

Curator's Choice

"Taking the discipline" at St. Inigoes Plantation: A Cilice from Priest's Point

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In the 1980s, archaeologists uncovered a curious metal object near a Jesuit residence at Priest's Point, St. Inigoes, Maryland (Figure 1). Originally described as a bedspring fragment (Dinnel 1984), it is now identified as a cilice ~ an object made of metal wire with sharp, inward-pointing tines, traditionally used or worn by faithful Catholics as a form of self-punishment. The term *cilice* is derived from Cilicia, a province in Turkey known for goats whose hair was used to make hair shirts, also worn for penitential purposes (Brandão and Nassaney 2008).

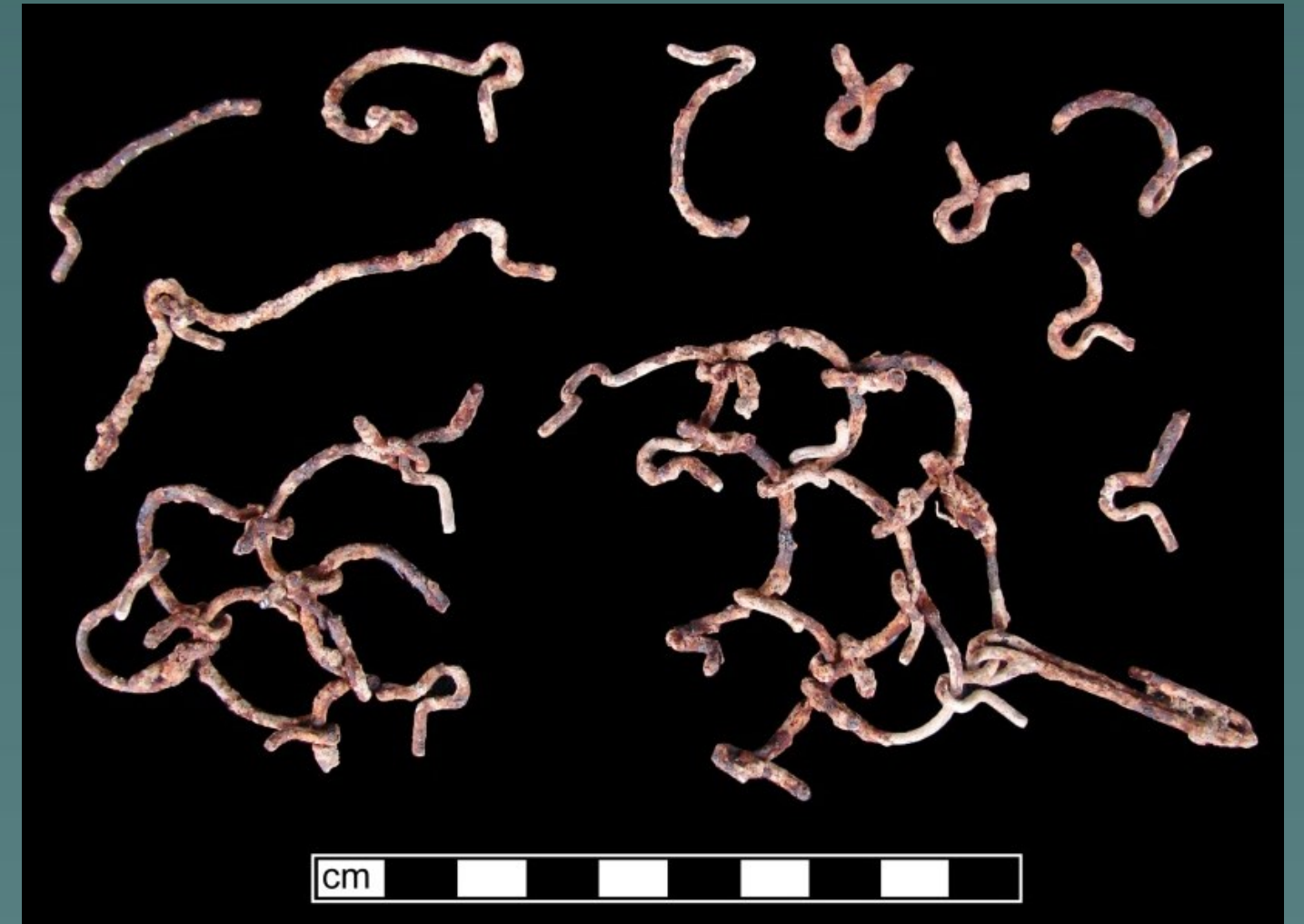


Figure 1: Fragments of a cilice from the Priest's Point site (18ST87) in St. Inigoes, MD.

The cilice from Priest's Point is a series of connected U-shaped iron wires, forming a net measuring at least 15 cm long and 6 cm wide. Each wire terminates in a loop and exposed tine. A hook is attached to the end, suggesting that the cilice was originally longer and may have been worn around the thigh (Figure 2). It bears many similarities to a cilice excavated from an 18th c. context at Fort St. Joseph, a French mission and garrison in Michigan (Brandão and Nassaney 2008).



Figure 2: The cilice from Priest's Point is similar to those that are still on the market today (left from www.cilice.co.uk). When worn around the thigh, the wire loop ends are directed down onto the skin, where they cause discomfort (right).

The Priest's Point cilice was excavated from a rubble layer associated with an 1872 fire and subsequent demolition at the St. Inigoes manor house (Figure 3). Associated artifacts included wrought and cut nails, whiteware, a 19th c. figurine fragment, and green glass. The demolition layer is located directly above a builder's trench. This suggests that the cilice was in or near the structure at the time of the fire, and probably fell from the second story priests' residence.

The twelve-room structure, probably built in the 1740s, was located along the St. Mary's River (Treacy 1889). It was the residence of numerous missionaries who managed St. Inigoes, a 2000-acre property purchased in 1637. While most of the property was rented as tenant farms between the 17th and early 20th c., Jesuits also lived there and managed a "home farm" or plantation. In addition, it was home to Jesuit novices for a short time at the beginning of the 19th c. (Carroll 1815).

Self-mortification allows the faithful to share in the suffering of Christ, and is done as a form of penance, or to resist bodily temptations. It was common among Jesuit missionaries around the world from the 16th through 18th c. Despite their otherwise sumptuous apparel, a Jesuit in 18th c. Asia reported that they could nonetheless "wear the hair-shirt and cilice, after the manner of numerous holy missionaries" (le Gobien 1706, quoted in Alberts 2014). In certain circumstances, self-mortification was also introduced to lay people, such as in 17th c. China (Brockey 2008). These practices were so frequent among indigenous

people of New France during the late 17th c. that some Jesuits disapproved of their violence, believing it was associated with "diabolical tendencies." European objects used in self-mortification (whips, hair shirts, and "iron girdles") were introduced to native populations to moderate this practice (Greer 2005).

Documentary sources do not suggest that self-punishment was common among lay people in Maryland. In his early 19th c. diary, Jesuit Brother Joseph Moberley relates a story about a Jesuit practicing self-mortification at St. Inigoes. At some point in the mid-18th c., a Jesuit would regularly "take the discipline" in an old barn. When she was a girl, an enslaved cook named Granny Sucky interrupted this act, asking "her good master not to be so cruel to himself." The Jesuit whipped her in retribution, after which Granny Sucky "determined never to care much about his self-cruelties in the future" (Moberley 1995). It is clear that this Jesuit believed self-mortification was an essential practice, and resorted to external violence in order to resist what he probably understood as temptation. Nonetheless, the enslaved African community, many of whom were baptized Catholics (Beitzell 1959), apparently did not share his views about the necessity of self-mortification.

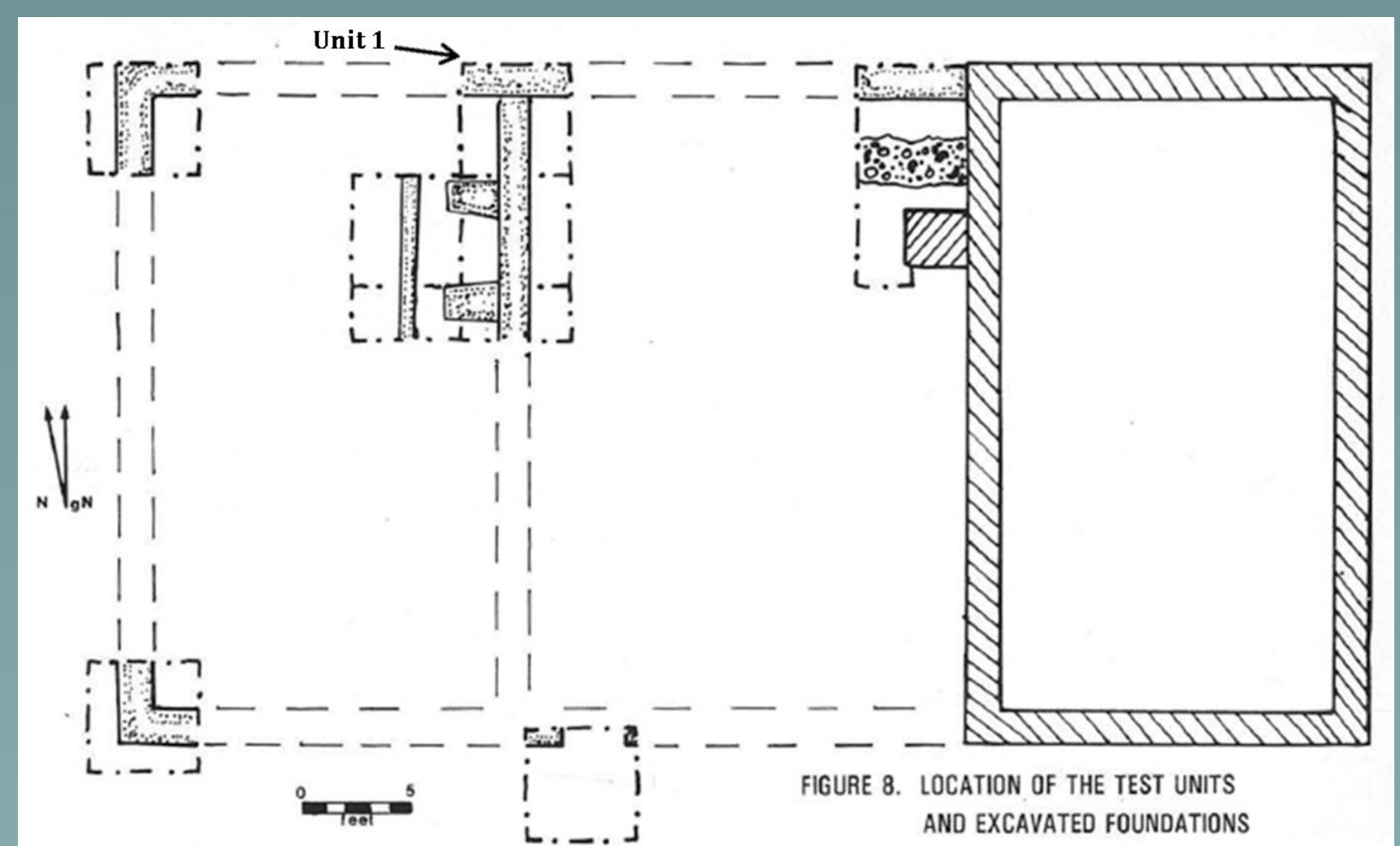


Figure 3: Plan view of excavations at St. Inigoes Manor House (18ST87). The cilice was recovered from a rubble layer in Unit 1. Adapted from Dinnel 1984.

The St. Inigoes cilice was almost certainly used by a Jesuit novice or priest. At the time of the fire, it was either curated in the manor house or regularly used by one of the inhabitants. It, and Brother Moberley account, indicates that self-punishment was long practiced there, by several different methods. It also indicates that while certain practices were meant to be kept private, they did periodically come to light on the large plantation.

We can also infer that although self-flagellation and the wearing of a cilice was practiced among clergy stationed at St. Inigoes, it was less often encouraged, or was simply unpopular among enslaved Africans. This reflects differences in missionary attitudes in New France and Maryland, and the agency of enslaved Africans to resist the Jesuits' imposition of religion (Finn 1974).

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