

## VIII. Other Possible Styles in Shell Gorgets in Aboriginal North America

8.1                    This chapter is intended to serve two functions. The first is to place the above discussion into some kind of perspective which will be of assistance from the archaeological overview in the styles analyzed above. The second is briefly to point out lines for further research.

It must be emphasized in the strongest terms that these groupings are tentative and are not backed up by rigorous analysis. Furthermore, with the problems caused by trade, it can scarcely be said that even grave lots are absolute guarantees of actual association of origin. Also there is no assurance that archaeological provenience will necessarily aid in determining social origin in all cases. The possibility of heirlooms raises even more serious problems.

Also, the examples illustrated are just that; they are not "typical" specimens. I would question whether truly typical specimens could be chosen without a reasonable detailed analysis and perhaps not even then.

8.2                    The shell gorgets made during Hopewellian times are the first extensive use of this medium in eastern North America. There appears to be more than one style involved in Hopewellian art as a whole, but the formal characteristics of the gorgets are relatively constant. Such gorgets have been found as far spread as Texas (specimen in the Museum of American Indian), Kentucky (Young 1910:239), Missouri (Wood 1961:39), Illinois (Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa), and possibly Tennessee (Camp Creek site, Lewis and Kneberg 1957:44). The

appearance of the engraving on the shell gorgets is similar to that on bone from other Hopewellian sites. These gorgets are probably late in Hopewellian times (ca.A.D.500?).

Only a few specimens of Hopewellian art in shell survive, however, and the medium does not appear to have been as important as it later became. A common feature of the gorgets is the balance of the figure or figures about a central perforation, but not all specimens are so treated. Another characteristic is the breakup of body areas into zoned, hatched decoration. Themes include birds and animals of undetermined character and cat figures (see figure 28, from Wood 1961:cover).

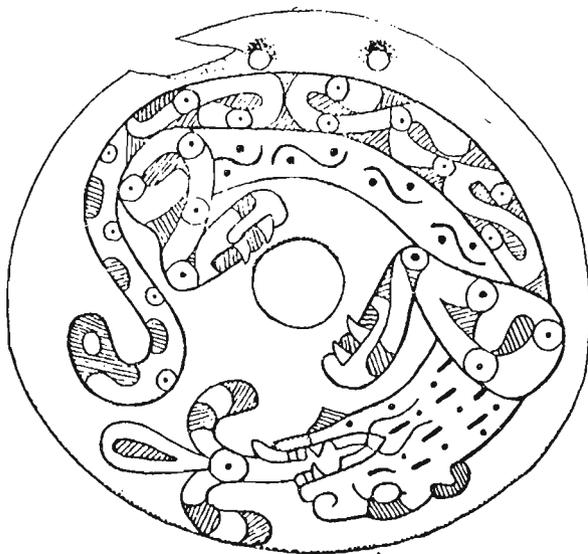


Figure 28.

8.3                    If nothing else is clear, it is that more than one style in shell is present at the Spiro site in LeFlore County, Oklahoma. At least some of the material at Spiro is certainly the result of trade with other areas, including the Etowah region and eastern Tennessee. For this reason, it is likely that had Spiro not been looted by pothunters, it might have assisted greatly in the solution of at least some important questions about contemporaneity of styles in the Southeast. All southeastern archaeologists, therefore, owe a real debt to the work of James A. Brown who has labored to bring order out of chaos. Stylistic chaos still reigns, however. A primarily formal analysis shows at least some four or five groupings among the Spiro shell materials which have no apparent kinship to material elsewhere. Certainly, there is no hint that structural analysis will reduce the complexity seen at this site. Faced with the problem of describing this material, I can only suggest that the reader consult the multitude of papers dealing with various aspects of the Spiro site (particularly Duffield 1964, where a bibliography of earlier works may be found as well as an extensive series of plates illustrating engraved shell). Taken as a whole, there is more engraved shell from the Spiro site than from any other location in eastern North America. In fact, there appears to be nearly as much engraved shell from Spiro as from the rest of the eastern United States. This appearance is only partly a result of the fragmentary nature of much of the shell from Spiro.

Gorgetts are actually only a small part of the total amount of engraved shell from Spiro. If any treatment of gorgetts can be said to be most representative of Spiro, it is probably that shown in the

rather eroded specimen of figure 29 (from a sketch in Burnett 1945:  
plate LXII).



Figure 29.

Generally, such gorgets are bilaterally symmetrical except that there are usually small differences in design and decoration on each side which appear to be significant. On certain other treatments of shell in what may be a different style, this same feature is also present.

Some of the other materials at Spiro which are so common

as to suggest local origin seem very similar to other tentative styles described below and will be referred to at the appropriate locations. Spiro, although of very great importance for the dating and correlation of various styles in the Southeast as well as in its own right, is apparently not on the same time level as the three styles analyzed above. There are treatments of rattlesnakes on cups made of conch shells at Spiro, but there are surprisingly few formal similarities, considering that the subject is the same, and few or no structural similarities that are apparent at this time. It is of interest to note that the Spiro gorgets and some tentative groupings of other kinds of Spiro engraved shell established by Dr. Philip Phillips (personal communication) lack the motifs and themes considered indicative of the "Southern Cult" (Waring and Holder 1945). Instead, the emphasis is on anthropomorphic figures, raccoons, certain kinds of bird, forked poles, and other motifs of great variety.

Although this discussion does not even scratch the surface of the stylistic variety at Spiro, it does suffice as an indication of some of the problems which can exist in such a complex situation. The value of stylistic analysis here is clear in light of the inability of normal archaeological evidence to settle many of the questions about the Spiro site.

8.3                   The Moundville site in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, presents even greater problems, if possible, since so little engraved shell is available from the site. Some gorgets found at Moundville have no counterpart elsewhere while others appear to belong to styles which are known to be on a "late" time level elsewhere. The following figure will serve to illustrate the material which appears to be distinctive at Moundville (figure 30, from Moore 1907:fig.98).



Figure 30.

8.4                    A tentative style with somewhat wider distribution is found in southeastern Missouri, southern Illinois, western Kentucky, western Tennessee, and northeastern Arkansas. Probably the best known example of this tentative style is a specimen from Eddyville, Kentucky, (shown in figure 31), and I have therefore named the tentative style Eddyville.



Figure 31.

Gorgetts in this tentative style have been found at Spiro as well, and many of the shell "bowls" from Spiro bear designs which are formally very similar. It may be that this is the result of trade, but since almost all bowls of this kind have been found at Spiro, it is probably better to avoid any definite statement of origin. Nonetheless, the gorgetts appear to be primarily centered in the areas farther east as described.

The designs of the Eddyville tentative style are usually informally balanced, and a kind of radial symmetry is apparent. The

treatment is essentially naturalistic although a certain rigidity of form is present, probably as a result of the limitations of the gorget field.

Features are highly standardized, and fairly uniform conventions govern the form of eye, nose, head and so on. The design may extend to the edge of the gorget.

The major themes present are various anthropomorphic figures usually described as "chunky player" and "dancer", variations on the spider, and geometric designs such as the cross. This tentative style shows many of the motifs of the Southern Cult defined by Waring and Holder (1945) such as the forked-eye bi-lobed arrow, mace, and so on. One of the most easily recognized, though not infallible, features of this style is the final placement of a series of concentric circles around the edge of the gorget as a border (see figure 31).

It is clear that at least some of Spiro is on the same time level as this tentative style. Also, there are what appear to be regional differences in the style with substyles in southern Illinois and southeast Missouri, western Kentucky, and western Tennessee. A group of gorgets from the Crable site in Fulton County, Illinois (Smith 1951, Morse 1960), appear to represent an attenuated or even "degenerate" variant of the Eddyville tentative style.

8.5            A possible regional variant of Eddyville which may be treated as a separate tentative style is found in northern Alabama and central Tennessee. This variant may be called the Cox Mound tentative style after the Cox Mound site in Jackson County, Alabama (Moore 1915: 315). Cox Mound gorgets, unlike most other gorgets, have the engraved

design on the convex, rather than concave side. One specimen in the Harvard Peabody Museum from the Cumberland Valley is shown in figure 32.

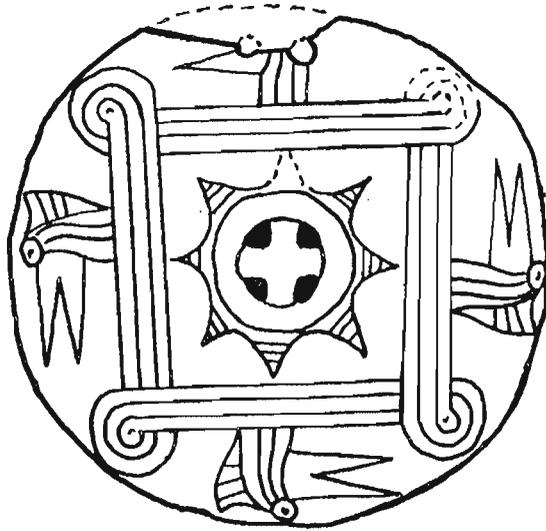


Figure 32.

The essential contemporaneity of the Cox Mound and Eddyville tentative styles is suggested by a grave lot from the Castalian Springs site in Sumner County, Tennessee (Myer 1917). Although a great deal of minor variation in form is present, the basic structure of all Cox Mound gorgets is virtually identical.

8.6                   The very rich grave associations of Mound C at the Etowah site in Bartow County, Georgia, include distinctive shell gorgets. The tentative style complex is, therefore, called "Mound C" from this location in an attempt to avoid using names of phases for styles. Finds of material

in this tentative style, however, are found over the entire eastern Tennessee area. Etowah, despite its richness, represents the southernmost extension of the tentative style.

Both bilateral symmetry and a kind of rotational symmetry were used in the layout of designs. Although a single anthropomorphic figure may be represented in a posture somewhat like that on Eddyville gorgets, two such figures are often shown in mirror image. The gorget has an undecorated border which may be "broken" at specific points by certain design intrusions.

The general feeling of this tentative style is "naturalistic" but with a somewhat less realistic emphasis than Eddyville. One characteristic of the Mound C tentative style is the cutting-out of all



Figure 33.

areas within the border which are not part of the design.

A number of themes are present in The Mound C tentative style. The nature of the finds, however, suggests that these are all on the same time level, and the simplest preliminary explanation is that these themes comprise a single style. An anthropomorphic figure, often with bird claws, wings, and an antlered head (figure 33) is a common theme. Other themes include two bird figures facing each other, standing on a cross arm, and usually separated by a striped pole. This is the less-conventionalized treatment of what Kneberg (1959:5) called the "turkey cocks design" (figure 34).



Figure 34.

A spider theme was also used; and in this and the next tentative style, it is often associated with the bird gorgets in grave lots (for illustrations of these themes see Moorehead 1932:figures 26-32). A cross and circle theme is also part of the tentative style.

As in the case of Eddyville, many Southern Cult motifs were used. Furthermore, Mound C tentative style gorgets have been found at the Saint Mary's site in southeast Missouri where Eddyville gorgets

were also found (MacCurdy 1913). Mound C gorgets also occur at the Spiro site. James Brown (1966:53) and Duffield (1964) both feel that the associations at Spiro are roughly contemporary, which indicates that the Mound C and Eddyville tentative styles were apparently on the same temporal horizon.

As already hinted, it is entirely possible that the manifestation of the tentative style at Mound C, Etowah, is the result of intrusion from the eastern Tennessee Valley. At the present state of knowledge, however, it is possible that the direction of influence and/or intrusion may have been the other way. Much of the archaeological synthesis of the area has yet to transcend the influence of modern state boundaries. Thus, the archaeological context of the Mound C tentative style is "early" Dallas in Tennessee (Kneberg 1959:35) and Wilbanks at Etowah (Larson 1964:3).

8.7 Chronologically following the Mound C tentative style (Kneberg 1959:39) is a whole series of "conventionalized" style(s) based upon the themes and structural principles, in part, of Mound C. In the case of the bird gorgets, a smooth transition from the Mound C treatment may be observed stratigraphically at the Hixon site in Hamilton County, Tennessee (Kneberg 1959). In the case of the anthropomorphic and spider themes, the transitional forms are lacking. It is not at all clear that the bird and spider themes in this conventionalized treatment are in the same style as the anthropomorphic, which may even be later (Kneberg 1959).

The distribution of the conventionalized styles extends from south-central Alabama to western North Carolina. The use of the bird theme appears

to be more common to the north in the Tennessee Valley while the conventionalized "dancer" seems more common in Alabama. Figure 35 shows the more highly conventionalized bird gorget in which the cut-out area of the Mound C treatment have been drilled pits.

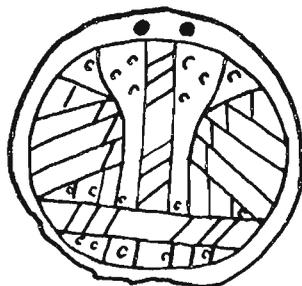


Figure 35.

The anthropomorphic gorgets show the replacement of the cut-out areas of Mound C by drilled holes and the elaboration of various forms into a spaghetti-like background. Close examination shows that part of this background is a conventionalization of the claw on the foot of Mound C gorgets. Similarly, lines extending into the border from the back of the head appear to have developed from the "antlers" present in the Mound C tentative style (figure 36).

The tentative styles involved in this continuity of tradition from Mound C to the conventionalized style(s) are probably better documented than any other styles in the Southeast, with the possible exception of the rattlesnake gorgets. Unlike the rattlesnake gorgets, however, excellent information on grave lots is also available. This fact

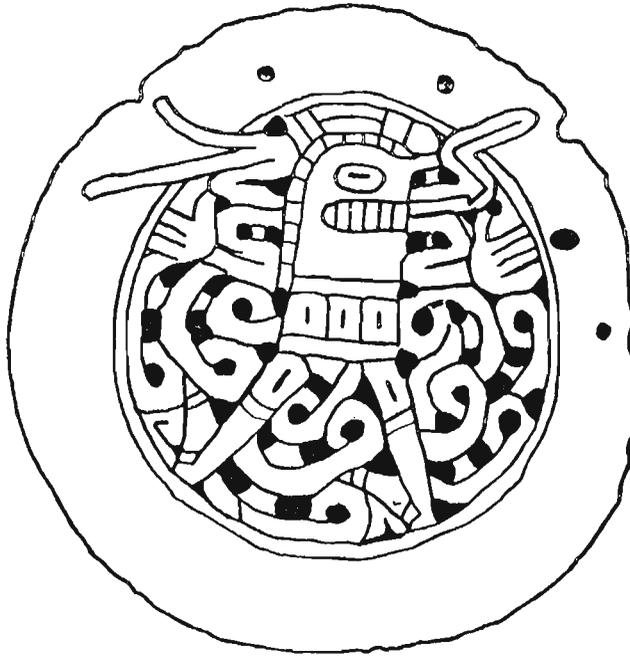


Figure 36.

indicates a fertile ground for further work on these styles which will assist materially in clarifying questions of time, contact, and continuity in the Nuclear Southeast. The name Hixon tentative style might be used for this complex with the reservation that it may prove inappropriate for the anthropomorphic theme gorgets.

8.8 Quite possibly the most common of all shell gorgets are those which were once found in great numbers in stone box graves in the area around Nashville, Tennessee. These are the "scalloped triskele" gorgets discussed by Kneberg (1959:15). Figure 37 shows what may

truthfully be called a "typical" specimen, for there is very little variation within this tentative style. The design is usually engraved on the concave side, but occasional specimens with convex decoration occur.

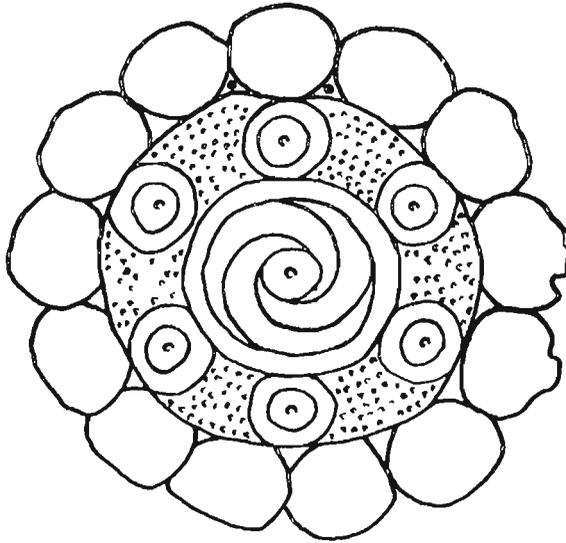


Figure 37.

This "Nashville tentative style" is as widespread as is the Citico style, and specimens are recorded from as far away as North Dakota (Howard 1953). Those specimens like figure 37 are late in the archaeology of eastern Tennessee although not so late as the rattlesnake gorgets (Kneberg 1959:39). The same theme in different form may also occur earlier, however, to judge from a grave lot at Castalian Springs containing two specimens of this theme, two Cox Mound gorgets, and an Eddyville specimen.

The archaeological context appears to be primarily

Cumberland phase around Nashville although such gorgets have been found in "middle" Dallas remains at Hiwassee Island (Lewis and Kneberg 1946) and in the Madisonville phase of Fort Ancient culture (Griffin 1943:plate CXXI) where it appears that the single specimen may be out of its "proper" temporal context.

8.9                    Along the Atlantic coast, shell gorgets found at the Irene site in Chatham County, Georgia, and occasional specimens found inland make up what may be called the South Atlantic tentative style. The basic technique of this style consists of drilling pits to form various geometric designs (figure 38). Occasionally an incised line may be used to outline some parts of the design.

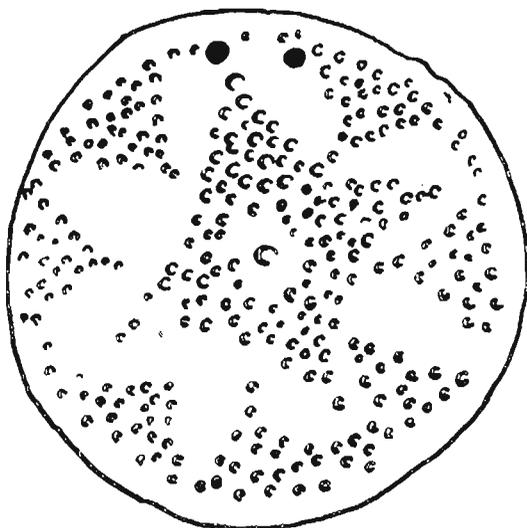


Figure 38.

These gorgets are primarily associated with the Irene phase (Caldwell and McCann 1941). A Lick Creek style gorget was also present at this site (Ga-Ct-I3), and South Atlantic tentative gorgets have been found at the Lick Creek site (specimen in Peabody Museum of Harvard) and at the Saltville site in Virginia (Maiden collection, Saltville). Tenuous as these links are, they suggest that the South Atlantic tentative style, Saltville style, and Lick Creek style were all on the same approximate time level.

8.10 In the vicinity of Lake Harney, Volusia County, Florida, C.B.Moore (1894:93) found gorgets which are different from those reported elsewhere. The following figure illustrates the most elaborate specimen (figure 39). Also associated was a gorget decorated with three large concentric circles which may have counterparts in gorgets found in eastern Tennessee.

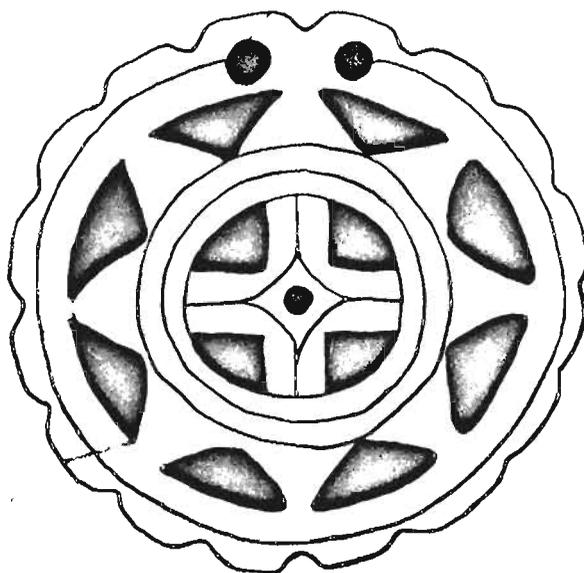


Figure 39.

There are many other cases of localized finds which do not fit into the styles described above. These include strange fragments found at Hobbs Island, Madison County, Alabama, (Webb 1939:plate 95) where Mound C gorgets were also found. Unusual shell gorgets have also been found in Arkansas -- one specimen in American Museum of Natural History (20/1575, a gift of C.B.Moore) and other specimens from Foster Place, Lafayette County, (Moore 1912:600). One of the specimens from the latter site looks very much like a local version of the "scalloped triskele" theme of the Nashville tentative style. Taken in all, these scattered finds indicate the existence of a great many minor and local styles of engraved shell gorgets.

8.11 This necessarily brief survey of Southeastern shell gorget styles may help to indicate the rich possibilities for further work. When it is considered that shell gorgets represent only a small part of the material suitable for stylistic analysis in this area, it becomes clear that a real contribution to the archaeology of the Southeast can be made through the study of style. Even on the basis of the discussion above, it is possible to create a hypothetical framework for southeastern styles in shell gorgets which can be tested by archaeologists.

Thus, there is a series of tentative styles spread over the Southeast on what may be called the Southern Cult "horizon": consisting of at least three unnamed Spiro styles, Eddyville, perhaps Cox Mound, and Mound C. Following this in eastern Tennessee and Alabama were the conventionalized treatments (Hixon?) which appear to be a development from Mound C. At roughly the same time and later in

central Tennessee was the Nashville tentative style. Perhaps only slightly later was the development in the northern part of the eastern Tennessee Valley of the Lick Creek style. The style appears to have supplanted the tentative Hixon style in eastern Tennessee, but the conventionalized anthropomorphic gorgets may have continued in Alabama. On approximately the same time level as Lick Creek, there was a variant style, Saltville, using the rattlesnake theme in extreme western Virginia and in North Carolina. The South Atlantic tentative style also appears to belong to this time period. Finally, the Citico style developed, probably from Lick Creek, and continued until European contact.

The speculative nature of this outline must again be emphasized at the risk of seeming repetitious. Three kinds of research are necessary before such an outline can be accepted. First is the careful and detailed analysis of the styles involved; second, the consideration of grave lots - no mean task in light of the present scarcity of such information; and finally, the testing of the outline against the current syntheses of the Southeastern archaeology.