

Unusual Sandal Sole Gorgets

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Several years ago we attended an artifact show in Alabama and purchased three unusual and unique pieces that were found along the Tennessee River in Alabama. We recognized these from the Glacial Kame Period during which several very distinctive types of artifacts were made. Characteristically Glacial Kame ornaments include lithic bird-stones, humped, concave, “coffin-like” and dumbbell shaped gorgets, tubular pipes, turkey tail and Adena type points. The most diagnostic, distinctive items include shell Annular gorgets (Figure 3) and “Sandal Sole” gorgets (Figure 1 & 2) made from shell and fossilized coral. Sandal Sole gorget usually have a tapered end and wide head as opposed to the more common equally balanced lithic, bone and shell bar gorgets. Vastano (2008) stated that it is estimated that less than 100 shell sandal sole gorgets exist in museums and private collections.

Glacial Kame, Red Ocher and Meadowood Cultures range from the Late Archaic-Early Woodland period (1,500 to 500 BC). These were pre-mound builders existing into the early Adena period. Although concentrated in Midwest Ohio, Indiana, Michigan area they also range north into Ontario and south to Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky and northeast Florida along the St. Johns River. Glacial Kame cultures often buried their dead in glacial moraines or kames, hence their name.

Our example (#0600 Figure 1) is 16.7 cm long x 5.0 cm maximum width and a maximum thickness of 11.4 cm. The surfaces are heavily ground leaving no evidence of shell type. However it is made of a high density shell weighing 115 grams which is more indicative of Queen Conch (*Strombus gigus*). It has two attachment holes but only the hole at the smaller end shows significantly more ware from suspension like a “button lanyard attachment” rather than a lanyard that passes through the hole and worn around the neck, arm etc.. Of equal interest is a small hole that appears to have been drilled by a predator (oyster drills) rather than a human. Whether it was used for suspending a feather or other decoration is speculation only. It appears it was present and purposely included when the piece was made.

Lithic sandal-sole gorgets are more unique and scarce. These were made from white limestone and fossilized coral limestone (Figure 4, 5, & 6). Circular granular spots on the surface are actually coral polyps (Figure 7). Where raw material was obtained is speculative. Fossilized coral deposits exist in Florida and upper Lake Michigan area where it is called Petosky Stone which was highly desired by Native Americans and present collectors today. Converse (1979) did

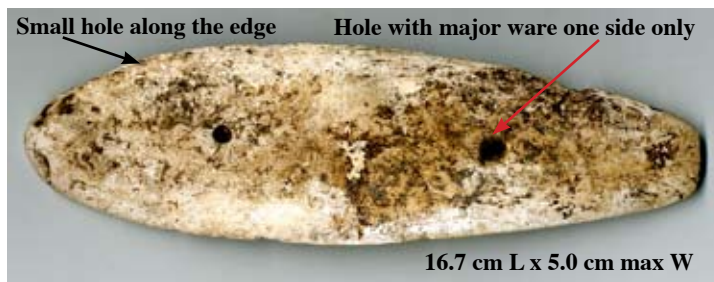


Figure 1 - 0600 Made from conch shell. Found along the Tennessee River, Morgan County Alabama



Figure 2 - Made from whelk shell. Engraved sandal sole gorget from the Mulen kame, Randolph County, Ohio



Figure 3 - Above - Annular Gorget from Waterloo Alabama west of Florence Alabama. Found along the North Bank of the Tennessee River in Lauderdale County. Right - Turkey Tail point. Found in a cave in Eastern Tennessee.

not distinguish those made from fossilized coral limestone. However, at least two noted in his book were referred to as “fossilized limestone or shell” but appear by the photographs to be made from fossilized coral limestone (Figure 5A & 5B). These were found at a cave site in Christian County Kentucky near the Tennessee line including a tubular pipe and bar gorget also made from “fossilized limestone”. Besides our example (Figure 4) from Alabama we have photographed another from Tennessee (Figure 6) that are made from fossilized coral limestone.

Our example (#0661 in Figure 4) is 14.7cm long with 8 cm maximum width and maximum thickness of 8 mm. It does not have apparent suspension holes like others. The so called “repair holes” are tapered and vary in width from 3.1 mm to 4.2 mm on the drilled side and vary from 2.1 mm to 3.1 mm on the other side. There are four other shallow pilot indentations

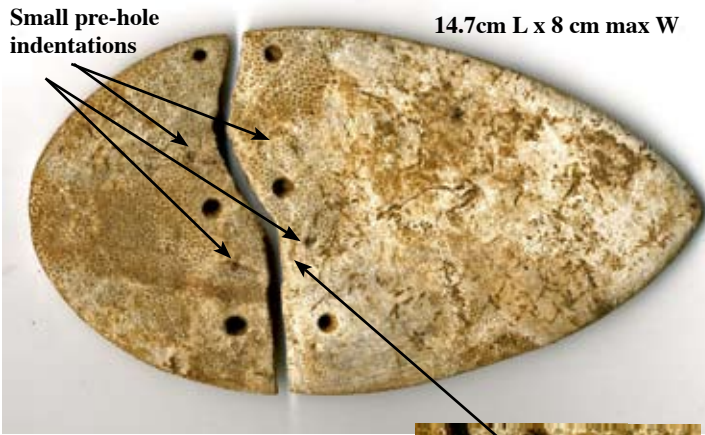


Figure 4 - #0661 Made from fossilized coral (limestone). Close-up (right) shows small dots which are skeletal remains of coral polyps. Lacks suspension holes. Found along the Tennessee River, Morgan County Alabama. Lacks suspension holes.

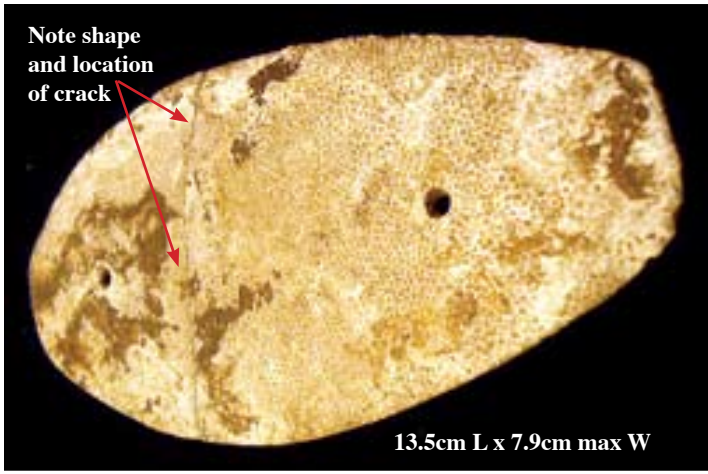
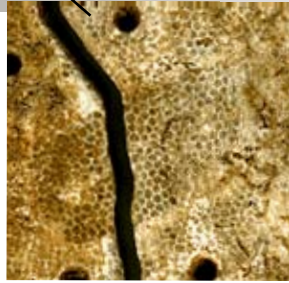


Figure 6 - Example displayed at the Owensboro Kentucky Show in 2006 found by Ray Kilgore in Tennessee. Made of fossilized coral. Broken exactly like the others but glued together by the finder. Lacks repair holes.

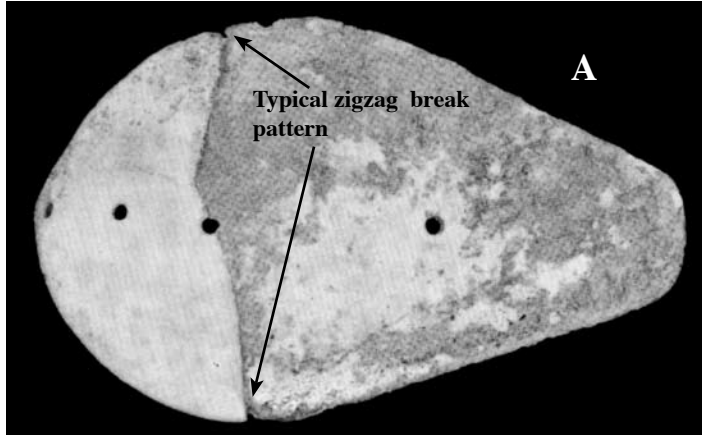
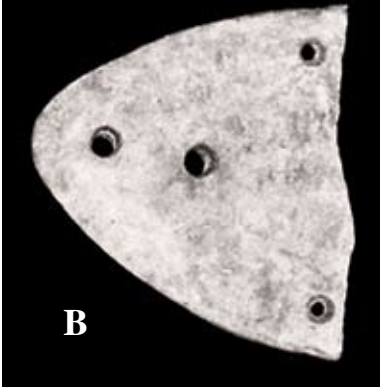


Figure 5 - Examples were found in Watt's Cave, Christian County, Kentucky, near the Tennessee line. Example (A) "is believed to be made of shell" and example (B) is made of what appears to be fossilized coral limestone. Photos from Converse (1979).



on the drilled side (see Figure 4) as if started they changed their mind for a three sets of holes configuration rather than two sets. The edge of the "crack" on the drilled side is smoother and indented as if scored before being "snapped?" where as the back side has sharper edges. There is no clear long term evidence of ware or stains between the repair holes indicating this was not used on a day to day basis and may have been strictly for ceremonial purposes or a burial practice?

"The importance and significance of the sandal-sole gorgets to the Glacial Kane people is evident by scarcity and inclusion in graves of individuals of probable distinction." Sandal-sole gorgets are not confined to males, since in at least one instance Converse (1979) noted that two were found with a female burial. He stated some were associated with burials and found on the top or along the head and shoulder regions. Vastano (2008) described placement of three shell sandal-sole gorgets found with a burial in Ohio. "They were found near the skull where they were stacked as follows. The bar gorget was on the bottom along with five small cut and worked animal jaws, above this was stacked a sandal shell gorget with another shell bar gorget on top. There was a wolf skull mask also associated with the burial." Presumably this is the area where these gorgets were generally worn or utilized but not clearly indicated.

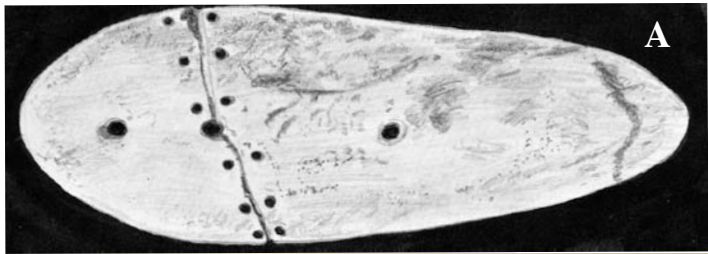


Figure 7A - Shell sandal-sole gorget with an angular break (Converse 1979) Figure 7B is slate gorget with a similar break (Poverty Point Museum, Louisiana).

Converse (1979) noted a significant portion of the sandal-sole gorgets were broken usually at the wide end often across one of the attachment holes and had “repair holes.” He speculated that the breakage indicated considerable use yet a high value was placed on this artifact since it was not thrown away but repaired. “Obviously the prestige or authority attached to the wearer of such an object was undiminished by its being repaired.”

Hoff (2007) noted the unquestionable similarities of unusual zigzag break patterns and repairs and felt that many breaks, if not all, were actually created for a specific purpose or occasion. Converse (1979) eluded to ceremonial possibilities but did not question the similarities of break patterns. Converse (1979) shows two other examples (Figures 5A & B) which display the same zigzag break pattern that are located at the wider end of the gorget. One piece (Figure 5B) was made from fossilized limestone which appears to be coral. The other (Figure 5A) is assumed to be made of shell but is not clearly stated and we feel it maybe coral limestone.

Placement of the “repair” and/or suspension holes are strange and not exactly alike. It is as if each has it’s own identity like plummets. Figure 4 has no suspension holes only repair holes. Figures 5 A and B have suspension and repair holes while Figure 6 has suspension holes but no repair holes.

A sandal sole type gorget shown in Figure 6 is also from Tennessee and made from fossilized coral. The granular polyp scars are easily distinguished. Although the piece was mistakenly glued together it exhibits the same zigzag break pattern and another variation of hole arrangements that lacks repair holes. It was on display at the Owensboro Kentucky Artifact Show in 2006.

Similar break patterns and areas of breaks were noted in other examples in Converse (1979) on several other sandal-sole gorget made of shell (Figure 7A). On display at the Poverty Point Museum is a slate gorget (Figure 7B) that also displayed the similar angular break. The Poverty Point Mound complex seems to have many transitional artifacts that may have been related to the earlier Glacial Kame Cultures. This site is dated from 1700 to 700 B.C.

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