

TRADE GOODS WITH A DALLAS PHASE BURIAL SALVAGE ARCHAEOLOGY AT 40MR12

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ABSTRACT

Glass trade beads have been recovered in association with a Dallas phase burial at Great Tellico (40MR12). This site, located in eastern Tennessee, has both a prehistoric Dallas phase and a historic Overhill Cherokee component. The occurrence of glass trade beads, together with typical Dallas burial furniture, suggests the persistence of the Dallas culture into protohistoric times, well after the DeSoto entrada of the early 1540's.

INTRODUCTION

40MR12, located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, was an important Dallas phase Mississippian townsite which was occupied well into the historic period. It was an important Overhill Cherokee town during the early part of the eighteenth century, and was often visited by traders from the British colonies in Virginia and Carolina.

Unfortunately, the shallow deposits at the site have been extensively damaged by intensive farming. At times, as many as three crops have been planted on it in a single growing season. During each plowing, numerous burials, housefloors, and other shallow features are destroyed. Although the site was recently nominated to the National Register, the damage continues unabated.

In order to recover some information about the site's prehistory, before it is completely destroyed, limited salvage excavations were undertaken by the Tennessee Archaeological Society. Members of the Anderson County, Blount County, and Loudon County Chapters participated in these investigations. All fieldwork was conducted during the winter months, in order to avoid interfering with normal farming activities.

During the excavations, a number of burials were discovered. One of these was accompanied by a variety of diagnostic Dallas grave goods, as well as a number of glass trade beads of European manufacture. This protohistoric burial is of unusual significance and is the subject of this paper.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BURIAL

This interesting burial, an adult male between 25 and 30 years of age (at time of death), was discovered in a pit 76 centimeters beneath the present ground

surface. The pit was oval in shape, being about 1.5 meters long and 1 meter wide. The pit was oriented almost perfectly East and West, with the body's head at the Eastern end. The body lay on its back in a partially flexed position. The grave fill contained only Dallas potsherds, suggesting interment occurred before Cherokee ceramics appeared at the site (See Egloff 1967: 19, 72-75, Table 2, for a description of Overhill and Qualla series ceramics from the surface of Great Tellico).

A sketch of the burial and accompanying grave goods is included as Figure 1. Near the top of the skull was located a bracket or spike-type hair pin, 75 millimeters long, made of shell (Fig. 2a). At each side of the skull, in close proximity to the ears, were found two shell knobbed ear pins, both made from conch columellae (Fig. 2b). These ear pins are diagnostic horizon markers for the Dallas culture. Lewis and Kneberg (1946: 130) described similar knobbed ear pins, found in excavations at Hiwassee Island, as follows:

"Knobbed shell ear pin made from conch columellae are as characteristic of the Dallas culture as are the shell gorgets."

At the neck and upper chest region were found 58 glass trade beads, possibly worn as a necklace. These small to medium-sized beads were all of opaque blue glass, all made by the cane-drawn technique (Fig. 2c).

Along the left upperarm and chest was found a spatulated greenstone celt, 16 centimeters long and 1.3 centimeters thick (Fig. 3a). Lewis and Kneberg (1946: 120) cite the occurrence of spatulate-shaped celts with Dallas burials at Hiwassee Island:

"We have included in this description of celts the perforated spatulated form sometimes called a spud, illustrated in plate 72A. This example, made of diorite, was found with a Dallas burial in the substructure mound unit 37."

Between the knees and chest region, at the skeleton's

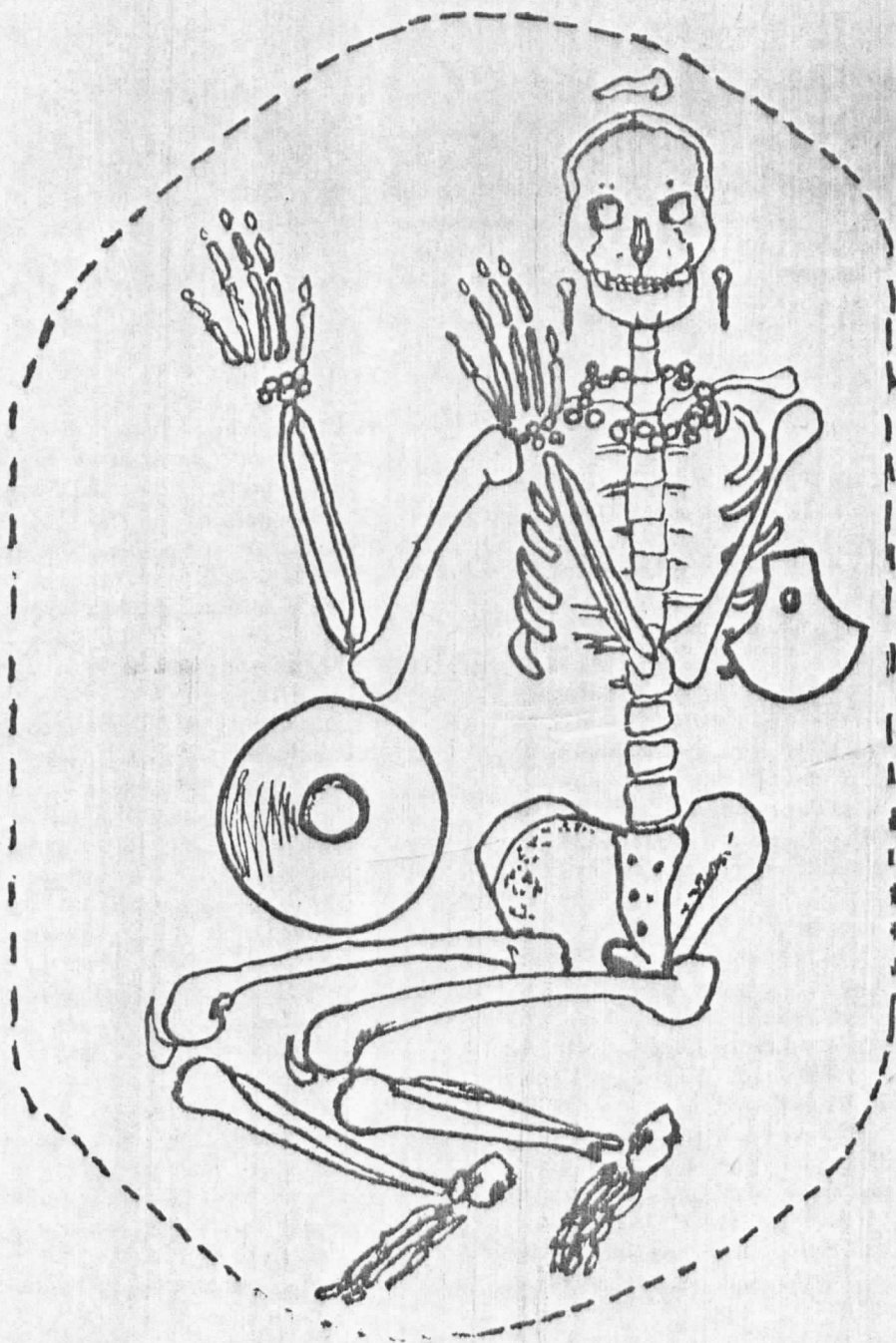


Figure 1. Sketch of protohistoric Dallas culture burial found at 40MR12, showing location of grave goods within the burial pit. The discovery of this burial is particularly significant because of the association of European-made glass trade beads with artifacts characteristic of the Dallas culture.

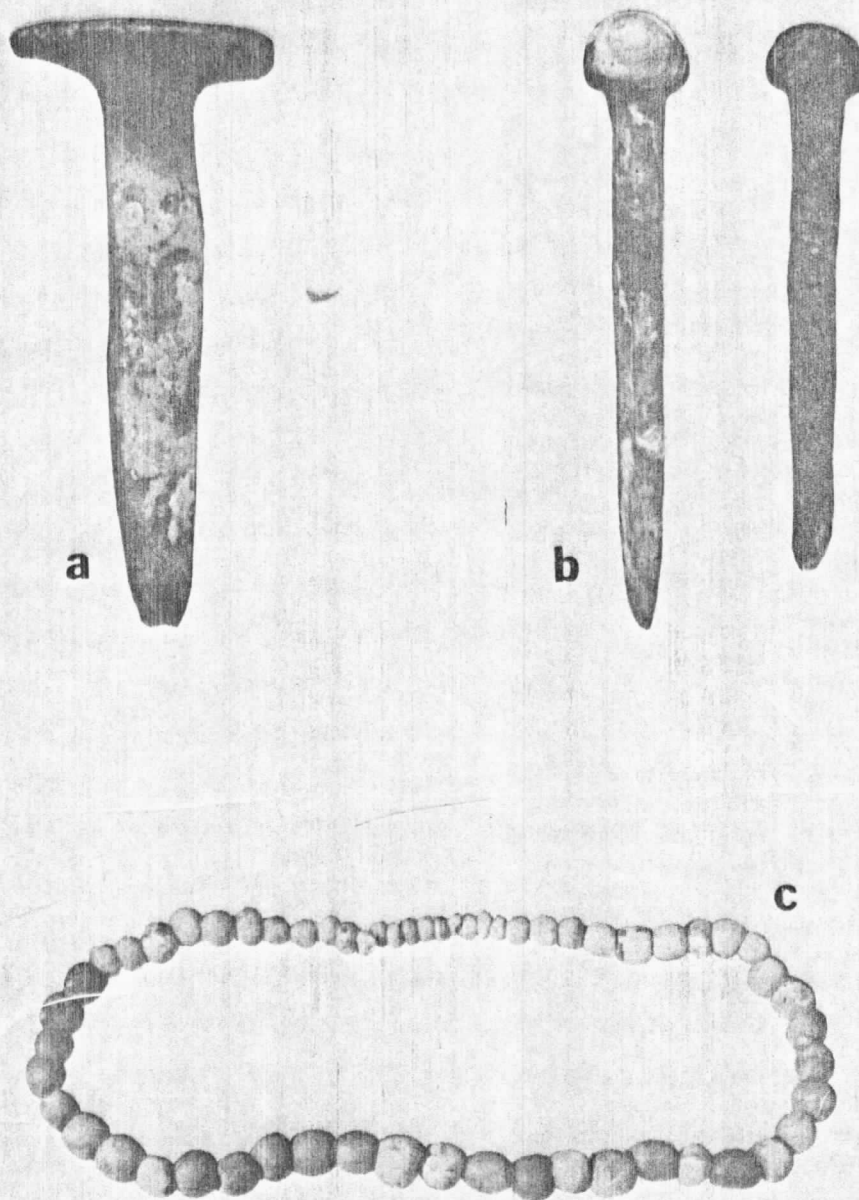


Figure 2. Grave goods from protohistoric Dallas burial at 40MR12: [a] conch shell hair pin; [b] knobbed ear pins, both made from conch columellae; [c] European-made glass trade beads, opaque blue in color.

right side, was found an undecorated shell-tempered Dallas water bottle (Fig. 3b).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BURIAL: PRESISTENCE OF THE DALLAS CULTURE INTO PROTOHISTORIC TIMES?

With the exception of the glass trade beads, all of the described grave goods are typically found in Dallas phase burials. Lewis and Kneberg (1946:132) have noted the early occurrence of trade goods in Eastern Tennessee:

"Trade good may have found their way into Eastern Tennessee at a very early date. In 1673 when Needham and Arthur arrived at the town of the Tomahitans some ten days travel west of the Appalachians, they discovered that the Indians living in the Eastern Tennessee Valley already had guns and brass kettles which they had obtained in trade from the Spaniards. There is little question that the Indians in this area did receive many items of British Colonial trade through Indian middlemen in direct contact with the traders of Carlina and Virginia."

More specifically, Lewis and Kneberg (1946:133) have identified burials containing historic trade goods as belonging to the Dallas component at Hiwassee Island:

"We cannot assume, however, that the Dallas community ceased to exist prior to trade contacts. There were seven natural flesh burials, one of which was in the substructure mound, that were accompanied by trade goods. We have no evidence to indicate that these were other than Dallas burials. We conclude, therefore, that the Dallas community persisted until the early 18th century."

Lewis and Kneberg did not mention whether any artifacts of aboriginal manufacture accompanied these seven Hiwassee Island burials. Their identification of these burials as belonging to the Dallas phase is based on context only.

The discovery of the 40MR12 burial is important because it demonstrates conclusively that some late Dallas burials contain trade goods. It also supports Lewis and Kneberg's belief in the persistence of the Dallas culture, at least into protohistoric times. Exactly how late Dallas society continued to exist is uncertain. Certainly, the recovery of the 40MR12 burial suggests that Dallas groups were "alive and well" until sometime after the DeSoto entrada of 1540-1541, and probably into the early 1600's. Hopefully, the ongoing Tellico Archaeological Project in the nearby Little Tennessee River Valley may soon clarify this situation, as well as answer questions concerning the nature of the Dallas-to-Cherokee transition.

REMARKS

The primary purpose of this paper was to (1)

document this interesting discovery, and (2) discuss its significance with regard to the persistence of Dallas culture into protohistoric times. There is, however, another aspect of this find that is worthy of consideration. Let us examine the implications of this discovery with regards trade in protohistoric eastern Tennessee.

European trade goods were reaching 40MR12 on an early time level. Jolly and Cornett (1976) have described the occurrence of chevron-type glass grade beads found on the surface of 40MR12. These distinctive beads are time markers for 16th and 17th century Indian sites along the Atlantic seaboard and seldom occur inland, west of the Appalachians. Jolly and Cornett (1976:37) have advanced several possible explanations for the presence of these chevron beads at 40MR12, including the possibility that these beads were obtained by Dallas peoples inhabiting Great Tellico before the advent of Cherokee society.

The discovery of glass trade beads with the 40MR12 burial, described herein, raises perplexing questions about the origins of those beads. This burial almost certainly dates to the late 1500's or early 1600's, a protohistoric period in eastern Tennessee. During this time interval, Great Tellico was remotely located deep in the interior, too far from the nearest colonial settlements to benefit from direct trading relationships with the whites. It is likely, therefore, that any trade goods found in Dallas context must have come through Indian middlemen, middlemen belonging to groups located between the Dallas and the colonists along the coast. Direct contact with the whites, while a possible explanation for the presence of trade goods on a Dallas time level, was probably so rare as to be virtually unrecognizable in the archaeological record.

Inter-Indian trade, then, is the most probable explanation for the origin of the glass trade beads found with the protohistoric Dallas burial at 40MR12. Trade routes covered great distances during Dallas times. Sabol (1977) and others have amply documented Dallas trade in shell, copper, and other exotic raw materials alien to eastern Tennessee. The Dallas inhabitants of 40MR12 participated in this Mississippian trade net, as demonstrated by the recovery of a catlinite disk pipe with a late prehistoric (or protohistoric) Dallas burial at 40MR12 (Rice 1974). Because trade was important in late prehistoric times, it is reasonable to expect that European trade goods, once they became available, would soon move deep into the interior Southeast. Such "exotic" trade materials would be much sought after by groups like the Dallas inhabitants of Great Tellico, who seldom if ever had any direct contact with white traders or explorers.

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