

Chevron-Type Glass Trade Beads from the Historic Overhill Cherokee Town of Great Tellico (40MR12)

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ABSTRACT

Chevron-type glass trade beads, a time-marker for 17th Century historic Indian sites along the Atlantic seaboard, have been found inland, beyond the Appalachian Mountains at the historic Cherokee site of Great Tellico. Great Tellico is one of a complex of contemporaneous "Overhill" townsites located primarily in the Little Tennessee watershed of eastern Tennessee, and known to have been occupied during the 18th Century. Chevron beads, together with other distinctive 17th Century bead types, are rare at Tellico and absent from these nearby historic sites. This general absence of earlier bead types suggests that Cherokee intrusion into this region may not have occurred until relatively late in the 17th Century.

INTRODUCTION

Surface collections from Great Tellico (40MR12), an important Overhill Cherokee village site in eastern Tennessee, contain a variety of European-made glass trade beads. Most of these beads date to the first half of the 18th Century when Tellico and other nearby historic Overhill Cherokee villages are known to have been intensively occupied.

Recently, a small number of chevron-type beads have been recovered from the surface at Great Tellico (Figs. 1 & 2). The occurrence of these distinctive beads on an historic Overhill Cherokee site is of particular interest. Such beads are generally found on 16th and 17th Century sites. Their absence on Overhill Cherokee village sites, known to have been occupied during most of the 18th Century, may indicate that those villages *were not there* much before A.D. 1700. An alternative explanation would argue that, prior to A.D. 1700, few trade goods were reaching the then-isolated Overhill villages. Before that time, the Overhill villages were remotely located deep in the interior, too far from the nearest colonial settlements to benefit from direct trading relationships.

Because these specialized chevron-type beads are one of the earliest types of trade goods recovered in eastern Tennessee, their occurrence is significant. They provide evidence for investigators interested in determining when the Overhill Cherokee entered eastern Tennessee. Also,

such distributional information is useful to scholars studying the Indian trade during the early colonial period. For these reasons, the authors have decided to document the occurrence of these unique chevron-type beads in eastern Tennessee.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Exactly when the Overhill Cherokee settled in eastern Tennessee is not well understood. It is generally believed that the Overhill Cherokee are late arrivals who displaced prehistoric Dallas phase Mississippian groups, the ancestors of the historic Creek. This belief is based on a discontinuity in material culture observable in archaeological assemblages, as well as linguistic differences and ethnohistorical accounts.

The first account we have of persons entering eastern Tennessee and coming into contact with the Overhill Cherokee dates to 1673. Then, James Needham and Gabriel Arthur led a small group across the mountains from Virginia in an effort to establish trade relationships with the Overhill Cherokee (Williams 1928). While in the Overhill Cherokee country, they observed the Cherokees in possession of brass kettles and about sixty Spanish muskets (Rothrock 1929: 5). The Cherokee, therefore, apparently had some intercourse with the Spanish in Florida during the 17th Century, *before* trade with the English colonists along the Atlantic Coast became important.

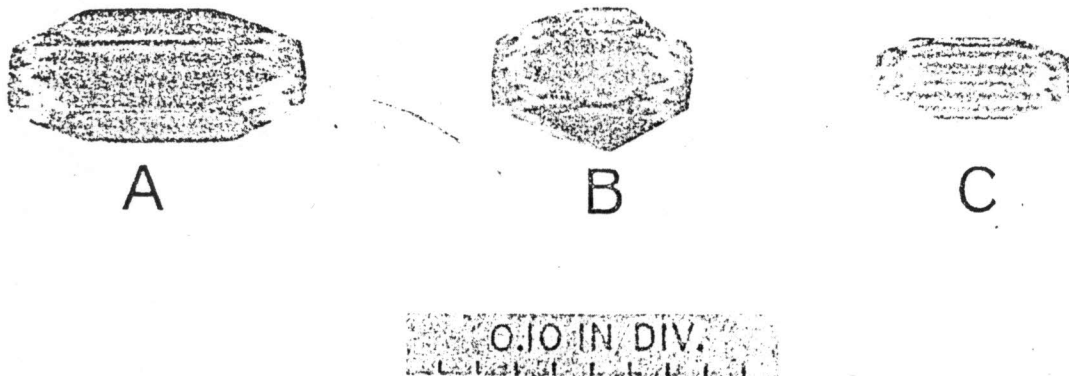


Figure 1. Chevron type beads from Great Tellico (40Mr12). A and B are typical hexagonal with translucent green core followed by layers of opaque white, brick red, opaque white, and finally, translucent blue or cobalt. C is a rare type with the final outer coating of green.

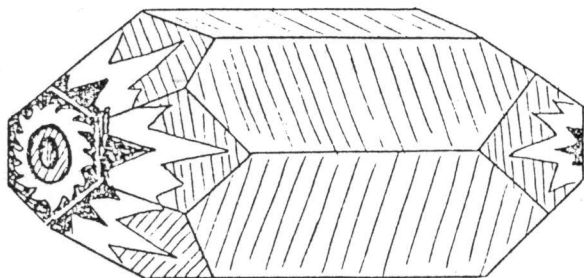


Figure 2. Line drawing of a chevron-type trade bead from the 18th Century historic Overhill Cherokee Townsite of Great Tellico (40Mr12). These European-made cut-glass beads are not round, but are multi-faceted, with a hexagonal cross section. Faceted chevron-type beads are very unusual. The Tallapoosa Valley of east-central Alabama is the only other location from which these beads have been reported.

Also, it is certain that the 17th Century Cherokee did receive some items of English colonial trade through Indian middlemen belonging to other tribes located between the Cherokee and the colonists to the east. These Indian opportunists, in direct contact with white traders of Carolina and Virginia, were quick to take advantage of their proximity to the colonial settlements. Until the colonial traders established direct trading relationships with the Cherokee late in the 1600's, these Indian middlemen made large profits by trans-

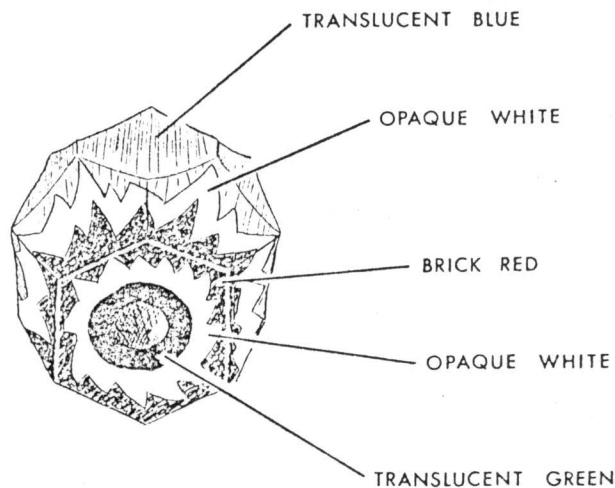


Figure 3. End-view of a multi-faceted, chevron-type trade bead from the historic Overhill Cherokee townsite of Great Tellico. Notice how the bead is constructed from multiple layers of differently colored glass. These distinctive beads were made from a hollow cane which was hexagonal in cross section. Facets were hand-cut or ground on each end of the bead, leaving central facets around the middle of the bead. When the ends of these beads were ground the colored layers of glass produced a star or chevron-like pattern; hence the name "chevron" beads.

ferring European-made goods to the more distant Cherokee.

Little is known about this early pre-English trade with the Cherokee. We do not know when

it started, or how extensive it may have been. Historical sources shed little light on the period before 1690, and only a limited amount of archaeological research had been done prior to recent years. Hopefully, the answers to some of our questions may soon be forthcoming, once the vast quantity of data that has accumulated during the ongoing Tellico Archaeological Project has been analyzed and reported.

By the first half of the 18th Century, the Overhill Cherokee were firmly entrenched in the Little Tennessee River Valley and along its tributaries. During this time period, Great Tellico and the other nearby Overhill villages had large populations. The substantial military power of the Overhill Cherokee nation, together with the Appalachian Mountain barrier, were sufficient to temporarily check colonial expansion across the mountains into eastern Tennessee. As a result, a static situation existed for almost 75 years in which Great Tellico and other villages were relatively stable in location. Consequently, a ready market existed for the sustained introduction of quantities of European-made trade goods, a situation that the Carolinians "over the hills" were quick to exploit. As a result, large quantities of trade items dating to the first half of the 1700's occur archaeologically on the Overhill sites.

Which European nation supplied the chevron-type beads to Tellico is unknown. It is certain, however, that the several European nations involved in the North American trade were securing beads from the same European source or sources. Until the first half of the 19th Century, the bulk of beads brought into the New World were manufactured in Venice (although a secondary source was operating in 17th Century Amsterdam, according to Van der Sleen, 1967: 48, 109). Thus beads obtained by the Spanish, French, and English for trade in the New World came from the same sources, and hence were the same kind of beads during any given time period. There is, therefore, no technique for determining whether the Tellico chevrons were introduced by the English, French, Spanish, or whomever.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TELLICO CHEVRON-TYPE BEADS

The chevron beads from Great Tellico are unlike most of those found in what is now the

eastern United States. Most chevron beads are round in cross section; those from Great Tellico have hexagonal cross sections (Figs. 2 & 3). The Tellico beads were made from hexagonal glass tubes by cutting or grinding facets on each end of the bead, leaving the original shape of the tube in the middle. This gives the finished bead a multi-faceted appearance, much like that obtained with the translucent cut-glass beads which were popular early in the 1800's (Kidd and Kidd's types If1-If5, IIIf1-IIIf5, Color Plates 1 and 3; also Good's types 10-13, 16-22, Color Plate 3). The Tellico chevrons should not be confused with these multi-faceted cut glass forms, which, although made similarly, are much later in time and quite different in appearance. The Tellico chevrons, it will be recalled, are thought to be a time-marker for the 17th Century.

Chevron, or "star" beads as they are sometimes called, are very distinctive in appearance. Their manufacture is complex; during fabrication, the still-plastic glass bubble is rolled on a corrugated marver, then layered in glass of another color and the process repeated several times.

The Great Tellico chevrons are layered in glass of four different colors. Those colors are, from the inner diameter to the outer diameter, as follows: a translucent green core about the central perforation, followed by opaque white, brick red, opaque white, and a final outer coating which may be either translucent blue or (rarely) green (Fig. 3).

Two varieties of chevron-type beads occur at Great Tellico. Both are similar in construction, differing only in the color of the final layer of glass applied to the outside of the bead. The most common variety is layered on the outside with translucent blue glass. Only one bead with a green outer coating has been found at Tellico.

The Tellico chevrons occasionally display elongated air bubbles between some of the layers, usually along a marver corrugation. This indicates they were cane-drawn, and not mandrel-wound. The bubbles were most often observed on the outer surface of the corrugated brick red layer, between the red and the surrounding white layer.

The marver corrugations on the Tellico chevrons are not straight, but bent in a radial

sawtooth-like pattern. This, together with irregular faceting on the ends, combines to distort the classic star-like pattern usually seen on round chevron beads.

THE ATYPICAL HEXAGONAL CROSS SECTION

Kidd and Kidd (1970) have studied glass trade beads from northeastern North America and elsewhere, proposing a classificatory system which is useful to type all trade beads. Their published system, which does not pretend to list all bead types, is one of the most extensive works yet available. It illustrates several types of chevron beads (Kidd and Kidd 1970: 59, 61). All of these are rounded in cross section, except for one example which has a flattened cross section. By contrast, the Tellico chevrons have atypical hexagonal cross sections and faceted ends. Otherwise, the Tellico beads are similar to those illustrated by Kidd and Kidd in their Color Plate IV.

A survey of the literature produced only a single reported occurrence of chevron beads with hexagonal cross sections. That was in the Tallapoosa Valley of central Alabama (Burke 1936). There, a few multi-faceted chevron beads with hexagonal cross sections and green outer surface layers occur infrequently, together with round chevrons in both blue and green. The multi-faceted Alabama chevrons are layered somewhat differently from the Tellico beads. The Alabama beads have an extra blue glass layer between the red layer and the green outer surface layer (i.e., a core of clear glass, followed by layers of white, red, white, blue, and white glass, with a green outer surface). Unfortunately, Burke does not provide us with details of site context, etc., which would be helpful in cross-dating the Tellico beads.

Orchard (1929: 84) briefly discusses chevron beads. A quotation he presents provides some insight as to why faceted chevron beads are so seldom reported:

In a few instances, the extremities in some of the larger and presumably older specimens are faceted, that is to say, ground down to a pyramidal form. (Edward Dillon, *Glass*, London, 1907)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF CHEVRON BEADS

Quimby (1966) notes the presence of chevron beads on 17th Century sites in the western Great Lakes region. There, the French introduced glass trade beads as early as 1610. Quimby (1966: 84) identifies the chevron bead as diagnostic of the Early Historic Period, which he dates between 1610 and 1670.

Most beads which occur at Overhill Cherokee sites, however, are typical of Quimby's Middle Historic Period, circa 1670–1760 (Quimby 1966: 85–87). This is to be expected, since we know from historical accounts that the Cherokee villages in the vicinity of Great Tellico were most intensively occupied during the late 1600's and first three-quarters of the 1700's.

It is instructive to compare trade bead assemblages found on Overhill Cherokee sites in the Little Tennessee Valley with those found on earlier 17th Century historic sites further to the northeast. Such a comparison quickly demonstrates that bead types predating 1670 seldom occur on Overhill sites.

Similarly, 18th Century sites elsewhere in eastern North America exhibit the same bead assemblages as found on contemporaneous Overhill Cherokee sites. At the Guebert Site in southern Illinois, an 18th Century historic Kaskaskia village, the trade bead assemblage present is virtually identical with that found in the Little Tennessee Valley (Good 1972: 105, Color Plates 3–6). As might be expected, no chevron beads were found at Guebert. An extensive bead sample excavated at Fort Michilimackinac (1715–1781), in northern Michigan, also is similar to that found on the contemporaneous Overhill Cherokee sites (Stone 1974: 88, Color Figures 48–51). There, only 2 chevron-like beads, both round in cross section, were found. At the Fatherland Site, the Grand Village of the historic Natchez, in the lower Mississippi Valley, no chevrons were found. Fatherland was occupied from sometime before 1682 until 1730 (intensive trade contact with the French did not begin until circa 1700).

Such regional bead comparisons are valid, it should be remembered, because *all* the glass trade beads being distributed to the natives during any given time period were made at the same European glass factories. Beads of the

same age are similar, therefore, regardless of the location where they are ultimately found.

The Tellico chevron-type beads are thus chronologically out of place. A time-marker for the 17th Century, these distinctive beads have *not* been found on the surface of other 18th Century Overhill Cherokee village sites along the nearby Little Tennessee River (Chota, Citico, Chilhowee, Toqua, Tommotley, etc.). At Chota, Tellico Archaeological Project excavations during 1969 and 1970 produced over 20,000 glass beads, but no chevrons were found (Gleeson 1970, 1971). Chota, capital of the Overhill nation, was occupied from sometime before 1725 until circa 1799, when it was abandoned as a town.

It is doubtful that ongoing archaeological research in the proposed Tellico Basin will result in the discovery of many additional hexagonal chevron beads. A preliminary analysis of glass beads recovered to date by the Tellico Archaeological Project reveals that no chevron types have been found on those historic Cherokee sites investigated (Dr. Alfred K. Guthe, personal communication, 1976).

COMMENTS

At Great Tellico, chevron and other contemporaneous bead types are found very infrequently. The general absence of these earlier bead types may indicate that Tellico *was not occupied* by the historic Cherokee prior to A.D. 1670. Alternately, if the Overhill Cherokee were living at Tellico during the middle to late 1600's, we can only conclude that the site was located so far inland and was so difficult of access that few trade goods reached the village during this early period.

Another explanation is suggested by the physical distribution of chevron-type beads on the surface of the site. At Great Tellico, chevron-type beads are found only in a small area of the large townsite. By contrast, the 18th Century beads so common at Tellico occur over a much larger area. This suggests that the chevron-type beads are being plowed from a single burial (or small group of nearby burials, perhaps a family group). Thus these distinctive beads may have been obtained by the Cherokee elsewhere, several generations earlier, and brought to Great Tellico as heirlooms (already many years old) and not through direct trade.

Finally, there is one remaining possibility. Although unlikely, it is possible that chevron-type beads may have been obtained by prehistoric Mississippian peoples inhabiting Great Tellico *before* the arrival of the historic Overhill Cherokee. Prehistoric Dallas phase groups were occupying eastern Tennessee when it was visited by the DeSoto expedition in 1540, and it is probable that these Mississippian groups continued to occupy this region through the rest of that century. We know that the Dallas people utilized existing aboriginal trade networks extensively, trading over long distances for copper, conch shell, and other exotic materials. The find of a catlinite disk pipe with a late Dallas phase burial at Great Tellico documents this propensity of Dallas peoples to secure esoteric goods elsewhere (Rice 1974). Continued salvage excavations at Great Tellico have recently unearthed some indisputable evidence that European trade goods were not completely unknown to the Dallas people. Although not yet reported, a late Dallas phase burial has been recovered which was accompanied by a small necklace of blue and white monochrome glass beads (all cane-drawn). This Dallas burial was accompanied by a typical Dallas shell-tempered water bottle, as well as conch shell ear pins and a spatulate celt made of greenstone.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Whatever the explanation for the occurrence of chevron beads at Great Tellico, more data on the occurrence of glass trade beads in eastern Tennessee needs to be published. These authors are interested in describing further the occurrence of trade beads in this region. We would appreciate hearing from anyone who would like to share information on the occurrence of chevron or other diagnostic glass beads from historic Southeastern sites.

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