

Abstracts

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“Marine Shell Ornaments from the Plains”

Introduction to the Symposium

Kerry Lippincott

This introduction is intended to serve as a prelude to the symposium as published here, a retrospect of my involvement, and a review of its inception and purpose.

I first became interested in exotic/marine shell ornaments in 1992, when I saw a couple of large shell mask gorgets excavated from a cave in northern Montana (contrary to the opinion of those who may think that my interest began because Raquel Welch was a member of the Shell People in the 1966 film classic, *One Million Years B.C.*)

The Marine Shell Artifacts of Kansas

Donald J. Blakeslee

This paper attempts to summarize all of the reported cases of marine shell found in archeological contexts in Kansas. It consists of two parts: a chronological summary and a discussion. The former details the evidence in a way that should allow comparisons with the remains found in other states. The latter discusses the temporal patterns that can be discerned and the meanings that the shell objects may have had within the various prehistoric cultures. Essentially, there appear to be two patterns. One that lasted from perhaps the Late Archaic into the Middle Ceramic used a variety of kinds of marine shell objects, along with some fossil shell carved into similar forms, almost entirely for mortuary purposes. The second pattern, which is seen first in the Wilmore complex but which lasted to the historic period, consists of the use of shell ornaments derived exclusively from the Southwest in nonmortuary contexts.

A Preliminary Survey of Marine Shell Artifacts from Prehistoric Archeological Sites in Nebraska

Gayle F. Carlson

Recent research has identified 33 prehistoric archeological sites in Nebraska that have produced marine shell artifacts. These sites range in age from 200 B.C. or earlier to about A.D. 1500, representing Late Archaic, Woodland, Central Plains Tradition, and Oneota cultural groups as well as two culturally unidentified examples. Marine shell specimens have been identified as originating from predominantly Gulf Coast and East Coast sources, with a small number, representing nearly all identified cultural groups, being derived from West Coast sources as well. The distribution of marine-shell-producing sites through time is evaluated and indicates a quite

heavy concentration of such evidence in the vicinity of the Republican River Valley in south-central Nebraska. The significance of this distribution with regard to possible trade networks is explored as well as the possible significance of marine shell itself to Nebraska's prehistoric inhabitants. Finally, some suggestions regarding future research directions are offered.

Mussels, Mussel Shell Tools, and Mussel and Marine Shell Ornaments from Missouri River Trench Sites in South Dakota

Kerry Lippincott

This review of the literature is based on sites and components cataloged in Lehmer's *Introduction to Middle Missouri Archeology* (1971) and sites reported later. A compilation was made of sites in South Dakota's Missouri River trench with reports of local freshwater mussels, mussel shell artifacts, and exotic/marine shell ornaments. The Archaic component at Medicine Crow produced a pendant made from a local shell. Beads and pendants from Gulf and/or Atlantic Coast marine shell date to the Woodland Period. Conch or whelk columella beads, pendants, and gorgets are most numerous from Initial Middle Missouri variant sites, followed by those from Post-Contact Coalescent sites. Presence/absence, types, and numbers of artifacts from other variants is spotty and rather unpredictable. The history and description of a previously unpublished *Busycon* shell mask gorget are reported.

Faces of Shell: Two Marine Shell Mask Gorgets from South Dakota

Michael Fosha

Two marine shell mask gorgets have recently been identified in South Dakota. Locational data suggest that these two items may have been buried on landforms of cultural significance. One mask, from the eastern lakes region of the state, shares strong similarities to masks located in the glacial lake region of North Dakota. Artifacts identified with the mask indicate an Oneota occupation. A second mask was found in western South Dakota and shares stronger similarities to masks recently recovered in Montana. Both of these mask are suggested as Late Prehistoric in nature, and according to local Lakota beliefs these items may have been used in curing ceremonies.

Whorls and Valves: Marine Shell Artifacts from North Dakota

Paul R. Picha and Fern E. Swenson

Marine shell artifacts recovered from a number of sites in North Dakota comprise an important body of evidence corroborating long-distance exchange relations and regional interaction networks in Northern Plains prehistory. Assemblages of Plains Woodland and Plains Village age contain nonlocal marine shell items derived from Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific sources. Bead and pendant forms predominate in the archeological samples examined; whelk shell masks are also

represented. Refinement of exchange models involving marine shell for the Northern Great Plains will result from reconsideration of the means, modes, and meanings of these exchange relations.

Marine Shell Mask Gorgets in Montana

Stanley Jaynes

Two marine shell "mask" gorgets were recovered from a cave in Montana during the fall of 1992. They are the only known specimens from Montana but are quite similar to other gorgets that have been found further to the east. An AMS date of 520 B.P. ± 70 was obtained from one of the gorgets. It is suggested that they were left as spirit offerings.

Shell from the Plains: A Southeastern Perspective

Marvin T. Smith

Since my wife and I first began looking at shell mask gorgets several years ago, many new finds and several old ones have been brought to our attention (Smith and Smith 1989). Many of these have come from the Plains area, so I was very happy when Kerry Lippincott invited me to comment on the papers presented in this volume. I was vaguely aware of shell masks on the Plains through the publications of Howard (1953, 1956), but had no idea that they were so plentiful. The papers presented in this volume greatly expand the range of this artifact type beyond those shown on distribution maps in two recent studies (Brain and Phillips 1996; Smith and Smith 1989).

Because my interest has focused on marine shell gorgets, I will largely restrict my comments to that artifact type. Nonetheless, I cannot help but be captivated by the range of shell artifact types present on the eastern Plains/Missouri River area. The mixture of east and west coast shell is intriguing, but not surprising considering the central locale of the study area. Regardless of its source, marine shell had a long way to travel to be utilized on the Plains.