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**FRANK BUNCE COLLECTION**  
**RAEFORD, NORTH CAROLINA**  
*(Frank Bunce photo)*

This Saltville Rattlesnake Gorget was found in Smyth County, Virginia. It was previously owned by John Berner, Jim Maus, and Alton Martin. Formerly published in the *Prehistoric American* special shell edition, it is one of the very best examples of the Saltville Gorget type in private collections. *(shown actual size)*

*The Journal for the Documentation of Prehistoric America*

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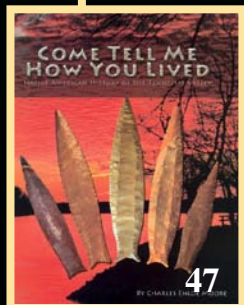


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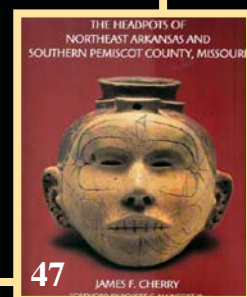
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# ENGRAVED MARINE SHELL GORGETS: A REVIEW

By Jim Glanville, Ph.D., G.I.R.S. Member, Retired Chemist, and Independent Scholar

## INTRODUCTION

Stone Age cultures around the world valued mollusk shells for the purpose of making durable ceremonial and decorative objects. For example, according to a recent news report, 100,000 years ago Neanderthals on the Iberian peninsula were wearing painted cockle shells—long before the arrival in that region of modern humans.<sup>1</sup>

In North America, engraved marine shell gorgets are one of the most attractive groups of artifacts that date from the Mississippian Period (A.D. 900-1600) of American Indian history and are characteristic of the cultures of that time who lived in the southeastern United States. Shell long endures in archaeological settings, particularly in non-acidic soils.

Mississippian gorgets were made from whelk shells and other marine mollusks and are mostly 2" to 6" in diameter. Gorgets in modern collections were almost surely recovered from burials and were typically found in close association with the skeletons of the persons who likely wore them when alive. These persons were perhaps religious figures or leaders, and often women or children. The name gorget probably derives from the English use of the word to describe something worn at the throat. Archaeologists, such as the artist Madeline Kneberg, have often pictured gorgets as being worn suspended on cords hung around the necks of their wearers

Many gorgets are “plain” or unengraved. The engraved ones discussed here were cut with stone tools to have characteristic designs. The engraved designs fall into a number of distinct types which are called gorget styles. Broadly, engraved gorgets divide into two groups: 1) circular and 2) pear- or mask-shaped, as illustrated by William Henry Holmes<sup>2</sup> in 1883 and shown by the dotted lines in Figure 1 at right. Disc beads also were made from conch outer shells, and the so-called chunky beads were made from the central stem (columella) of mollusks. Shell beads are familiar to most collectors of Indian relics.

Engraved circular gorgets typically have the designs on their concave face, while pear-shaped gorgets are

typically engraved on their convex face. Gorgets with “cut out” sections are said to be fenestrated, from a Latin word meaning windowed. Many gorgets exhibit a closely spaced pair of suspension holes near the top edge.

Even when lacking detailed provenience information, their strong iconography (style of engraving)<sup>3</sup> gives them special value as markers of Indian cultures and of cultural contacts. After discussing gorgets in general, this article focuses on gorgets which depict stylized rattlesnakes, and particularly those from northeastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia (the region formed by the watersheds of the forks of the Holston River that I call Holstonia), where my studies have been centered, and most particularly on the group of gorgets engraved in the Saltville style.

## THE LITERATURE OF ENGRAVED MARINE SHELL GORGETS

There are hundreds of articles scattered widely throughout both the professional and relic collector literature that mention or picture shell gorgets. Nine major works that aggregate gorget studies are listed in this section.

Holmes' 125-page, 1883 article for the Bureau of American Ethnology (available for on-line viewing) initiated gorget studies with a loud fanfare by showing 70 specimens divided into seven style classifications. An example of each of Holmes' seven style divisions is shown in Figure 2.

Following Holmes' magisterial synthesis, many years passed before a new work entirely devoted to engraved marine shell gorgets appeared. However, in the interim, widely scattered pictures of individual gorgets were published both in the professional and relic collector literature. Gorget studies were finally rekindled by the publication of an article by Madeline Kneberg in 1959 that pictured 62 specimens of Tennessee gorgets.<sup>6</sup> The Mississippian Period scholar, A.J. Waring, in his review<sup>7</sup> of her article wrote: “At last someone has done a long-needed job” of arranging eastern Tennessee shell gorgets into a “sensible chronological sequence”. At about this same time, widespread collector interest in gorgets was generated by the appearance of the books *Sun Circles and Human Hands*<sup>8</sup> and *Tribes That Slumber*.<sup>9</sup> Both of these books, which prominently feature pictures of gorgets as well as many other artifacts, proved extremely popular with the public at large and both remain in print today, over half a century after they were originally issued.

Jon Muller's 1966 Ph.D. dissertation<sup>10</sup> was the first thesis devoted to engraved marine shell gorgets. That thesis, together with Muller's contemporaneous article

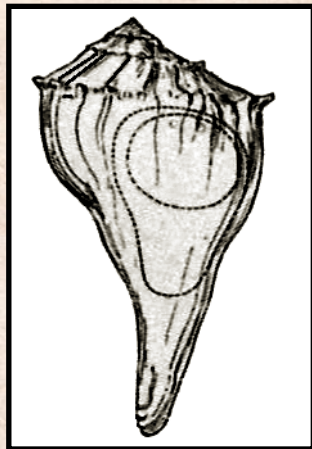
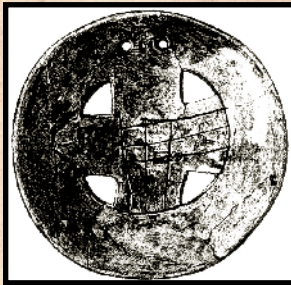


Figure 1. From Holmes, 1883. Plate XXIX, detail

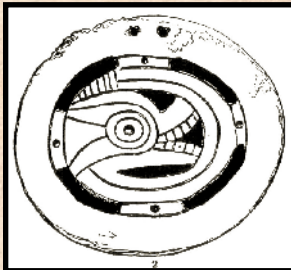




*Cross style gorget. The two suspension holes are at the top. Holmes Plate LI-1.*



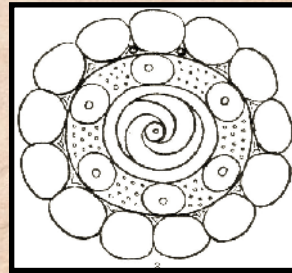
*Bird style (four-woodpecker) gorget. Holmes Plate LIX-1.*



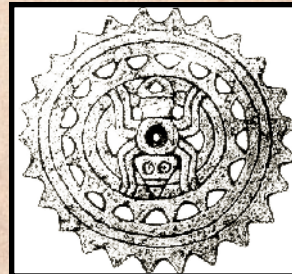
*Serpent (rattlesnake) style gorget.<sup>4</sup> The black areas show fenestrations. Holmes Plate LXV-2.*



*Human figure style gorget with suspension holes on the left. Holmes Plate LXXXV-3.*



*Scalloped disc style gorget. Holmes Plate LVI-3.*



*Spider style gorget. Holmes Plate LXI-4.*



*Human face style gorget.<sup>5</sup> Holmes Plate LXVII.*

**Figure 2.** Examples of gorgets in Holmes' seven styles published in 1883.

in *Tennessee Archaeologist*,<sup>11</sup> developed the concept of gorget style and defined the names of the sub-styles of the rattlesnake gorget genre. Arguably, Muller's key advance was to demonstrate the manner in which a study of artistic style (with the case of gorgets as a particular example) could contribute to the development of American archaeology.

The first professional article dedicated to a "pilot study" of engraved, pear-shaped mask style marine shell gorgets appeared in 1989.<sup>12</sup> M.T. Smith and J.B. Smith noted that mask style gorgets were geographically widespread (ranging from Alabama to North Dakota) during the Mississippian Period and interpreted the symbolism of the 69 examples they described as suggesting that mask gorgets

functioned in a warfare or hunting related role. Recently, a useful review was published describing the significance of mask style gorgets found in the Ohio River Valley.<sup>13</sup>

In 1996 Jeffrey Brain and Philip Phillips authored a book largely devoted to marine shell gorgets published by the Peabody Museum.<sup>14</sup> This book (discussed in the following section) serves as catalog of the exhibited and published specimens of gorgets known to them at that time. As such, it is a benchmark publication and today is the starting point of any serious study of engraved marine shell gorgets. A few are shown front and back, a few are inadvertently duplicated, and seven "frauds" are included—so the precise total is a little uncertain.



**Table 1. Principal Brain and Phillips Gorget Major and Sub-styles.**

<b>Major Style</b>	<b>Sub-styles or Subdivisions</b>
Plain (unengraved)	Subdivided by size, shape, edge treatment, and number of holes and hole placement
Annular (ring-like)	Subdivided by their size and the size of their center hole
Bird or turkey cock	Cox Mound, Hixon, Jackson, Pearce
Square cross or crib	Bennett, Donnaha, Moorehead, Warren Wilson, quadrilobed
Circular cross or cruciform	Circular cross
Geometric	Crable, Dunning, Lenoir, Pickett, Pine Island, Ruffner, Russell, Tibbee Creek, Younge
Human figure, dancer	Big Toco, Cartersville, Eddyville, Hamilton, Houston, Hull, Philbrook, Rhoden, Spaghetti
Mask or human face	Buffalo, Chickamauga, McBee
Rattlesnake	Lick Creek, Brakebill, Carter's Quarter, Citico, Saltville
Spider	McAdams, Orton, Rudder
Scalloped disk or triskele	Nashville I, Nashville II

A year later, in 1997, Darla Spencer Hoffman published a magnificent survey of West Virginia gorgets<sup>15</sup> in which she described 70 specimens. The preceding year, Brain and Phillips had reported just eight West Virginia gorgets, so her work was a major advance. She achieved this in large measure by seeking out the collectors who owned over 80 percent of the gorgets she studied. Her work convincingly demonstrated the potential value to archaeology of aggregating images of, and provenience information about, privately held gorgets. My own gorget work has proceeded along similar lines, as I describe below.

### **BRAIN AND PHILLIPS 1996 BOOK/CATALOG**

The Brain and Phillips book catalogs, describes, and pictures about 1,100 engraved gorgets. It also includes useful maps showing the geographic distributions of gorgets in particular styles. Roughly 900 of their gorget total are circular and 200 are pear-shaped.<sup>16</sup> Table 1 shows the book's major gorget style classifications and their subdivisions. Most gorget sub-style names were taken from places where gorgets in that sub-style were found.

Table 2 shows the counts and percentages of the principal styles of gorgets listed in Brain and Phillips' catalog. Rattlesnake style gorgets account for 28% of the total and are the dominant style—being over twice as common as gorgets in any other style.

Table 3 shows the counts and percentages of the find states of gorgets. The Brain and Phillips catalog lists 379 Tennessee gorgets, which account for about 40% of the total. Over 90% of the gorgets in the catalog come from just nine states: Tennessee, Oklahoma, Georgia, Alabama, Illinois, Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Missouri. Within those states, gorget distribution is typically highly localized. For example, sites along the Tennessee River

**Table 2. Principal Gorget Styles by Count and Percentage According to Brain and Phillips**

<b>Style</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Rattlesnake	260	28.2
Human figure, dancer	125	13.6
Mask or human face	114	12.4
Scalloped disk or triskele	109	11.8
Cruciform (crib) square or circular cross	109	11.8
Bird or turkey cock	78	8.5
Geometric	42	4.6
Spider	32	3.5
Unclassified	18	1.9
Annular (ring-like)	17	1.9
Plain	17	1.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>921</b>	<b>100.1</b>

From Brain and Phillips catalog of gorgets listed by style, pp. 9-128.

account for most of the gorgets from Tennessee and Alabama; all gorgets from Oklahoma come from the Spiro site; and Georgia gorgets were concentrated at the Etowah mounds.

Turning to rattlesnake gorgets, they are abundant in Holstonia and constitute the single most important category from that region. Table 4 shows the state-by-state counts of rattlesnake gorgets. Tennessee was the source of slightly over 50% of the specimens in the Brain and Phillips catalog and just five states (Tennessee, Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama) accounted for over 92% of the total of 260 rattlesnake style gorgets.

Table 5 is a simplified form of Table 4. In Table 5, the sub-styles Citico and Carter's Quarter are combined into a single group designated for convenience as an overall



**Table 3. All Styles of Gorgets Count and Percent by Reported Find State\***

<i>State</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Tennessee	379	39.1	39.1
Oklahoma	130	13.4	52.5
Georgia	111	11.5	64.0
Alabama	90	9.3	73.3
Illinois	46	4.7	78.0
Virginia	37	3.8	81.8
North Carolina	35	3.6	85.4
Arkansas	28	2.9	88.3
Missouri	22	2.2	90.5
Kentucky	21	2.2	92.7
Texas	16	1.7	94.4
Florida	11	1.1	95.5
Mississippi	11	1.1	96.6
North Dakota	10	1.0	97.6
West Virginia	8	0.8	98.4
Indiana	6	0.6	99.0
Ohio	4	0.4	99.4
Louisiana	2	0.2	99.6
South Dakota	1	0.1	99.7
South Carolina	1	0.1	99.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>969</b>	<b>99.8</b>	<b>99.8</b>

\*Data from Brain and Phillips pp. 405-503. Some gorgets (not included in this table) lacking specific find states are simply reported as being from the "Southeast."

CCQ (Citico-Carter's Quarter) style. Additionally, the sub-styles Lick Creek and Brakebill are aggregated into a single group designated for convenience as an overall LCB (Lick Creek/Brakebill) style. Gorgets in the Carter's Quarter sub-style may be generally regarded as fenestrated Citico style gorgets. Gorgets in both the Lick Creek and Brakebill styles are fenestrated. So doing aggregates the styles into the original styles devised by Jon Muller. The data in Table 5 comes from Brain and Phillips pp. 83-106.

### GORGET SERIATION

As used by archaeologists, the term seriation simply means a listing of artifacts in chronological and dated sequence. For gorgets, seriation is of enormous value because the approximate date of any individual gorget engraved in a distinctive style can be immediately estimated by referring to a listing such as that shown in Table 6.

Almost from the beginning of my 2004 studies, I have been aware that the limited gorget dating and seriation in the Brain and Phillips catalog was not generally accepted among professional students of gorgets.

Fortunately, gorget seriation has recently been revisited in studies by Lynne P. Sullivan<sup>17</sup> and by David J. Hally.<sup>18</sup> Table 6 relies in large part on those studies. However, in preparing Table 6, I have also exercised my own judgment based on conversations with knowledgeable professionals over the past five or six years. As an amateur effort, I label my table a "speculative" seriation. Note that all rattlesnake style gorgets come at a relatively late date and overlap the time of arrival of Spanish conquistadors in the Southeast.

**Table 4. The Distribution of 260 Brain and Phillips Cataloged Rattlesnake Gorgets by Sub-style and State**

<i>Style ↓</i>	<i>State →</i>	<i>TN</i>	<i>GA</i>	<i>VA</i>	<i>NC</i>	<i>AL</i>	<i>SE*</i>	<i>WV</i>	<i>KY</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>MO</i>	<i>IN</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>TOT</i>
Citico		48	17	11	4	9	8	2	3	0	1	1	0	104
Carter's Quarter		7	8	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	20
Lick Creek		14	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Brakebill		47	9	1	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	63
Saltville		1	0	7	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Unassigned (generic)		15	7	3	10	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40
State Count		132	44	25	22	17	9	3	3	2	1	1	1	260
State Percent		50.8	16.9	9.6	8.5	6.5	3.2	1.2	1.2	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.4	99.9
Cumulative Percent		50.8	67.7	77.3	85.8	92.3	95.5	96.7	97.9	98.7	99.1	99.5	99.9	

\*SE = Southeast, gorgets lacking a specific find state.

From Brain and Phillips catalog of gorgets by style pp. 83-106.



**Table 5.** *Rattlesnake Gorget Counts from Brain and Phillips by Aggregated Sub-styles*

<b>Aggregated Sub-style</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
CCB: Citico and (104) Carter's Quarter (or fenestrated Citico) (20)	124	47.9
LCB: Lick Creek (22) and Brakebill (63)	85	32.4
Unassigned rattlesnakes (not placed in one of the five named sub-styles)	40	15.4
Saltville	11	4.2
Totals	260	99.9

From Brain and Phillips pp. 83-106. Here in Table 5, their styles have been aggregated into the original styles devised by Jon Muller.

**Table 6.** *A Speculative Seriation of Gorgets According to Styles and Sub-styles.*

<b>Gorget Style</b>	<b>Gorget Sub-styles</b>	<b>Date Range, AD</b>
Crib (square cross)	Bennett, Moorehead	1100-1300
Human Figure	Big Toco (fenestrated, perhaps dancers)	1250-1325
Bird	Hixon (facing paired woodpeckers, fenestrated)	1200-1350
Spider	Orton (circular with rings of holes, from Tennessee)	1250-1325
Cruciform	Ruffner, Dunning	1250-1325
Cruciform	Pine Island (cross with quadrilateral fenestrations)	1300-1375
Bird	Cox Mound (four woodpeckers around a square)	1325-1400
Triskele	Nashville I, Nashville II	1325-1450
Human Figure	Spaghetti (distorted human faces, highly fenestrated)	1375-1475
Geometric	Taskigi (edge pitted plain gorgets)	1375-1475
Crib (square cross)	Warren Wilson (quadrilobed)	1375-1475
Rattlesnake	Lick Creek, Brakebill, Carters Quarter, Citico	1400-1600
Mask	Buffalo, Chickamauga, McBee	1450-1600
Rattlesnake	Saltville	1450-1650

## THE AUTHOR'S METHODS

Since 2004, I have located and pictured many gorgets not in the Brain and Phillips catalog by three principal methods: 1) A detailed study of the collector literature (books and magazines); 2) By visits to collector shows and the private homes of collectors; and 3) By monitoring the gorgets which have been offered for sale by relic dealers, particularly via those they have shown on line.

Books illustrating gorgets that have been published for the collector community fall into two groups: 1) The important ten-volume series of works with the generic title *Who's Who in Indian Relics*<sup>19</sup> and 2) Various other works that picture gorgets. The ten books published under the title *Who's Who in Indian Relics* deserve to be widely known, as collectively they represent a remarkable photographic record of American Indian artifacts. A complete study and thorough compilation of the evidence in these volumes would require a huge effort.<sup>20</sup>

Other books published for the collector community that contain images of gorgets are Fundaburk and Foreman's book mentioned earlier (footnote 8). In a section titled "Ceremonial Complex" they quote extensively from Waring and Holder,<sup>21</sup> as well as other authorities, and picture many gorgets in plates such as: 20, 23, 28, 31, 32, 41-50, 155, and 156. Bert Bierer self-published a simply produced, well-organized and well-documented compendium of southeastern Indian artifacts including gorgets.<sup>22</sup> Lar Hothem's shell artifact "value guide"<sup>23</sup> shows many examples of offered-for-sale engraved shell gorgets, some of which are perhaps reproductions.<sup>24</sup> A 2007 book about shell artifacts by two Florida-based marine biologists is a significant work with its many color pictures and its sensible approach to artifact cataloging. Unfortunately, it was not carefully edited.<sup>25</sup>

Over the past 50-odd years, the relic collecting community has produced many magazines. Some have





*Citico style gorget. An unfenestrated rattlesnake gorget with two suspension holes that measures  $4\frac{3}{8}$ "  $\times$   $5\frac{1}{2}$ ". Formerly in the Clarence Maiden collection. Cataloged in Brain and Phillips with the Muller designation VA-Ws-M1 and using Muller's picture. Stated provenience Mendota, Washington County, Virginia. Photographed by the author in the Charles Burnette collection, 2005.*

*Fenestrated Citico style gorget. 5" in diameter. Collected by Ralph Space and Clarence Maiden. Cataloged in Brain and Phillips with the Muller designation Va-Sm-S8 and using Muller's picture. Stated provenience Saltville, Virginia. Photographed by the author at the Space Farms Zoo and Museum, New Jersey, 2006.*



*Lick Creek/Brakebill style gorget.  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter, present location unknown; known only from this picture said to be of the Edgar Sanders of Saltville collection, ca 1960. Original photograph donated to the author by the late Tom Totten and now in his files. Previously unpublished.*

*Lick Creek/Brakebill style gorget.  $1\frac{3}{4}$ " inches high. From the Holliston Mills site in Kingsport, Tennessee. Two suspension holes, with one apparently a re-drill to replace the worn-through hole. Photographed by the author in a private collection, 2008. First published in the preview announcement of this article.*



*Saltville style gorget.  $2\frac{1}{4}$ " in diameter. Not in Brain and Phillips catalog. Probably from Southwest Virginia. Photographed by the author in the Charles Burnette collection, 2005. Previously unpublished.*

*Saltville style gorget.  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter. Not in Brain and Phillips catalog. Said to be from the Broadford site in Smyth County, Virginia, Photographed by the author in the Tommy Beutell collection, 2005. Previously unpublished.*



**Figure 3.** Rattlesnake gorgets from the author's collection of photographs.

been long lived; others have been fleeting. Also, various groups of collectors have produced, and continue to produce, newsletters. Four long-lived magazines are: 1) *Journal of the Illinois Archaeological Society*; 2) *The Central States Archaeological Journal*; and 3) *Prehistoric American*, which began life in a black-and-white format in 1966 under the title *The Redskin*, was by 1982 being published as *Prehistoric Art*, and in 1985 with the title *Prehistoric Artifacts*; and 4) *Indian Artifacts Magazine* a quarterly relic collectors publication currently in its 29th year of publication that has occasionally published images of gorgets. An example of a collectors magazine that

became defunct is the onetime Ohio-based publication called, simply, *Artifacts*.

Internet gorget resources and auction catalogs reflect the activities of auction houses that deal in Indian relics. Some of these houses publish elegant, glossy catalogs that can be subscribed to by postal mail. Others offer on line auctions with the catalogs being posted on the internet. Some publish both paper and on line catalogs. Collections from the estates of deceased collectors constitute many (perhaps most) of the archaeological artifacts that are offered at auction. In recent years, the author has seen numerous gorgets offered for sale, even on the general interest auction sites such as



Saltville style gorget. 3 1/4" diameter. Recovered in 1972 from the Early Upper Sauratown site, Stokes County, North Carolina. Photographed by the author in the Jim Maus collection, 2006. Black-and-white image previously published by Jim Maus.<sup>35</sup> Author's photograph, 2006.



Saltville style gorget. 2 1/4" diameter. From the Early Upper Sauratown site, Stokes County, North Carolina. Photographed by the author in the Jim Maus collection, 2007. Not previously published. Author's photograph, 2007.

Saltville style gorget. 3 1/4" diameter. Formerly in the Fred Sharpe collection. It is very indistinctly pictured on page 311 of the 1972 edition of *Who's Who in Indian Relics*. The author required four years to track down this gorget in its present home in a private Virginia collection. Author's photograph, 2008.



Saltville style gorget. Approximately 4" diameter. This specimen is unique in that the "jaws" point upward. Found before 1947 by Douglas Rights<sup>36</sup> about three miles south of Elkin, North Carolina. Brain and Phillips catalog with the Muller designation NC-Yd-D3. Photographed by the author in 2007 on display at the Museum of Anthropology at Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Saltville style gorget concave face. 2" in diameter. Recovered from Chilhowie, Smyth County, Virginia, probably in the 1950s. It has a single center hole. Photographed by the author at the Dr. Presley Rankin Museum, Ellerbe, North Carolina, 2007. Previously unpublished.



The reverse side of the Rankin collection Saltville style gorget shown immediately above. Dr. Rankin obtained this gorget by purchase and did not know its provenience. The annotation reads "Smyth Co. Va / Chilhowie School / Kelly Barry." In the mid-1950s Kelly Barry was mayor of Chilhowie and is well known to me from oral history as an avid relic collector. My work would be much easier if all gorgets came so well-labeled.

Saltville style gorget. 3" diameter with two suspension holes and a third, small hole. Photographed by the author in the Jack Stallings collection, Virginia Beach, Virginia, April 2010. Formerly in the Ben McCary collection. Labeled on reverse by McCary: "Mendota site Washington Co., VA 1952." Pictured in the book by Peck et al. in 2008.



Saltville style gorget. 3" diameter with four suspension holes. Presently in the Cliff Kelsey collection. Seen and photographed by the author at the March 2010 GIRS show in Fletcher, North Carolina. Said by its owner to have come from a site on the Watauga River about four miles upstream from Elizabethton, Tennessee.

Figure 4. Saltville style gorgets from the author's collection of photographs.



eBay. It is a reasonable guess that over the course of a year dozens, and possibly hundreds, of gorget images appear in printed catalogs or at the websites of on line sellers. Simply attempting to monitor and record all gorgets among the flood of American Indian artifacts coming onto the market is a time consuming endeavor. Checking to see if they have previously appeared in an earlier, alternative publishing format is additionally time consuming.

My already-published work on gorget studies and the methods I use include an article in the *Smithfield Review*<sup>26</sup> and two articles in the *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia*.<sup>27</sup>

## SALTVILLE STYLE GORGETS

Saltville, in Smyth County, Virginia, is a small town in the large region that constitutes Southwest Virginia. For various reasons, the region is one of the least explored by conventional archaeology in the entire eastern half of the United States. The only comprehensive work devoted to its regional archaeology is now 40 years old,<sup>28</sup> and it is typically reduced to describing major sites such as Broadford, Chilhowie, Mendota, and Saltville, each in a handful of paragraphs. As its name implies, Saltville is underlain by salt (NaCl) formations, and dissolved salt rising to the surface creates licks that over millennia attracted large animals and their concomitant hunters. Saltville is a concentration site for Paleoindian period Clovis points and from 1895-1970 was the site of a large complex of chemical plants. Mississippian period American Indians no doubt established a salt trading center there with the salt creating a local economic center. Michael Barber (who at the present time of writing is the State Archaeologist of Virginia) learned from working there some 20 years ago that numerous private artifact collections were characteristic of Saltville and Smyth County. Based on the local assemblage of archaeological prestige objects Barber described the place as a “salt powered chiefdom”.<sup>29</sup>

Table 5 shows that in the 1996 catalog Saltville style gorgets were the rarest of the rattlesnake styles. They were also the most geographically localized. Of the 11 reported specimens, seven came from Southwest Virginia, three from North Carolina, and one from Tennessee. My investigations confirm and extend those conclusions. I have now collected pictures of slightly over 50 Saltville style gorgets of which three or four come from upper East Tennessee, about a dozen come from the Stokes-Surry-Yadkin County triangle in North Carolina, with the rest being assigned to Southwest Virginia. These counts are reasonable but are not, and cannot be, definitive. For example, some of the gorgets I cannot assign to a specific find site, but only to a region, and such limited evidence requires me to draw inferences, or even to make an intelligent guess. Another complicating factor is the slippery nature of style itself, with some gorgets carrying designs that fall between two

named styles. In this connection, Saltville style gorgets are not traditionally regarded as being fenestrated, although some now known come with fenestrations.

*Prehistoric American* has published a number of articles showing Saltville style gorgets. Jim Maus published one of the Saltville style gorgets from his collection.<sup>30</sup> Anthony Stein published one in a gorgets survey article,<sup>31</sup> and said it came from either Southwest Virginia or East Tennessee (personal communication, 2006). Frank Bunce published pictures of an interesting Saltville style gorget in his collection<sup>32</sup> and displayed another fine Saltville style gorget from Sullivan County, Tennessee at the 2007 Fletcher, North Carolina G.I.R.S. artifact show. Robert and Camille Matthias published a specimen with a single center hole from Sullivan County, Tennessee in 2008.<sup>33</sup>

Recently, the picture of a Saltville style gorget from Mendota in Washington County, Virginia was published in a retrospective account of the Ben McCary collection.<sup>34</sup> McCary frequently purchased artifacts from persons in Southwest Virginia.<sup>35</sup> Also, longtime relic collector and author Jim Maus has posted an article about Saltville style gorgets at his newly developed web site at: <http://www.jimmausartifacts.com/saltville-style-gorgets/>.

Further examples of Saltville style gorgets depicted in photographs that I have taken are shown in Figure 4. I anticipate that additional specimens of Saltville style gorgets will show up in the future. Perhaps the publication of this article will bring some of those to light.

## GORGETS AND HISTORY

One of the most satisfying aspects of a study of Saltville style gorgets is their value as a potential tool for understanding the Sixteenth Century history of the Southeast.

For 70 years before the English permanently settled at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, Spaniards had been active in the Southeast. The conquistador, Hernando de Soto, traveled through the region in 1541; Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine, Florida in 1565. A splendid article describing the events of the Spanish period history of the American Southeast was published in *National Geographic Magazine* in 1988.<sup>38</sup> Readers of this article will likely be particularly interested in Judge's well-illustrated essay because it includes a full page (p. 349) devoted to images of engraved marine shell gorgets.

My interest in gorgets was actually preceded by an interest in Spaniards being in Saltville in 1567, when they attacked a palisaded village there.<sup>39</sup> In brief, history tells that that year an exploration party under Juan Pardo, seeking to open an overland route from the mines of Mexico to the Carolina coast, traveled west into Tennessee. Pardo left a detachment of men under Sergeant Hernando Moyano stationed at Fort St. Juan near present-day Morganton, North Carolina. From there Moyano traveled north in search of gold and attacked a palisaded American



Indian village at present-day Saltville. My speculation is that people fled from Saltville after the attack to the three county Stokes-Surry-Yadkin triangle region of North Carolina. Of course, it is only speculation, but it does offer a possible explanation for the very distinctive distribution pattern of Saltville style gorgets between those two localities. I presented my detailed arguments to the Virginia History Forum in Richmond in 2007, and they are available to be read on line.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the question remains as to which American Indian people made Saltville style gorgets. The arguments are too lengthy to develop here, but a very strong case can be made for the Yuchi as their makers and that Saltville was a Yuchi center.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Mississippian Period artifacts with strong iconography, such as engraved marine shell gorgets, in private collections—even those whose find sites are unknown—retain considerable archaeological value despite the fact that their detailed archaeological contexts went unrecorded. Members of the collecting community perform a useful service when they collect and aggregate information about categories of such artifacts. The Saltville style of gorget is a very good case in point.

I am pessimistic about the eventual fate of most engraved marine shell gorgets held in private collections. I have approached curators, or other officials, at a number of museums about the possible accession by their museums of engraved marine shell gorgets from private collections. All have been uniformly negative. One wrote “NAGPRA is a serious concern for those involved with museum curation and collections management. This is a very thin ice topic.” NAGPRA, of course, is the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which is now 20 years old. As far as engraved marine shell gorgets are concerned, the effect of the Act has been to strongly inhibit their curation at public museums. In my opinion, it will be an irreparable loss if these objects of high art that honor the American Indian people who made them are not satisfactorily documented and properly conserved.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### END NOTES

1. Fountain, Henry. “Neanderthal Decorative Shells Found in Southeastern Spain.” *New York Times*, January 8, 2010.
2. Holmes, William Henry. “Art in Shell of the Ancient Americans.” Pp. 179-305 in *Annual Report (1880-81) of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*. Washington, DC: US Govt. Print. Off., 1883. Which can be examined at, or downloaded from, <http://books.google.com/books?id=SLgqAAAAMAAJ>. Facsimile reprint Davenport: Gustav’s Library, 2006.
3. Style is a complicated topic beyond my scope here. I adopt the simple-minded definition that gorgets that look similar are in the same style. Readers interested in pursuing the topic of style can conveniently begin with Muller, Jon. “Prolegomena for the Analysis of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex.” Pp. 15-37 in *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: Chronology, Content, Context*, ed., Adam King. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.
4. This gorget was taken from the Lick Creek mound in northeast Tennessee. It resides today in the Peabody Museum at Harvard University and was used as the cover illustration for Brain and Phillips’ 1996 gorget catalog. On p. 461 it is designated by them as Tenn-Gn-LC2 and said to be in the Lick Creek style.
5. This specimen was taken around 1876 from the Ely Mound in Lee County, Virginia.
6. Kneberg, Madeline. “Engraved Shell Gorgets and Their Associations.” *Tennessee Archaeologist* 15(1): 1-39, 1959.
7. Waring, A.J. Jr. “A Review of Madeline Kneberg’s ‘Engraved Shell Gorgets and Their Associations.’” *American Antiquity*, 25(4): 620-621, 1960.
8. Fundaburk, Emma Lila and Mary Douglass Fundaburk Foreman. *Sun Circles and Human Hands: The Southeastern Indians, Art and Industry*. Luverne, AL: Emma Lila Fundaburk, 1957.
9. Lewis, Thomas M.N., and Madeline Kneberg. *Tribes that Slumber: Indians of the Tennessee Region*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1958.
10. Muller, Jon David. *An Experimental Theory of Stylistic Analysis*. Harvard University, Department of Anthropology, Ph.D. Thesis, August 1966. This work is only available via purchase from Widener Library at Harvard College.
11. Muller, Jon. “Archaeological Analysis of Art Styles.” *Tennessee Archaeologist*, 22(1): 25-39, 1966. This work can be obtained via an interlibrary loan.
12. Smith, M.T., and J.B. Smith. “Engraved Shell Masks in North America.” *Southeastern Archaeology*, 8(1): 9-18, 1989.
13. Baker, Stanley W. “The Importance of Marine Shell Mask Carvings Based on their Archaeological Occurrence in the Ohio Valley.” *Ohio Archaeologist*, 59(4):4-15, 2009
14. Brain, J.P., and P. Phillips. *Shell Gorgets: Styles*



of the Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric Southeast. Cambridge: Peabody Museum Press, 1996.

15. Hoffman, Darla Spencer. "From the Southeast to Fort Ancient: A Survey of Shell Gorgets in West Virginia." *West Virginia Archeologist*, 49(1&2): 1-40, 1997.

16. My guess is that a comprehensive study of the relic collectors literature would yield photographs of hundreds more engraved gorgets. It is anyone's guess as to how many remain undocumented in private collections—perhaps a couple of thousand.

17. Sullivan, Lynne P. "Shell Gorgets, Time, and the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex in Southeastern Tennessee." Pp. 88-106 in *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: Chronology, Content, Context*, ed., Adam King. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.

18. Hally, David J. "Mississippian Shell Gorgets in Regional Perspective." Pp. 185-231 in *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: Chronology, Content, Context*, ed., Adam King. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.

19. Wachtel, Hubert. C., ed. 1964 *Who's Who in Indian Relics No. 1*, Union City, Georgia, reprint edition 1980. Thompson, Ben W., ed. *Who's Who in Indian Relics No. 2*, 1968, *No. 3*, 1972, *No. 4*, 1976, *No. 5*. 1980, *No. 6*, 1984, and *No. 7*, 1988, all privately printed for the publisher at Kirkwood, Missouri. Jinks-Weidner, Janie & Leonard D. Weidner, eds. *Who's Who In Indian Relics, No. 8*, 1992, *No. 9*, 1996, and *No. 10*, 2000, published for the editors at Westerville, Ohio.

20. A complete scholarly study of these works would be instructive. Such a study would make an excellent Ph.D. project in anthropology. In addition to the volumes' archaeological content, they reveal much about the anthropology of relic collecting.

21. Waring, A.J., Jr., and P. Holder. "A Prehistoric Ceremonial Complex in the Southeastern United States." *American Anthropologist*, 47: 1-34, 1945.

22. Bierer, Bert Worman. *Indians and Artifacts in the Southeast*. Columbia, SC: Self published, 1978.

23. Hothem, Lar. *Antler, Bone, & Shell Artifacts: Identification and Value Guide*. Collector Books, Paducah, Kentucky, 2006.

24. Bailey, Richard. Personal communication, 2006.

25. Hoff, Frank and Nancy Hoff. *Shell Artifacts: With Emphasis on Southeast Collections*. Dade City: Pasttime Artifacts, 2007. The legend to Figure 1.1 contains fifteen words, two of which are misspelled. The bibliographic citation to Brain and Phillips misspells the name of the second author and the word protohistoric. A serious error of omission is the book's failure to cite any work by Jon Muller.

26. Glanville, Jim. "Improper Archeology, 'Fabulous Saltville,' and the Ancient History of Southwest Virginia." *The Smithfield Review*, Volume IX, pages 55-100, 2005.

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28. Holland, C.G. *An Archeological Survey of Southwest Virginia: Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology Number 12*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970.

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30. Maus, Jim. "Rattlesnake Engraved Shell Gorget: The Saltville Style." *Prehistoric American*, 33(4): 19, 1999.

31. Stein, Anthony A. "Mississippian Shell Gorgets." *Prehistoric American*, 39(4): 26-28, 2005.

32. Bunce, Frank. "Frank Bunce Collection, Raeford, NC. Dawn Bunce Photographs." *Prehistoric American*, 39(4): 40-44, 2005.

33. Matthias, Robert and Cammille. "A Saltville Style Rattlesnake Gorget." *Prehistoric American*, 42(1): 14, 2008.

34. Peck, Rodney, Thomas McCary, and Jack Stallings. *Who's Who in Virginia Archaeology - Ben C. McCary, Williamsburg, Virginia*. Kannapolis, NC: Rodney Peck, 2009. Page 75.

35. Hamm, Tommy. Personal communication, 2004.

36. Maus, Jim. "The Dan River Rattlesnake Engraved Shell Gorgets." *Central States Archaeological Journal*, 35(3): 166-167, 1988.

37. Rights, Douglas LeTell. *The American Indian in North Carolina*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1947. The gorget is pictured on page 252b. Reverend Rights was a life-long relic collector. Some of his collection was preserved.

38. Judge, Joseph. "Exploring Our Forgotten Century." *National Geographic Magazine*, 173(3): 331-363, March, 1988.

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40. Glanville, Jim. *Unknown Holstonia: Southwest Virginia Before the Settling of Jamestown*. Paper presented at the Virginia Forum, Library of Virginia, Richmond. Saturday April 14, 2007. Available on line at: <http://www.holstonia.net/files/Richmond2007.pdf>. Images of gorgets are included in this article.