
PREHISTORIC HOPEWELL METEORITE COLLECTING:
FURTHER EVIDENCE

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In a recent paper published in this Journal (Prufer, 1961) I have discussed prehistoric Hopewell meteorite collecting and its significance in the framework of North American archaeology and ethnology.

Briefly, the conclusion was that in the eastern United States prehistoric meteorite collecting is a horizon marker of the Middle Woodland Hopewell Complex.

Since this paper went to press, another case of prehistoric meteoric-iron utilization has come to my attention. This is the discovery of fourteen cymbal-shaped earspools at Kolomoki, Mound *D*, in Georgia (Sears, 1953). The importance of this material rests on the fact that it was found in a non-Hopewellian context.

The associations of the Kolomoki meteoric-iron spools, one of which is decorated with a pearl in the center of the cymbal-shaped plate, are of some interest. Only one pair was found with a complete, extended burial, three single specimens were found with as many skull burials, eight specimens occurred with a single skull burial associated with a human hand, and one spool was found with a long-bone bundle burial.

The distribution of the spools within the burials suggests that not all of them were used as ear ornaments. In one case eight spools were arranged beneath the skull in a manner suggesting that they may have been affixed to a string, and in the case of the complete, extended burial, one spool was located at the waist while the

other was found near the neck. The relatively frequent occurrences of single spools rather than pairs also suggests that some of these objects were put to uses other than those of ear ornaments.

Considering the association and distribution of meteoric-iron spools found in Mound *D* which yielded large numbers of burials, Sears remarks that perhaps “. . . the most unusual thing about these ornaments is their complete absence from the burials of personages who, we are sure, on the basis of position in the mound, grave type, etc., were of special importance in the ceremonies” (1953:22). He considers the skulls to have been “trophy” skulls, suggesting that the iron ornaments accompanying them may not have been made by local Kolomoki people. While, as Sears points out, “trophy” skulls are depicted on Southern Cult shell engravings, it should be noted that “trophy” skulls are also an important attribute of the Hopewell Complex. In Ohio, Hopewell “trophy” skulls have been reported from Turner, Marriott 1, Hopewell, North Benton, Seip 1, and Harness. In other areas this trait has also been recorded. Whether these skulls really are trophies is, in the light of present knowledge, debatable. They may be the skulls of venerated individuals from within the community.

Analysis of three Kolomoki iron spools yielded the following nickel percentages: 20.93, 18.3, and 18.7.

How, if at all, can the presence of the Kolomoki meteoric-iron objects be connected with Hopewellian influences?

To answer this question it is necessary to discuss briefly the chronological position of Kolomoki. Sears notes the complexity of Mound *D*, ultimately concluding that it “. . . seems safe then, to conclude that Mound *D* does pertain to the Kolomoki period, both on the basis of internal evidence relating it directly to village assemblages and on the basis of its relationship to Mound *E*, which was more obviously a Kolomoki period mound” (1953:43). The presence of Weeden Island material suggests, however, some overlap in time with that complex.

Granting this conclusion, the problem boils down to defining the chronological position of the Kolomoki period and its possible relationship to the Hopewell influenced phases of the Gulf Tradition. Sears, the excavator of Kolomoki, argues that the Kolomoki period “. . . represents the terminal phase in development of Weeden Island. . . .” (1953:44). The Hopewell influenced horizons of the South are Santa Rosa—Swift Creek, St. Johns Ia (late), and Marksville. The directly relevant horizon here would be Santa Rosa—Swift Creek. According to Sears, the position of Kolomoki would be at the tail end of a sequence:

Kolomoki

Weeden Island

Santa Rosa—Swift Creek

where Kolomoki is considered to date from just prior to the developed Southern Cult. This scheme would place Kolomoki at a great chronological distance from any Hopewell influenced culture complex.

In a recent letter referring to my horizon-marker theory in the light of the Kolomoki material, Sears (March 29, 1962) remarks: “Actually I don’t think that this affects your thesis at all since in my opinion classic Weeden Island culture and particularly mortuary ceremonialism are direct lineal descendants of Hopewell culture and ceremonialism. This is not to say that they are the same people but that the original inspiration for cultural development in this area was from Mid-western Hopewell and that after Hopewell died out in the Midwest a Hopewell type culture continued its development in the Southeast. . . .”

Quite apart from this comment, a much stronger case for Hopewell connections of Kolomoki can be made, because of an alternative chronology suggested by Willey (1949) and Caldwell (1958) on stratigraphic grounds, reversing the order of sequence succession. Caldwell, giving his interpretation, states that the “. . . view we shall follow here, based on the stratigraphical situation . . . is

that the Kolomoki Period is the earlier and follows Santa Rosa—Swift Creek. In the Lower Valley, the equivalent manifestation should be Troyville, but if the latter should prove to be less than a full cultural phase . . . Kolomoki may overlap in time with Marksville and Coles Creek" (1958:56-57).

This alternative sequence has recently found strong support from radiocarbon dates placing the Kolomoki period temporally within the reach of some Hopewell phases in the South as well as in the North. The dates in question for Kolomoki, Mound *D*, have yielded values of 36 ± 300 A.D. (M-49) and 164 ± 300 B.C. (M-50) respectively (Crane, 1956). In addition, a recent date of 358 ± 250 A.D. (M-396) has been obtained for Ja-63, a Kolomoki Period site in Florida (Crane and Griffin, 1958; Bullen, 1958). While somewhat later than the Kolomoki, Mound *D*, dates, this date still places Ja-63 within the reach of Hopewell; for that matter, it may date a late phase of the Kolomoki period.

I am in no position to resolve the differences between Sears and Caldwell. Quite apart from the stratigraphic evidence, the radiocarbon dates for Kolomoki Period sites do, however, seem to favor Caldwell's interpretation of the situation.

Granting the absolute chronological position of the Kolomoki Period, which argues against Sears' sequence, the Sears-Caldwell controversy becomes relatively unimportant for our purposes. Quite apart from the opinion given by Sears in his letter to me, suggesting Hopewellian traces in Weeden Island ceremonialism, the radiocarbon dates for Kolomoki, Mound *D*, make direct contacts between that site and Hopewell a clear possibility. Thus, the meteoric-iron spools from Mound *D* can well be the result of such direct influence (though their typology makes it unlikely that they are trade pieces). In either case—direct influence through chronological contemporaneity, or indirect influence through the handing down of Hopewellian ceremonial concepts through time in the unlikely event that the radiocarbon dates should prove wrong—the concept of meteoric iron as a Hopewell horizon marker would appear to remain valid.

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