Case 12-US-TN- Humphreys County-Duck River-MSN-Dover chert-1250 CE



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[Duck River Sword-Mississippian Culture Ceremonial- Arrowhead-6 3/4"](http://www.ebay.com/itm/381411704039?_trksid=p2057872.m2749.l2649&ssPageName=STRK%3AMEBIDX%3AIT)

**Case No.: 13**

**Accession Number:**

**Formal Label:** US-TN- Humphreys County-Duck River-MSN-Dover chert-1250 CE

**Age:** These swords belong to the Middle Mississippian period ceremonial centers that existed at Duck River and at Etowah c 1250 CE. The illustrated blades were recovered at the Etowah Indian Mound site.

**Distribution:** These swords are most often found in the box graves of ceremonial centers in Tennessee and Etowah, but were also believed to be traded to the Caddo people of Arkansas and eastern Texas as many examples have been recovered from the Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma.

**Display Description:**

This is a long, narrow, willow-leaf shaped blade. It may be widest near the distal end and taper to a narrow rounded or pointed base. The distal end is acuminate. The blade is developed with broad percussion flaking that is somewhat collateral, yet without a median ridge, and the blade edges are finished with fine pressure flaking to create even edges.

James A. Brown (1976) named this type for the Duck River cache found in Humphreys County, Tennessee in 1894.In the cache that consisted of 46 ceremonial pieces, the largest sword was 1 ¾ inches wide and 28 inches long. The larger blades are believed to have been used as ceremonial dance swords held by winged eagle dancers. The shorter blades were believed to have been used as knives. The blades are most often made from Dover or Ft. Payne chert that is found along the Duck River. A few were made of slate or wood. The type is similar to the contemporary Ramey knives found in the Cahokia area of Missouri and Illinois.

**LC Classification:**

**Date or Time Horizon:** **Age:** These swords belong to the Middle Mississippian period ceremonial centers that existed at Duck River and at Etowah c 1250 CE. The illustrated blades were recovered at the Etowah Indian Mound site.

**Geographical Area:** Humphreys County-Duck River, TN

**Map:**

**GPS Coordinates:**

**Cultural Affiliation:** Middle Mississippian

**Medium:** Dover chert

**Dimensions**: H 6.75 in  
**Weight:**

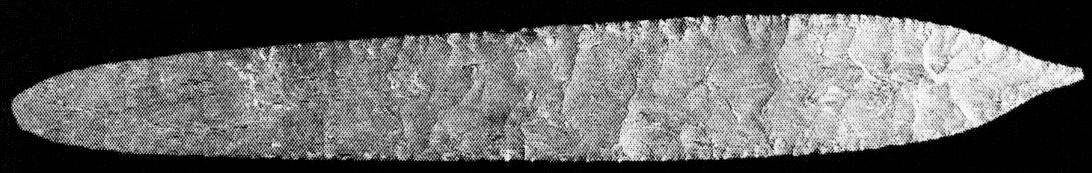
**Provenance:**

**Condition: original**

**Discussion:**

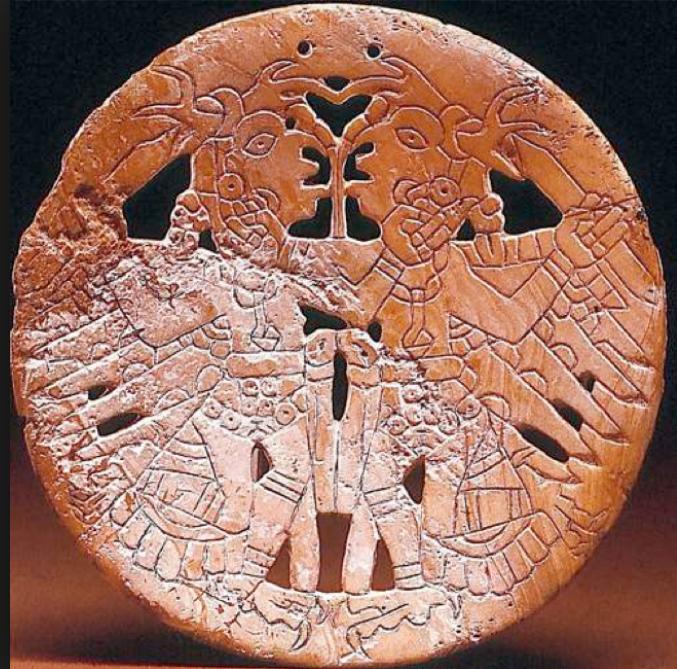
These swords are most often found in the box graves of ceremonial centers in Tennessee and Etowah, but were also believed to be traded to the Caddo people of Arkansas and eastern Texas as many examples have been recovered from the Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma.

Two types of Duck River chipped stone bifaces are depicted on the Hightower anthropomorphic-style marine shell gorgets. One type is the "Duck River Sword," a long, thin sword-form thin biface with rounded, **mucronate**, or multiple triangular points (**Brown 1976b:158; Perino 1985:108**). The other type is the **raptor talon effigy biface**. Both biface types have been found in archaeological contexts in the mid-South and appear to have been knapped from flint similar to examples mined from the Dover quarries in Stewart County, Tennessee (**Gramly 1992**). Some of the best-known examples of these two forms are represented in the Duck River cache, discovered at the Link Farm site in 1894 in Humphreys County, Tennessee (Marceaux and Dye. 2007: 175). The cache contains multiple sword-form bifaces and raptor talon effigy bifaces in addition to other flaked stone symbols (**Brehm 1981**). 15 Duck River sword-form bifaces were found in mortuary contexts and in the Upper Tennessee Valley five examples of Duck River sword-form Dover flint bifaces were recovered from the Late Hiwassee Island or Early Dallas phase contexts at the Hixon site. The stratigraphic position of the burials and accompanying blades suggests they were interred between 1200 and f350 CE (**Neitzel and Jennings 1995**: 410-4f4). This was in a period of great economic stress at the beginning of the downturn in climate at the end of the Neo-Atlantic Altithermal Climatic Period and the beginning of the Pacific Climatic Period.



**Sword-Form Flint Biface, with a rounded base and a mucronate tip, Humphrey's County, Tennessee. Photo, David H. Dye in Marceaux and David Dye. 2007.**

Ceremonial chipped flint "swords" from the Craig Mound At Spiro Mounds. The longest is 17" (43.2 cm.) photograph by Robert Bell in August of 1935. It shows seven of the large "Spiro swords" that were found together in a cache.



Anthropomorphic-style, mortal combat theme, marine shell gorget, Hixon site, Hamilton County, Tennessee ca. 1200-1350 CE showing birdman, raptor-winged, deer-horned warriors holding Duck River flaked stone bifaces. Frank H. McClung Museum, University of Tennessee.

These **birdman, raptor-winged, deer-horned warriors** wield **Duck River flaked stone bifaces** raised above the shoulder emphasizing display and combat. The engravers of the mortal combat gorgets situated the stone bifaces in a smiting context, alluding to human sacrifices or their re-enactments by deities locked in mortal combat. The gorgets and the sword-form bifaces were made near the time of gorget manufacture with sword-form bifaces dating as early as 1200 CE and gorgets manufactured no earlier than 1250 CE. The mortal combat theme suggests trophy-taking behavior (**Childress and Wharty 1996; Nash 1972**) illustrated iconographically by trophy heads incorporated as headdress elements (**Burnett 1945:**Plate 74; **Hamilton et al. 1974**:figure 70). **1978**:146, Plates 2, 17, Figure 106). All of the shell gorgets and flaked stone bifaces recovered archaeologically have been found in mortuary contexts along with prestige goods, representing chiefly élites who had attained exalted status through inherited or achieved rank, mainly through prowess in warfare.

**References:**

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