

# PARKIN ARCHEOLOGY

## A REPORT ON THE 1966 FIELD SCHOOL TEST EXCAVATIONS AT THE PARKIN SITE.

Timothy C. Klinger  
Arkansas Archeological Survey

Interest in Parkin archeology extends well back into the last century. It wasn't until the summer of 1965 that the first controlled excavations took place at the site conducted by the Arkansas Archeological Society. In the summer of 1966, in addition to being designated a National Historic Landmark, a second season of test excavations was conducted at this late prehistoric Mississippian community.

Under the direction of Charles R. McGimsey III and Sandra Scholtz, the University of Arkansas archeological field school excavated seven test units in four areas of the site during June and July of 1966. Portions of three structures and ten burials were located in addition to the recovery of over 2300 artifacts.

### INTRODUCTION

The late Mississippian community of Parkin (3CS29) is located on the eastern bank of the St. Francis River in north-east Arkansas within the present day limits of the City of Parkin. Artificially elevated approximately 2 m above the surrounding area, the site occupies an estimated 11 acres and is bounded on the north, east and south by a wide depression. The well-preserved remains of a large, aproned temple mound (approximately 7 m in height) are situated on the western edge of the site providing an additional several meters to this bank of the St. Francis River (Figs. 1 and 2).

The history of the development of our cumulative knowledge about Parkin archeology covers a period of at least a century and probably several decades more. Over the years, the Parkin site has attracted the attention of amateur and professional archeologists alike. As early as 1909, C.B. Moore suspected that the site had already been so intensely looted that little was probably left *in situ*. Representing the Philadelphia Academy of Science, Moore visited Parkin while investigating the large Mississippian sites of eastern Arkansas. According to the rough measurements taken by Moore, the sides of the village mound were estimated to be the following lengths: "north, 617 feet; south, 525 feet; east, 938 feet; west 863 feet" (1910:303). Moore's crew of nine men spent approximately one day at the site and managed to locate and extract some 19 burials and 25 pottery vessels (Moore 1910:304-305).

It was four decades later that Phillips, Ford, and Griffin visited Parkin as part of their survey of the lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley (1951). This survey team collected a surface sample of nearly 7000 sherds and included Parkin as one of the best developed examples of the "St. Francis-type" sites found to be characteristic of the St. Francis River drainage. A total of 20 other sites in the basin were assigned to this class which exhibited a number of distinctive characteristics including a relatively short occupation span (i.e., pure late Mississippian occupation), a planned rectangular village layout, one or more ceremonial mounds and plazas, and "fairly large numbers of people" occupying the sites (Phillips, Ford, and Griffin 1951:329). Additional examples of the

St. Francis-type sites in the basin include the Rose Mound, Castile Landing, the Vernon Paul Place, and the Fortune Mound.

Another two decades were to pass before the first controlled testing program was conducted at Parkin. In the summer of 1965, the Arkansas Archeological Society, in conjunction with the University of Arkansas Museum, conducted a nine-day training session in archeological field techniques with over 50 members of the Society participating in the program. A total of 14 test units were excavated in 1965 concentrating the investigations in four areas of the site: seven units were excavated in Area A, the village mound edge and the southern depression; two units were excavated in Area B, the hypothesized plaza area; two units were located in Area C, the area including the small mound to the east of the main mound; and three units were excavated in Area D, the apron of the main mound (Davis 1966:12).

After the nine days the Society spent at the site it was decided that the University of Arkansas archeological field school would conduct an additional testing program at Parkin in the summer of 1966. Under the overall direction of Charles R. McGimsey III, assisted in the field by Sandra Scholtz, the field class spent approximately five weeks investigating three areas of the site (A, D and E, Fig. 3). Students participating in the field program included Douglas Faith, George Jernigan III, Joyce Jones, Eileen McAlister, James B. Montgomery, Sara Tepfer, and Amie Wilson. Mary Printup was the field school cook. In addition to the seven students, the City of Parkin appointed six young men from the Neighborhood Youth Corps to assist in the testing program.

The major objectives of the 1966 season were five-fold and can be summarized as follows:

- 1) A completion of the units began in 1965 located on the main mound apron (Area D);
- 2) Reconstruction of the building zones represented in that area of the mound apron (Area D);
- 3) Determination of the size, shape, and function of the structures on the apron partially uncovered in 1965 (Area D);

#### Antler tine flakers: 3 specimens

The three specimens which were identified as flakers (Fig. 18f,g,h) were all portions of antler tines (probably white-tailed deer, *Odocoileus virginianus*). Heavy striations and polish on the tip of each are indicative of use.

#### Bone Abrader: 1 specimen

This tool was located in level XV (160-170 cm BD) of unit N136E44 on the mound apron. Manufactured from the left unfused distal epiphysis of a deer femur, this specimen exhibits a single U-shaped groove indicative of use modification.

#### Fishhook: 1 specimen

This artifact (Fig. 18e) was associated with Burial 4 (N34E85) in Area A. Manufactured from an unidentifiable mammal bone fragment, only the lower portion of this tool was recovered.

While bone fishhooks are not uncommon in the Archaic (DeJarnette 1952) and Mississippian (Davis 1966; Kneberg 1952) periods of the southwestern United States, most of those discussed in the literature are modified to the extent that all sides of the tool are a uniform thickness. The fishhook fragment recovered in Area A during the 1965 season at Parkin conforms to this design (Davis 1966:31). The most similar example to that found in 1966 is illustrated by Ford and Willey (1940:120) as characteristic of the Marksville occupation in Louisiana on a middle Woodland time period. A basal thickening along the area of the tool likely to be subjected to the most stress is characteristic of these artifacts. The vertical grain of the bone is thus reinforced by this thickened base (Allen P. McCartney, personal communication).

#### COPPER DISK

While re-excavating the Area A trench, the remains of a circular copper disk were uncovered lying on the trench floor (approximately 35 cm BD). The archeological context appeared to be undisturbed (i.e., no evidence of pot hunting) and no other artifacts were found in association. Burial association, although possible, seems unlikely, the closest burial

uncovered being over 4 meters away. This specimen is actually more oval in shape than circular and measures approximately 40 mm x 30 mm and is less than .5 mm in thickness.

The initial field interpretation of this artifact was that it represented the exterior cover of an ear spool. The edges of the disk are slightly bent over suggesting that it did provide a covering plate for an object, but what that object could have been is only speculation.

#### HISTORIC BEAD

While surface collecting during 1966 in Area E at Parkin, two historic beads were found. The first specimen is a small (25 mm dia) doughnut-shaped purple-blue (Munsell 7.5 PB 4/16) translucent glass bead. This specimen appears to be of late historic origin and is probably not associated with the aboriginal occupation of the community.

The second, and more interesting specimen (Fig. 19) is a multicolored glass bead of the Chevron type. Mary Elizabeth Good, of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Jeffrey P. Brain of the Peabody Museum have both examined the bead and concur on its identification. This Chevron is classified as hollow cane and of compound construction. Composed of seven layers of colored glass, the bead's colors (Munsell) can be described as follows:

Layer 1	Blue	7.5	PB	2.5/6
Layer 2	White			
Layer 3	Red	7.5	R	4/8
Layer 4	White			
Layer 5	Green	2.5	GB	5/6
Layer 6	White			
Layer 7	Green	(translucent) 2.5		5/6

The overall exterior dimensions measure 7.92 mm (width) and 7.57 mm (length). The diameter of the perforation measures 2.44 mm. The exterior surface is composed of 12 grooved facets (six on each side) in addition to a barrel-shaped body.

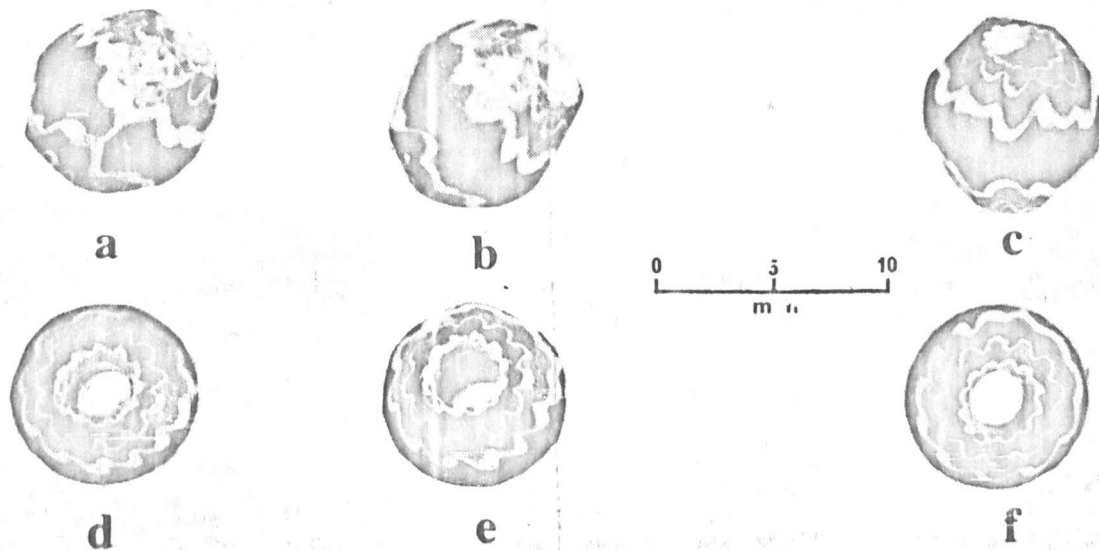


Figure 19. An historic glass bead of the Chevron type found on the surface, Area E, Parkin (1966). Six different views of the same specimen.

The significance of this particular find lies in its possible relationship to the 1541 DeSoto expedition which is theorized to have past by or through Parkin. The bead as such, however, gives us little to go on but does provide another remainder of the entrada. Although the Chevron type of compound bead has been manufactured for several centuries, the one discovered at Parkin **could** be associated with the 1541 expedition. It is important to remember, however, that a number of interpretive problems are involved, including the lack of contextual and associational data, the manufacture span of the Chevron type, and a determination of the actual origin of this particular specimen.

While it is probable that the Parkin Chevron represents one of the earliest types traded in North America (typical

during the mid 16th Century), it is difficult to attribute it solely to DeSoto. Similar specimens have been found near Chattanooga, Tennessee (Brain n.d.), Ontario, Canada, and from New Mexico associated with the site of Hawikuh (Orchard (1975:96-97). At least no additional early European trade item has been found in good context at Parkin (Davis 1966:11). A brass Hawk's bell was recovered during an amateur excavation of a child's burial at the site. Other items such as glass bottles are rumored to have been associated with the burial. Again, it is difficult to conclusively assign their origin to the DeSoto expedition.

All in all, early historic artifacts such as the ones discussed above, hold a fascinating potential for us to learn a great deal more about the first European visitors to this area.

## FAUNAL REMAINS

The faunal remains recovered during the 1966 test excavations have not been subjected to detailed analysis, as is the case with the 1965 collections (Davis 1966:30). The faunal remains at Parkin are well preserved and were present in varying quantity in all areas of testing although no areas of concentrated bone were uncovered.

While a detailed analysis is lacking, a cursory listing of the faunal record would read as follows: beaver, turkey, white-tailed deer, dog, muskrat, racoon, squirrel, rabbit, a variety of fish including gar and catfish, and turtle.

The remains of mussel shells were also present in nearly all areas of testing from both the 1965 and 1966 seasons. A preliminary quantitative comparison between the faunal and shell remains suggests that both played comparable roles in the subsistence strategies of the Parkin villagers. Both hunt-

ing and fishing, in addition to gathering, probably only represent buffer resources for a predominantly horticultural subsistence base.

In their stratigraphic tests of sites in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley, Phillips, Ford, and Griffin (1951:31) note that only "small lenses of shell appear in middens throughout the area" and "only on the Yazoo River have we encountered anything that could properly be described as shell middens and even these are not nearly as extensive as those known along the Tennessee River. No specific mention of the density in which faunal remains occurred in the deposits at Rose Mound (a large St. Francis-type village and Parkin contemporary on the east bank of the St. Francis River approximately 4 miles southeast of Parkin) is noted by Phillips, Ford, and Griffin (1951:284-290).

## SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1966 test excavations at the Parkin site represent the second controlled investigations conducted, in as many years, at a site that has been recognized in the archeological literature as being significant for well over six decades. Its significance has, however, shifted in the last century from being simply a mine of antiquities to providing us with a laboratory in which to study the processes of social-cultural change operating within a highly complex cultural system. Although our investigations at this large late Mississippian center have not been extensive, to say the least, they have provided enough data to argue convincingly for a critical reevaluation of our models concerning the developmental and structural nature of Parkin specifically and of other "St. Francis-type" sites generally (Klinger 1975).

To summarize the results of the 1966 excavations at the Parkin site the following generalizations are offered:

- 1) Although the site has been subjected to a century of disturbance by pot hunters and others, large areas of the temple and village mounds appear to be undisturbed, with the deeper deposits remaining pristine throughout the site.

- 2) Excavations in Area A of the site (the southern edge of the village mound) suggest that the village mound is a result of successive artificial construction zones rather than being built up by the refuse deposited by several generations of occupation.
- 3) Evidence for structures is present in Area D (temple mound) and Area E (village mound) of the site, although its frequency of occurrence is far below our expectations. (Based on interpretations by Griffin (1952:231), Moore (1910:303), and Phillips, Ford, and Griffin (1951:285) we would have expected dense refuse deposits with few or no artificial construction zones in the village area.)
- 4) While several post holes were found in 1965 along the southern edge of the village mound, no further structural evidence of a wall or palisade was encountered during the 1966 excavations.
- 5) Burial form throughout the site is generally homogeneous (i.e., primary and extended) with very few exceptions.

While comparatively little is known about the Parkin phase in northeast Arkansas, a wealth of information about this