

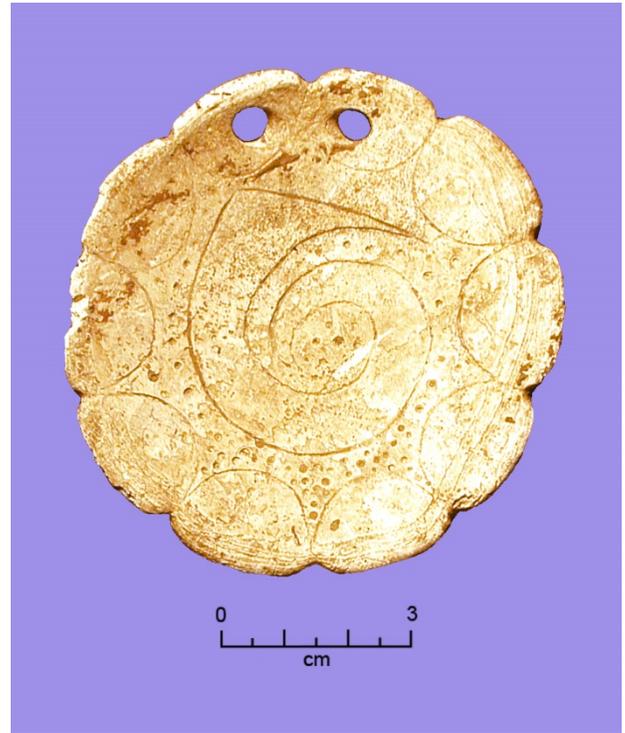
## MANN SITE, “TRISKELE” SHELL GORGET in the Charles R. Lacer, Jr., Collection

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The one known example of a “triskele” shell gorget found in Indiana was collected in 1964 by Mr. Charles R. Lacer, Jr., in Posey County, Indiana, during the rescue excavation of a heavily disturbed part of the small, late prehistoric Caborn-Welborn village and cemetery at the Mann site. The Mann site (12PO2) is Indiana’s largest and most complex prehistoric Native American site. The gorget itself was made from marine shell, a type of large conch, or whelk, that once was abundant on the Gulf Coast of Florida.

In common usage, a gorget is an item such as a piece of jewelry that is worn around the throat or neck. This term derives from the Medieval style of European women’s neck and head coverings which wrapped around the throat (or gorge), but later referred to a piece of military metal armor worn to protect the throat. Stylized gorgets evolved into jewelry for men. Silver gorgets were popular historic trade items for Native Americans.<sup>2</sup>



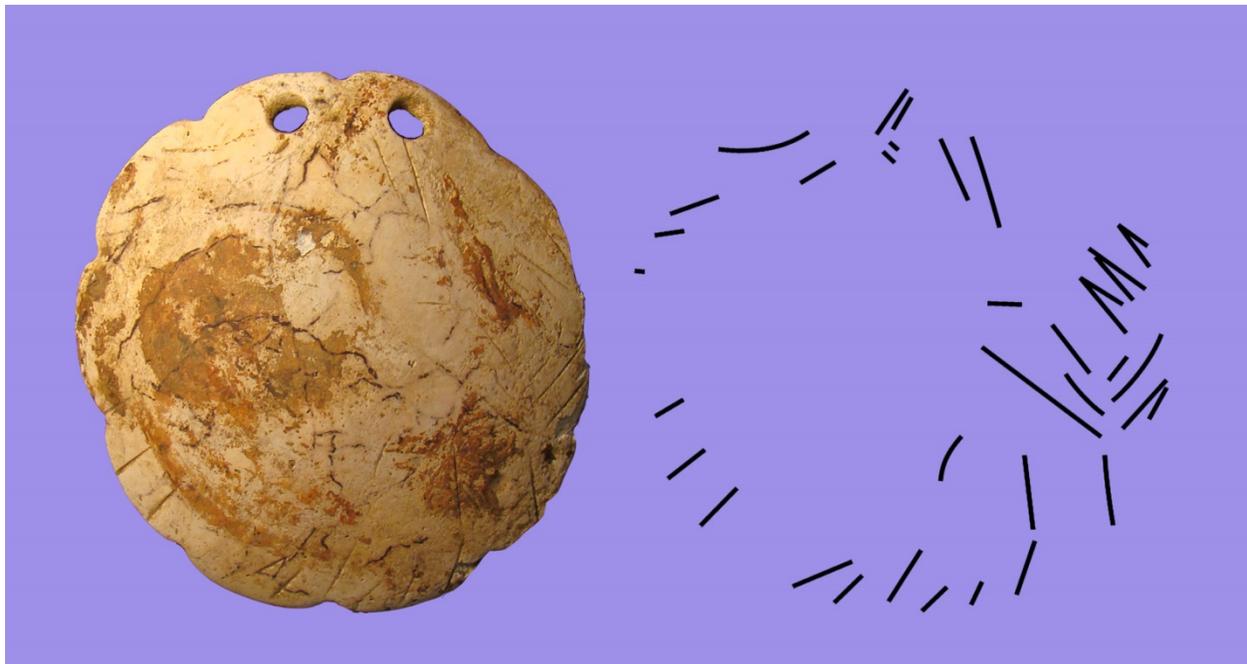
The Caborn-Welborn component at Mann occupied only a small portion of the vast area that is archaeologically famous for its earthworks, habitation features and domestic artifacts, and distant trade materials and manufactured goods of the Hopewell period. Both earlier and later occupations occurred on the same piece of real estate.<sup>1</sup> Unrelated to the earlier Hopewell component, the Caborn-Welborn component is the latest. It has two radiocarbon dates (calibrated to A.D. 1440-1520, 1590-1620 and 1440-1520, 1570-1630).<sup>3</sup> Small-scale excavations by James H. Kellar in 1977 revealed a wall trench house and pit features with Caborn-Welborn pottery, as well as abundant earlier artifacts and features.<sup>4</sup>

The design on the Mann site triskele gorget can be classified as a variable example of the triskele style, whose primary center of manufacture was in the area around Nashville, Tennessee during the Late Mississippian period, dating after about A.D. 1400 and lasting several centuries.<sup>5</sup> Classic triskele gorgets<sup>6</sup> have a central three-part spiral or volute, hence “triskele.” In comparison, the Mann site specimen has only two parts that comprise a simple interlocking scroll – a “biskele” if there were such a term. The classic triskele form also has a scalloped border around a serpent-like band of intermittent circles laced at intervals on a dotted background between the border and the central

spirals. In contrast, the Mann site gorget uses the dotted background as a fill for one of the spirals; it does not incorporate circles, but does have a scalloped border. Outside the Nashville area, triskele style gorgets are rare but widely distributed, from North Dakota and Missouri to Virginia and central Georgia. The Mann site gorget represents one of the outliers in the distribution, and like some other outliers lacks the classic form. The outliers might be copies of the Nashville-region gorgets made by artists not entirely familiar with all the components of the classic design. Other styles of marine shell gorgets of the Caborn-Welborn culture (A.D. 1400-1650) of southwest Indiana and adjacent states are the spider (Hovey Lake site) and the mask (Murphy site).<sup>7</sup>

The discovery of the Mann site “triskele” gorget, unlike most gorgets, was documented. It was found upside down on the chest of a young child, about 3 ½ years of age, whose remain had been placed in a rowed cemetery near other children. On each side of the gorget were a conch columella shell bead (1.5 x 0.9 cm) and a large olivella bead (3.8 x 2.0 cm)<sup>8</sup>, suggesting a necklace.

The gorget itself measures 8.8 by 8.1 cm. The two holes at the top of the gorget show wear that is consistent with the gorget being attached to a cord or leather thong and worn suspended, probably as a necklace around the neck of the child. The back side of the gorget has a series of truncated



engraved lines that extend to the edge of the gorget and were part of a larger design, the missing portions of which appear to have been worn away or were poorly preserved once placed in the ground. The engraved lines suggest no specific figures but provide a hint that the gorget was manufactured from an engraved shell cup, like one of the styles found at Spiro Mounds, Cahokia, Moundville, Etowah, and other Mississippian mound centers. Perhaps the cup was broken in manufacture and then recycled into the gorget, but it could have been broken in use at a location far from the cup’s manufacture and also far from the production center of the triskele style. While no

marine shell cups are known for the Caborn-Welborn culture, there are ceramic copies of shell cups, as there are in other Mississippian cultures.

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