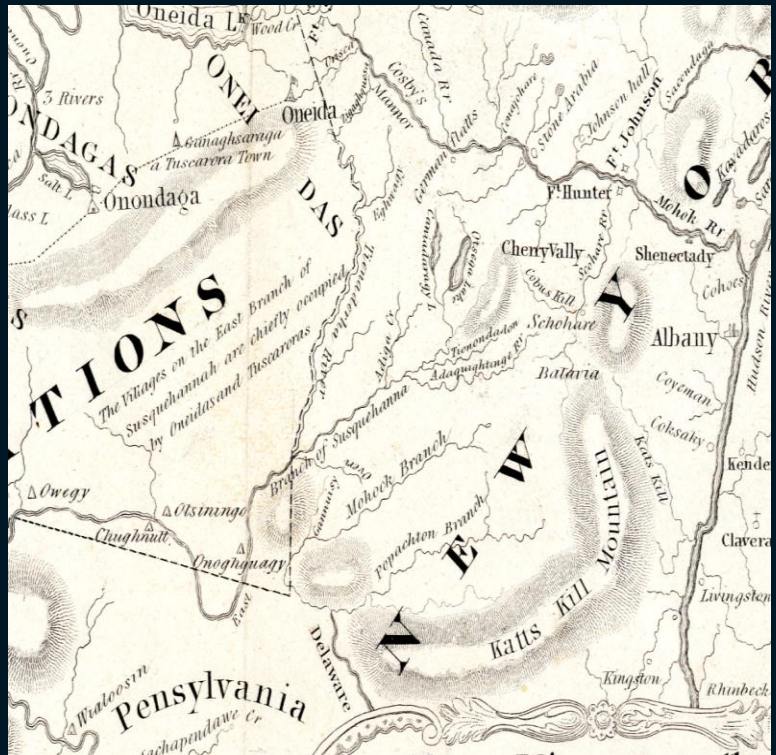
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Massachusetts Press: Supplemental Material at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation From the Revolution Through the Era of Removal by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).

# **The Material Culture of Oquaga in the Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum**

©2011

## Oquaga

Located on the Susquehanna River, near the vertex of the Fort Stanwix treaty line, Oquaga (here spelled “Onoghquagy”) was the southernmost Oneida town. Its population probably did not exceed 250, but was particularly diverse, including Tuscaroras, Cayugas, Mohawks, Mahicans, Nanticokes, and Shawnees.



In 1779, an American military officer wrote, “It was the finest Indian town I ever saw...on both sides of the river there was about 40 good houses, Square logs, Shingles & stone chimneys, good Floors, glass windows &c &c.”

The prosperity and cultural openness that characterized Oquaga is also visible in three items of Native manufacture collected by Ebenezer Moseley. A Yale-educated missionary from Connecticut, Moseley resided at Oquaga between 1765 and 1773. His mission was supported by the Britain-based Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and Parts Adjacent.

*Map of the Country of the VI Nations* by Guy Johnson, New York State Library, Albany



## 1. Pipe Bowl

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley, 1981, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. (E68211). Photo courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum

This pipe bowl with an otter face was made of catlinite pipestone obtained from a quarry in present-day Minnesota. It is unknown whether the catlinite arrived at Oquaga as raw material or a finished object. It resembles Ojibwe styles, but bears a faint Iroquois-language inscription *onaongodan raonnaarwen*—“the prominent one, his pipe.”



## 2. Moccasins

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley, 1981, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum (E68212)

These moccasins reflect traditional Iroquois styling. They are decorated with dyed porcupine quills, deer hair, metal bangles, and glass beads. By 1850, Iroquois craftspeople used glass beads in greater quantities and more elaborate patterns, while porcupine quills had fallen into disuse.



### 3. Moccasins

Iroquois, early 19<sup>th</sup> century,  
provenance unknown

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley, 1981,  
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem,  
Mass. Photo courtesy of the  
Peabody Essex Museum (E21451)

Early in the 1800s, Canadian civil  
servant George Heriot described  
moccasins and their production:

*The leggings have no feet and are tucked  
into moccasins of a single skin with no  
heel and no strong leather sole. It is  
puckered over the toes of the foot, where it  
is sewn with cords of gut to a little leather  
tongue. Then it is taken up with ties of the  
same skin, passed through holes cut at  
regular intervals and tied above the heel  
after being crossed on the instep of the  
foot...Different sorts of threads are  
interwoven very neatly with moose, buffalo  
and porcupine skins [quills] dyed in  
different colours.*

## The Missionary at Work

Traveler Richard Smith published the following eyewitness account of Moseley's efforts in 1769. He took particular note of Moseley's dress.

*June 4<sup>th</sup>. Sunday, in the Morning we attended Divine Service which was conducted with regularity and Solemnity. They first sang a Psalm, then read a Portion of Scripture and after another Psalm Moseley preached a sermon (in a chintz Night Gown) and the Business was concluded by a Third Psalm. The Congregation consisted of near 100 Indians, Men, Women, and Children including the chief of the Tuscarora Town 3 miles below with some of his People & they all behave with exemplary devotion.*

For most of his tenure, Moseley was assisted by a young man from Connecticut, James Dean, who was fluent in the Oneida language, as well as two politically prominent Oneida converts, Isaac Dekayensese and Agwelondongwas (Good Peter).

## 4. Belt

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley,  
1981, Peabody Essex Museum,  
Salem, Mass. Photo courtesy of  
the Peabody Essex Museum  
(E68210)

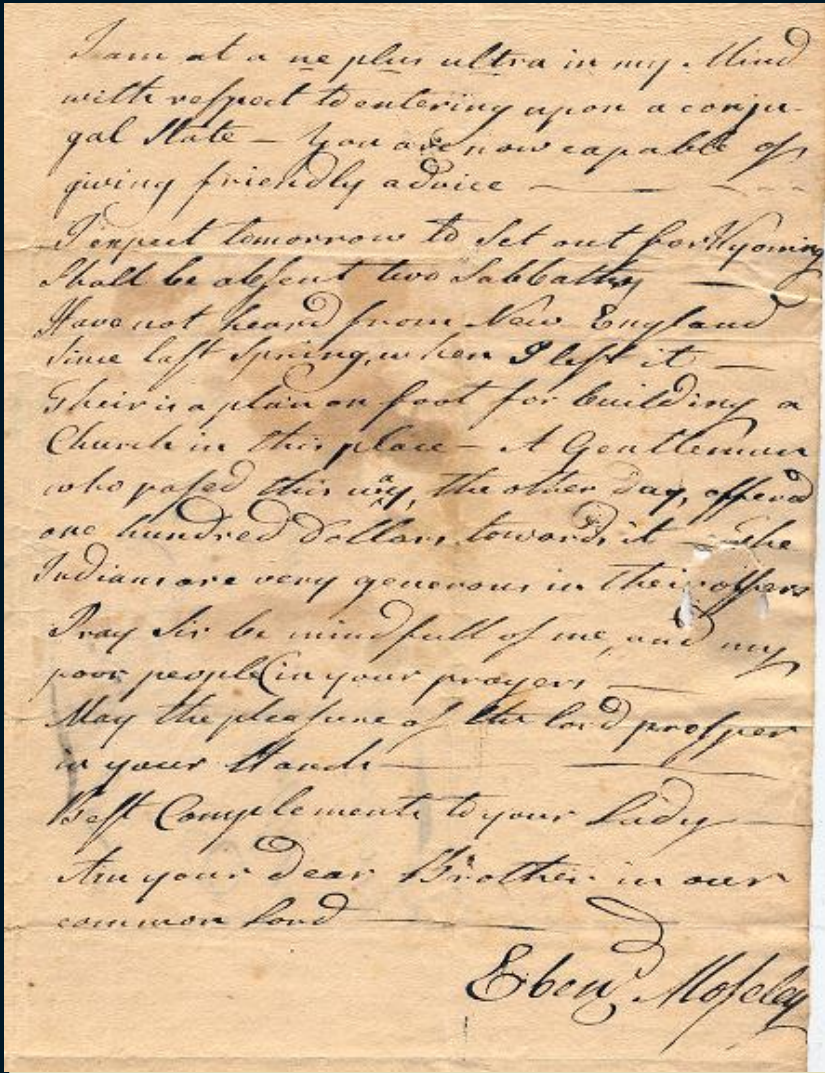
This colorful belt was manufactured from moose hair, plant fibers such as corn husk and hemp, and trimmed with white glass beads. As is likely true of the moccasins, the belt's creator was probably a woman.

Figures 8 and 17 in *The People of the Standing Stone* suggest how the belt was probably worn.





## The End of the Moseley Mission...and Oquaga



I am at a ne plus ultra in my Mind  
with respect to entering upon a conjugal  
State - You are now capable of  
giving friendly advice -  
I expect tomorrow to set out for New York  
I shall be absent two Sabbaths  
I have not heard from New England  
since last Spring, when I left it -  
There is a plan on foot for building a  
Church in this place - A Gentleman  
who passed this way, the other day, offered  
one hundred Dollars towards it - The  
Indians are very generous in their offers  
I pray Sir be mindful of me, and my  
poor people in your prayers  
May the pleasure of the Lord prosper  
in your Hands  
With Compliments to your Lady  
I am your Dear Brother in our  
common Lord

Eben Moseley

Moseley carried on a correspondence with Samuel Kirkland, his counterpart at Kanonwalohale, the Oneidas' principal village. In 1770, Moseley wrote his recently-married colleague:

Dear Sir, my Situation is very lonesome and desolate, no Suitable companion for Society, nor even a house keeper to wash my dishes. I long much to see you, to know whether Hymens prison is a palace of Joy, and his Silken bands, cords of Friendship, or the reverse. I am at a ne plus ultra in my Mind with respect to entering upon a conjugal State. You are now capable of giving friendly advice.

Samuel Kirkland Papers, Hamilton College Archives, 10a

By the end of 1771, Moseley had decided to terminate his mission. A disapproving Kirkland responded:

*I am sorry to hear you are about to quit the business of your mission.... You will deem it an Act of friendship in me to inform you [that] it has been suggested to the Indians (as they tell me) "that you leave your mission for filthy lucre's sake, that you design to cross the Atlantic, purchase a quantity of goods & pursue the mercantile life." ... I hope these are no more than suggestions, upon meer conjecture. You are doubtless sensible, the Honor of Relig<sup>n</sup> in these parts depends not a little upon your future employment.*

Moseley abandoned both the mission and the ministry. He returned to Connecticut, where he became a merchant, farmer, and a local leader in the revolutionary movement. He was a colonel in the Connecticut militia and served in the state legislature. Moseley died in 1825.

Oquaga was not as long-lived. Patriots burned the town to the ground in 1779 in retaliation for some Oquagans' support for Britain. Most Oquagans took refuge at Fort Niagara or Kanonwalohale. The town was not reoccupied after the war, and was part of the territory lost to New York State in the 1785 Fort Herkimer treaty.

## SOURCES and ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (New York: Henry Holt and Doubleday, 1885-1912)

Dolores Elliott, "Otsiningo: An Example of an Eighteenth-Century Settlement Pattern" *Researches and Transactions of the New York Archaeological Association* 17 (1977)

William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649-1776* (London: Longmans, 1961)

John R. Grimes, Christian F. Feest, Mary Lou Curran, *Uncommon Legacies: Native American Art from the Peabody Essex Museum* (New York and Seattle: American Federation of Arts/University of Washington Press, 2002)

Judy Hall, "'To Make Them Beautiful': Porcupine Quill Decorated Moccasins from the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes" in *Fascinating Challenges: Studying Material Culture with Dorothy Burnham* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001)

Marjory B. Hinman, *Documentary History of Old Onaquaga* (Onaquaga: Old Onaquaga Historical Society, 1966)

George Heriot, *Travels through the Canadas* (London: Richard Phillips, 1807)

Sylvia Kasprzycki, "Continuity and Change in Iroquois Visual Arts" in *Iroquois Art: Visual Expressions of Contemporary Native American Artists* ed. Kasprzycki, Doris I. Stambrau, and Alexandra V. Roth (Vienna, Austria: European Review of Native American Studies, 1998)

Richard Smith, *A Tour of Four Great Rivers: The Hudson, Mohawk, Susquehanna, and Delaware in 1769* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906)

Karim M. Tiro, "James Dean in Iroquoia," *New York History* 80 (1999)

*Special Thanks: Christine Bertoni, Randall Ericson, The Peabody Essex Museum, Sidnie Reed, Karen Kramer Russell, Eric Wolin, Roy Wright*