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**ENGRAVED HUMAN
CRANIAL BONE
RATTLES & GORGET
OHIO & TENNESSEE
ADENA & HOPEWELL CULTURES**

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**ENGRAVED BONE RATTLES
CUT FROM HUMAN CRANIUM
PINSON MOUNDS SITE
MADISON COUNTY, TENNESSEE**



ABSTRACT

CRANIAL BONE RATTLES & GORGET

**ADENA AND HOPEWELL CULTURES
WOODLAND PERIOD
OHIO AND TENNESSEE**

This article illustrates and describes three examples of artifacts made from circular bone sections cut from the cranial area of human skulls. The use of human bone as a raw material began in eastern North America during the Archaic period. The majority of these items, such as bone awls, were used more for utilitarian purposes. The later Woodland period began to produce a greater number of more complex and standardized shamanistic types of tools. The majority of these items have been found in association with burials. The two rattles and one gorget described in this article were made sometime between 800 B.C. and A.D. 265 during the Woodland period.

"For the first time (Hopewell, AD 1-400) in eastern North America human bone becomes a widespread craft medium." ---2007, Mark F. Seeman, "Predatory War And Hopewell Trophies," The Taking and Displaying Of human Body Parts As Trophies By Amerindians, p. 173.

"During this same period (Hopewell) human bone becomes an important material for the

production of a variety of standardized material forms. Some of these appear to be shamanic or transformative in character (such as, flutes, sucking tubes, rattles, whistles & gorgets) while others do not."---2007, Mark F. Seeman, "Predatory War And Hopewell Trophies," The Taking and Displaying Of human Body Parts As Trophies By Amerindians, p. 173.

"Most remarkable of all the mound art are the intricate conventionalized engravings on human bone found in the Hopewell and Turner (mound) groups by Moorehead and Putnam."---1930, Henry Clyde Shetrone, "The Mound-Builders" p. 131.

"Two engraved rattles fashioned from human parietals were worn at the knees (from burial in mound 6, Pinson Mounds) as were several strings of ovoid shell beads."---1986, Robert C. Mainfort, Jr., "Pinson Mounds, A Middle Woodland Ceremonial Center," p. 70.

"Since both man and beasts of various kinds have an important place in aboriginal mythology, it is to be expected that in numerous instances their bones had a special sacred significance and use---."---1912, Frederick Webb Hodge, "Handbook Of North American Indians North Of Mexico, Part 1," p.159.



ENGRAVED HUMAN CRANIAL BONE RATTLES & GORGET

ADENA AND HOPEWELL CULTURES WOODLAND PERIOD

The earliest evidence of human bone used as a raw material in North America dates to the Archaic period. Several late Archaic sites have produced evidence of trophy head taking, scalping and artifacts made from human teeth and bone. Most of the human bone artifacts from this period (60%) have been recovered from non-grave features. The majority of these items are in the form of awls made from long bones. Artifacts found in burials from this period also include drilled and notched tooth necklaces and bone gorgets drilled for suspension.



THESE ILLUSTRATED ENGRAVED RATTLES ARE CASTS MOLDED FROM THE ORIGINAL BONE RATTLES
ORIGINAL RATTLES ARE IN THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION COLLECTION

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ENGRAVED CRANIAL BONE RATTLES

PINSON MOUNDS SITE
MADISON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
MIDDLE WOODLAND PERIOD

These engraved human bone rattles were discovered during the excavation of Twin Mounds on the Pinson Mounds site. Each one was found at the knees of an adult

male who was approximately 45 years old. Each of these rattles were found in pairs of circular discs that were cut from a human cranium. Only these two discs were engraved. Luckily, the plain halves were the least preserved of the four pieces. Each pair of rattles are drilled at the edges where they were tied together with thongs. Small yellow quartzite river pebbles were used to create the sound. Several strings of ovoid shell beads were also found that may have been attached to the rattles. These rattles measure approximately $3 \frac{15}{16}$ inches (10 cm) in diameter.

Pinson Mounds is a mortuary complex covering approximately 400 acres and located in Madison County, Tennessee. It's the largest Middle Woodland period site in the southeast, dating to approximately 200 B.C. to A.D. 400.

The Woodland period produced far more human bone artifacts than the previous Archaic period. Human bone began to be used as a raw material over a wide area in the eastern United States. Hopewell craftsmen were producing many standardized forms of artifacts, such as flutes, sucking tubes, rattles, whistles and gorgets. Many of these types of artifacts have been discovered in burial mounds. Hopewell sites have produced the most prolific numbers of skillfully crafted artifacts made from human bones.



ENGRAVED CRANIAL BONE RATTLE

PINSON MOUNDS SITE
MADISON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
MIDDLE WOODLAND PERIOD

Both of the Pinson Mounds rattles are engraved with highly stylized motifs that are not easy to interpret. The main image subjects are highlighted by a background of parallel lines that appear to represent a woven design, like a basket. This rattle has a central design feature that seems to indicate an eye or head and may represent one of the very abstract images of a bird that appears on some Hopewell pots. Seeman writes that, "Hopewell iconography is distinctive, recognizable, and carries a shamanic caste. Dominant themes include those of human and animal connection, ancestors, and world renewal." (Seeman 2007: 179)

Two rare and important Hopewell culture engraved human bone rattles were discovered during the excavation of Twin Mounds on the Pinson Mounds site. Both were found at the

knees of an adult male who was approximately 45 years old. Pinson Mounds is a mortuary complex covering approximately 400 acres and located in Madison County, Tennessee. It's the largest Middle Woodland period site in the southeast, dating to approximately 200 B.C. to A.D. 400.



ENGRAVED CRANIAL BONE RATTLE

PINSON MOUNDS SITE
MADISON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
MIDDLE WOODLAND PERIOD

The design of this Pinson Mounds rattle is engraved with a highly stylized motif. The main image is highlighted with a background of parallel lines that appear to represent a woven design, like a basket. One of the main design features of this rattle is a series of three diamonds that have diamonds within diamonds and a plus sign in the center that may indicate the four directions.

Both of the Pinson Mounds rattles are engraved with highly stylized motifs that are not easy to interpret. The main image subjects are highlighted by a background of parallel lines that appear to represent a woven design, like a basket. One of the rattles has a central design feature that seems to indicate an eye or head and may represent one of the very abstract images of a bird that appears on some Hopewell pots. One of the main design features on the other rattle is a series of three diamonds that have diamonds within diamonds and a plus sign in the center that may indicate the four directions. Seeman writes that, "Hopewell iconography is distinctive, recognizable, and carries a shamanic caste. Dominant themes include those of human and animal connection, ancestors, and world renewal." (Seeman 2007: 179) Another pair of drilled bone discs, with a similar style of engraving were found in the "central alter" of Turner Mound 3 in Hamilton County, Ohio.



ILLUSTRATED RATTLE IS A CAST MOLDED FROM THE ORIGINAL BONE RATTLE
ORIGINAL RATTLE IS IN THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION COLLECTION

UNDERSIDE OF ENGRAVED CRANIAL BONE RATTLE

PINSON MOUNDS SITE
MADISON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
MIDDLE WOODLAND PERIOD

This edge view shows the curved and concave shape of the disc that is necessary for a rattle.

Each of the Pinson Mounds rattles were found in pairs of circular discs that were cut from a human cranium. Only two of the discs were engraved. Luckily, the plain halves were the least preserved of the four pieces. Each pair of rattles were tied together with thongs and small yellow quartzite river pebbles were used to create the sound. Several strings of

ovoid shell beads were also found that may have been attached to the rattles.



ILLUSTRATED ENGRAVED RATTLES ARE CASTS MOLDED FROM THE ORIGINAL BONE RATTLES
ORIGINAL RATTLES ARE IN THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION COLLECTION

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UNDERSIDE OF ENGRAVED CRANIAL BONE RATTLES

PINSON MOUNDS SITE
MADISON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
MIDDLE WOODLAND PERIOD

This picture shows the underside of both engraved rattles. The impression of the interior of the cranium can clearly be seen.

Artifacts made from human cranium have been found on late Archaic sites in the form of cups, bowls and gorgets. Gorgets made from discs cut from human skulls have also been found on Woodland sites. The example shown in this article was excavated from an Adena culture infant burial in Florence Mound located in Pickaway County, Ohio. It's described as a "cranial ornament" and a "bone gorget decorated with bird of prey design." Most gorgets were made of shell. They were drilled and hung around the neck.



PHOTO BY DENNIS VESPER---FROM OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION
IMAGE IS COMPUTER ENHANCED

ENGRAVED CRANIAL BONE GORGET

FLORENCE MOUND
PICKAWAY COUNTY, OHIO
ADENA CULTURE

This bone gorget was made from a disc cut from the cranium of a human skull. It was excavated from the Florence Mound in Jackston Township in Pickaway County, Ohio. It was found with an infant burial and is described as a "bone gorget decorated with bird of prey design." The image is a stylized design of a raptorial bird. The surface has a textured effect like hammered copper. The head of the bird is the main central feature with a wing on the right side. A tail is on the left side and the talon is forward. Two holes are drilled on opposite sides of the circumference. The color is brownish yellow, very pale brown, very dark brown and dark gray in color.

The use of human bone is universal. People have been using human bones to make both utilitarian and ritual items for thousands of years. On Easter Island many fishhooks were made from human bone. Human bones have been used to make items that display evidence of a victorious defeat of an enemy in the form of war trophies and they have been used to help retain the memory of ancestors. The subject of human bones today is dramatic and in some ways perplexing. Ancient burials hold much of the most important history of a culture, especially in the form of artifact iconography and bone pathology. But sadly, these organic materials, unlike stone, will one day be gone and with them a part of what allows an ancient culture to live and so there in lies the dilemma.

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