

A Remarkable Cougar Effigy Gorget From Clinton County, Ohio

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Among the artifacts preserved in the Wehrle Collection at The Ohio Historical Society is the unusual cougar or puma effigy gorget illustrated in Figures 1 through 4 (OHS 3490/12). According to the accession records, this item is "Steatite carved to represent lower jaw of puma" and was collected by Jonathan M. Richardson and sons James E. and Frank Richardson, in the vicinity of Wilmington, Clinton Co., Ohio, sometime between 1865 and 1905. During this period, the Richardsons excavated some 25 mounds in Clinton County, and no more specific provenience for the gorget is available. Much of the Richardsons' activity seems to have centered in the years around 1880.

Although labelled "steatite," the gorget is made from a dark green chlorite schist similar to if not identical with the material from which the "great pipes" (Hart 1973) generally associated with the Middle and Late Woodland periods are made. These are believed to derive from the Tennessee area, as may the raw material. This artifact might, in fact, be rather confidently assigned to the Hopewell culture on the basis of raw material alone, were it not for the remarkable resemblance the gorget bears

to cut animal maxilla masks described from Adena (Webb and Baby 1957). A cut puma (*Felis concolor*) maxilla was found with a burial in the Dover Mound, Mason Co., Kentucky, and cut puma mandibles are reported from the Westenhaver Mound, Pickaway Co., Ohio, and Mound 77 at the Chilton Site, Henry Co., Kentucky. A cut wolf maxilla from the Wright Mound 6, Montgomery Co., Kentucky, and a similar restored artifact from the Ayres or Ayers Mound, Owen Co., Kentucky, are shown in Figure 5, reproduced from Webb and Baby (1957).

The resemblance of the Clinton Co. gorget to these animal masks is so striking as to suggest that the chlorite schist artifact is Adena rather than Hopewell and was intended to represent an animal maxilla mask. Although we have not located specific references to Adena artifacts made from chlorite schist, a chlorite cone (Anonymous 1970) has been illustrated from Brown Co., Ohio, and may well be Adena. That the Clinton County gorget represents a cougar or puma is indisputable, since a row of relatively small incisor teeth is clearly represented. Nor does there seem to be any doubt about the authenticity of the artifact. It is true that the Richardsons were

connected with the famous "Welch Butterfly" (Welch and Richardson 1879), now generally considered to be a fraud, but the raw material, style of execution, and even the comparative lack of attention given to the cougar gorget by its discoverers all suggest that it is genuine. It will be noted, also, that the right canine has been broken off and that the front edge of the gorget is very irregular, suggesting that the gorget may have been reworked; if so, however, we are unable to determine what the original artifact was like.

References

- Anonymous
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1973 "Great pipes" of the Woodland Period. *Ohio Archaeologist* 23 (3): 23.
- Webb, William S. and Raymond S. Baby
1957 *The Adena People—No. 2*. Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.
- Welch, L. B. and J. M. Richardson
1879 *An illustrated description of prehistoric relics found near Wilmington, Ohio*. Journal Steam Printing, Wilmington, Ohio.

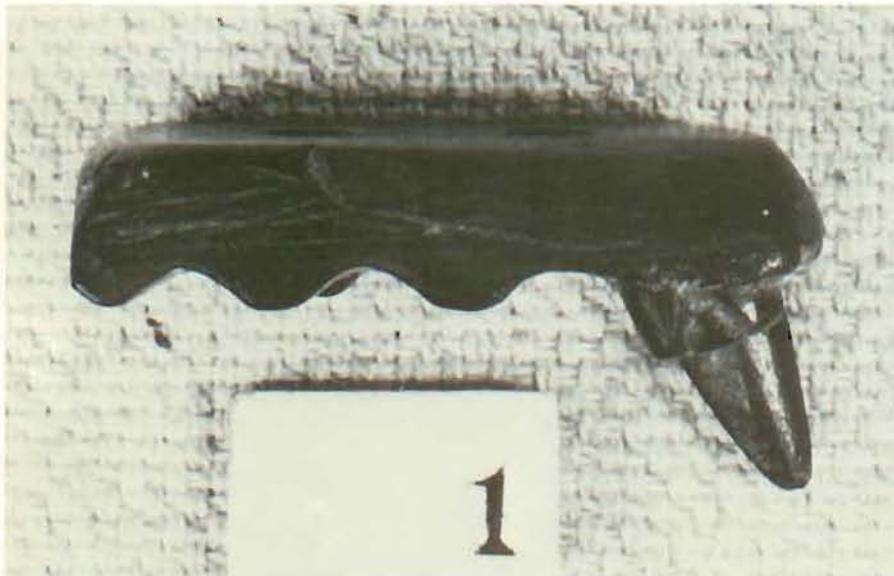


Fig. 1. Side view of Clinton Co., Ohio, cougar effigy gorget. Scale equals one inch.



Fig. 2. Front view. Note faint incising made to represent incisor teeth.

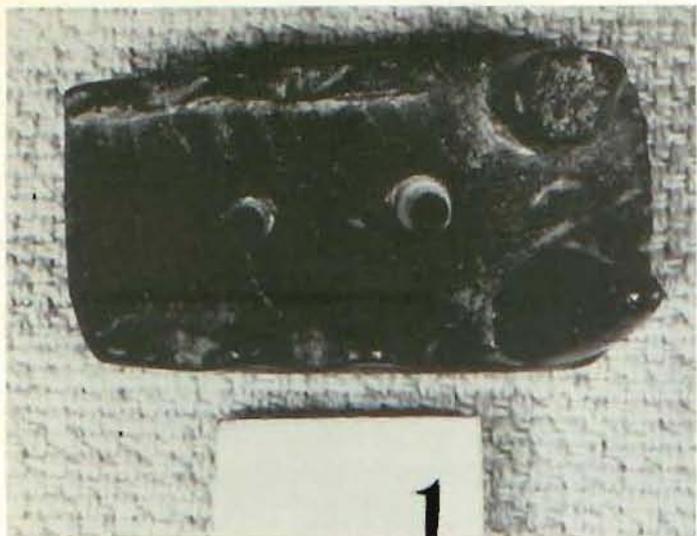


Fig. 3. Bottom view.

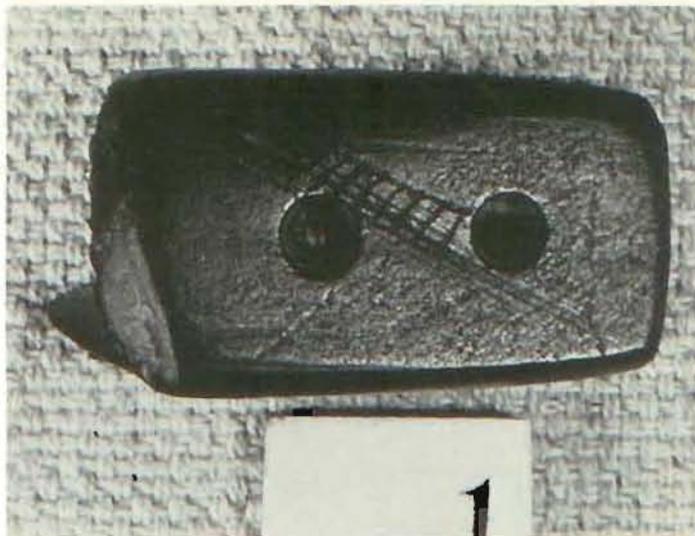


Fig. 4. Top view. Note irregular, unfinished or broken front edge.

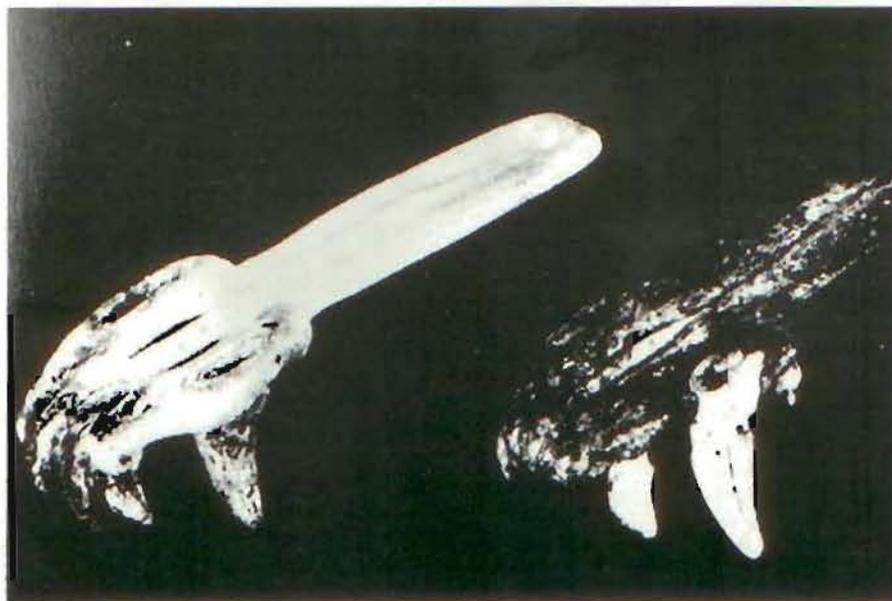


Fig. 5 Restored wolf maxilla artifact from Ayres Mound, Kentucky, and (right) nearly complete wolf maxilla artifact from Wright Mound 6, Kentucky. Reproduced from Webb and Baby (1957).