

Olive Shell Tinkers

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Tinkers (Figure 1) are unique innovative use of olive shells. Of the few we have seen they appear to be made of the large and common lettered olive (*Oliva sayana*). However there is no reason why many olive or cone shaped species could not have been used. Hothem (1990) shows four "pendants or ornaments" which are actually tinkers that he states are made out of tips of conch shells. When looking at the picture it appears that they are made of a cone type shell rather than conch tips since they start to curve inward at the base whereas conch tips spread outward. However, we cannot see any reason why conch tips could not be used unless the sound is compromised. Barnett (1981) shows a set of six tinkers made from cone shells. When in good condition cone shaped shells have an unusually highly polished natural finish. Lettered olive shells are common along the Gulf of Mexico and can be a rich brown to a light tan-yellow with parallel spotted zigzag bands across the width. The netted olive (*Oliva reticularis*) found in south east Florida and the West Indies cones in chestnut brown to white. When cut in half the inner surfaces are white and are also highly finished.

Barnett (1981) referred to these bell shaped artifacts as "tinkers" which is a very appropriate name since when strung together they produce a light, sharp clinking sound. Tinkers were worn in clusters around the upper arm, ankle upper calf area just below the knee of the waist (Figure 2). Barnett (1981) stated that they were use in ceremonies to add cadence of measured movements of a dance. He, as

we, speculate they were also worn during non-ceremonial occasions. "Order of the March Observed by Outina on a Military Expedition" from an engraving by La Bry after a drawing of Timucuan Indians in Florida by La Moyne show what are possibly tinkers worn on the upper arm and just below and around the waist (Fundaburk, 1965). These may also be made from cowries since they show a "hump" in the middle. Many engraved drawings on shell gorgets and other whelk shells show wrist, arm, ankle, and upper calf bands (Fundaburk, 1965). However they are not clearly defined as to what shell utilized. Based on this drawing and others in this series you might speculate that perhaps only ranked natives wore these. Examination of Theodor de Bry drawings of the native Indians in Virginia in 1590 (Harriot 1972) does not show any tinkers on the arms or legs. Miles (1962) shows a single tinker type shell strung on a Seminole necklace with a mixture of beads, shell, pottery, stone and claws. Shell "Tinkers" seem to be more common in western and central America collections.

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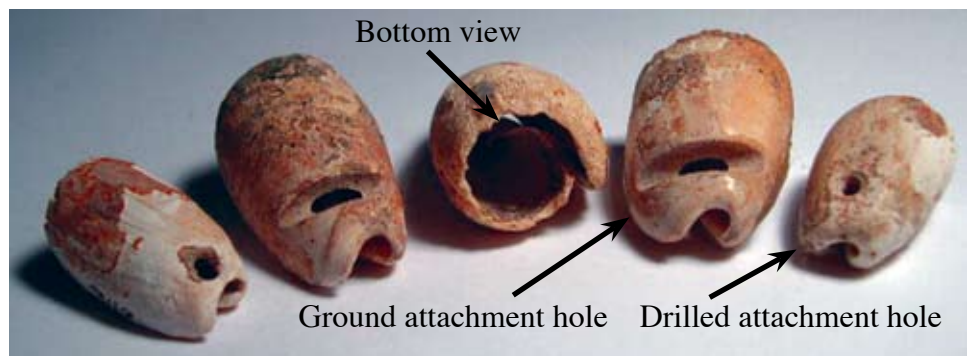
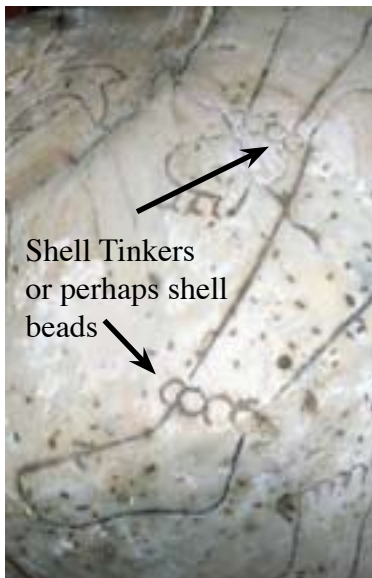


Figure 1- above - "Tinkers" or bells made from modified Olive shells found in north-west Florida.

Figure 2 - left - Beads or possibly "Tinkers" worn on the wrists and ankles of a dancer depicted on a engraving on a large shell from the Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma.



Figure 3 - Utilized area on a Olive shell