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An Unique Shell Gorget from Wood County, Texas

Jesse Todd

During the excavations preceding the construction of Lake Fork Reservoir, archaeologists from Southern Methodist University uncovered a child's burial at the Gilbreath site (41WD538) in Wood County, Texas (Bruseh and Perttula 1981:16). The child was from 2 to 3 years of age and burial furniture consisted of five ceramic vessels and an unique marine shell (*Busycon sp.*) gorget from the chest area (Figure 1). The age of the site, which has a Titus phase component, ranges from ca. A.D. 1430-1680.



Figure 1. Close-up of shell gorget in child's burial at the Gilbreath site (41WD538). Photograph courtesy of Southern Methodist University.

Conch shell gorgets are not abundant in Caddo archaeological sites in Northeast Texas. Two sites along the Red River, the Sanders site (41LR2, Krieger 1946) in Lamar County, and the Roitsch site (41RR16, Harris 1953; Skinner et. al. 1969) in Red River County, contain almost all of the shell gorgets found in Northeast Texas. Seventeen gorgets were discovered at the Sanders site (Jackson et al. 2000) and five were recovered from the Roitsch site.

The gorget from the Gilbreath site (Figure 2) is 109.6 mm long and 53.6 mm wide at its widest point. It is 4.0 mm thick, and the two perforations are approximately 5.5 mm in diameter. The gorget is highly polished and the lower end appears to have been utilized for some unknown purpose because of the amount of wear present along its edges. The gorget has the shape of a mace similar to engravings found on shell cups at the Craig Mound at the Spiro site in eastern Oklahoma (Phillips and Brown 1978).

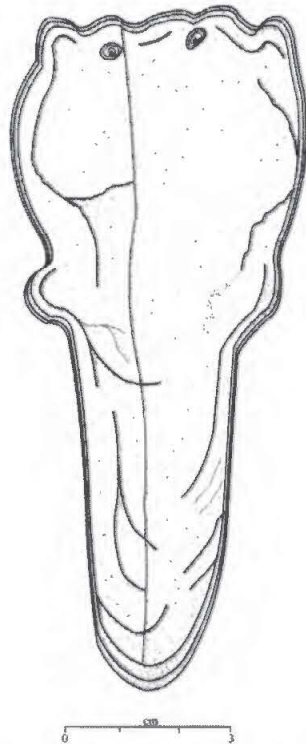


Figure 2. Shell gorget from the Gilbreath site.

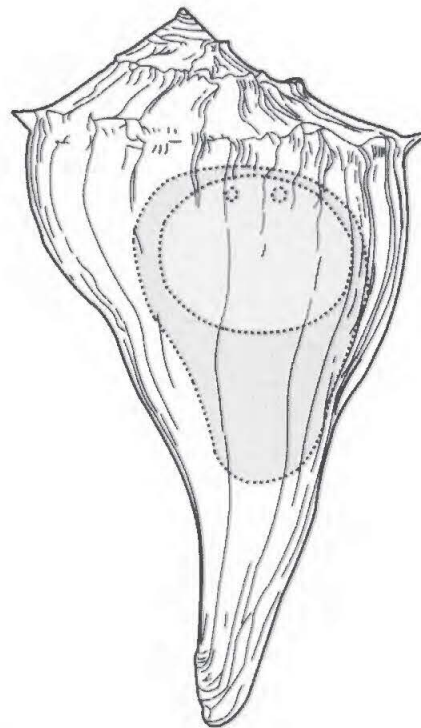


Figure 3. Locations on a *Busycon* shell that are used in making gorgets (modified from Holmes 1883:Plate 29).

The location on the *Busycon* shell that the gorget came from is interesting. Most gorgets made by Native Americans came from the shell's outer whorl (Figure 3). However, this gorget appears to have been made from the lower portion of a *Busycon* shell, which is usually the part that was used to make celts (Figure 4).

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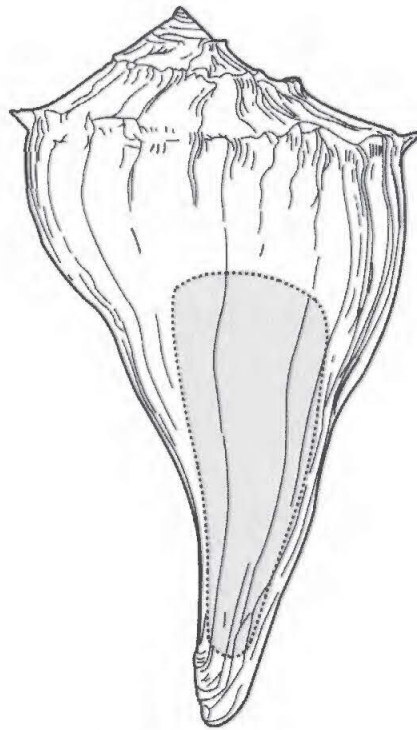


Figure 4. Location of the portion of a *Busycon* shell used in making shell celts (modified from Holmes 1883:Plate 29).

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