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Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 2(2)

ISSN

0191-3557

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Publication Date

1980-12-01

Peer reviewed

A Ship Incised on Slate Found Near Bodega, Sonoma County, California

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In the spring of 1977, the author conducted an archaeological reconnaissance near the town of Bodega, about four miles inland from Bodega Bay in Sonoma County, California. During the course of the reconnaissance, a small, broken piece of slate (Fig. 1), incised with the picture of a sailing ship (Sonoma State University Accession No. 77-3-241), was collected from the surface of archaeological site CA-Son-290, an ethnographic village of the Bodega Miwok. Since the occurrence of incised artifacts in northern California is rare, a brief discussion of the context of the find and a description of the artifact are in order.

The reconnaissance was initiated at the request of the Sonoma County Planning Department after it was determined that significant archaeological resources were located within the boundaries of a proposed subdivision. CA-Son-290, a large midden site originally recorded in the late 1940's, was resurveyed in 1977 and found to occupy an area of approximately 14,000 square meters between Tannery and Salmon creeks. Intensive augering indicated a maximum site depth of about one meter (Werner and Amaroli 1977).

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A literature search revealed that the location of CA-Son-290 was that of a Bodega Miwok village called *Su'wutene* (Barrett 1908: 304-305), which was occupied during the late prehistoric and early historic periods. Consistent with this identification, small corner-notched obsidian and glass projectile points and abundant glass, ceramic, and metal artifacts were observed on the surface of the village site. Ethnographic and historic records contain additional information relevant to the site

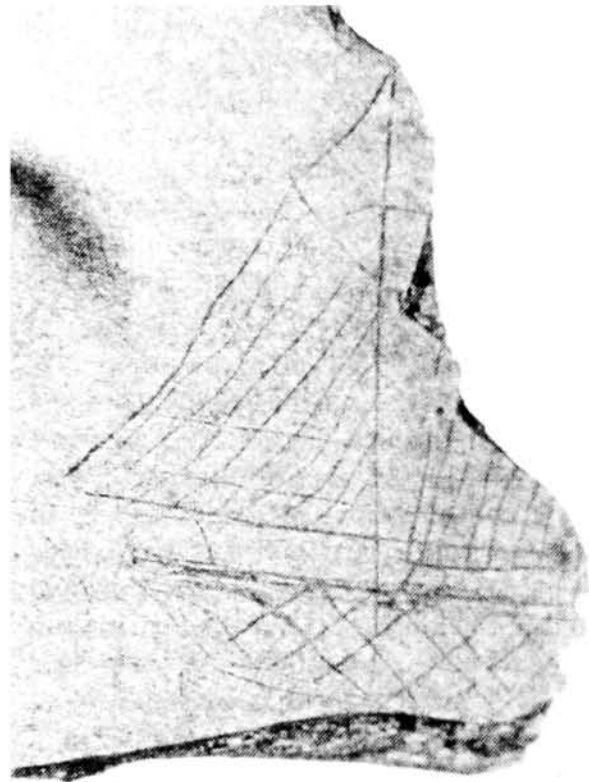


Fig. 1. Slate incised with sailing ship. Photo by Nelson B. Thompson, Cultural Resource Facility, Sonoma State University.

(Barrett 1908; Kostromitinov 1975; Munroe-Fraser 1880; Trussell 1960). Kostromitinov (1975) indicated in 1835 that this band of Bodega Miwok maintained cordial relations with Russian traders who occupied the former Khlebnikov Ranch and adobe, located about 250 m. east of *Su'wutene*.

The Russians abandoned Khlebnikov Ranch in 1841 (Trussell 1960). In 1846, Steven Smith applied for and received a land grant from the Mexican Government (Becker 1964). Smith's Rancho Bodega encompassed the former Russian holdings at Khlebnikov Ranch, as well as all of the coast from Bodega Bay to the mouth of the Russian River (Becker 1964). Smith maintained friendly relations with the people of *Su'wutene* until his death in 1855 (Trussell 1960). Thereafter, it appears that the village of *Su'wutene* fragmented (Trussell 1960). Reportedly, a portion of the population passed through Santa Rosa in December, 1857 on the way to a reservation (Sonoma Democrat, December 10, 1857). The analyzed ceramics, nails, and glass found on the surface of CA-Son-290 belong to the period of 1860 to 1890 (A. Praetzelis, personal communication, April, 1977) indicating that a part of the village population may have remained at *Su'wutene* until the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The artifact reported here is composed of a locally occurring light black slate, with sharp and crumbly edges. The broken specimen, measured with the incised sailing ship in an upright position, is 55 mm. high, 50 mm. wide at the base, 37 mm. wide at the midsection, and 37 mm. in thickness. One natural incision can be observed above the incised ship. The incised vessel is 31 mm. tall with a mast height of 26 mm. and a maximum hull length of 22 mm. The combined widths of the two sails is 27 mm. An intensive but unsuccessful attempt was made to locate the missing portion of the specimen.

The foresail has been identified as a gaff tops'l, diagnostic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (E. P. Von der Porten, personal communication, December, 1977). The type of ship has not been identified. Given the accurate details of the incised reproduction and the intensive shipping at Bodega Bay during the late nineteenth century, it is likely that the drawing was rendered from direct observation.

Although incised objects have been reported from several areas within California (e.g., Pilling 1957; Lathrap and Meighan 1951; Nelson 1910), these objects do not appear to be similar to the present specimen in either style or material. The incised specimen discovered at CA-Son-290, exhibiting a reproduction of a nineteenth century sailing vessel, appears to be unique in northern California. Based upon archaeological, historic, and ethnographic data, it is suggested that the specimen was incised between the years of 1860 and 1890.

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An Unusual Carved Figure from the Chumash Area

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A carved whale bone figure from a private collection in Santa Barbara was long considered by the author to be a child's doll; however, an account of Gabrielino shamanism by Hudson (1979) in a recent issue of the *Journal* has prompted re-evaluation of this object.

The figure is roughly carved from whale bone which is honeycombed with small eroded cavities (Fig. 1). It measures 13.7 by 4.5 cm. and is 4 cm. at the thickest point, which is the head. It is armless and legless. Wedge-shaped in profile, the back is flat and the figure tapers to a chisel shape at the lower edge. The sides are slightly carved, giving hip-like protuberances to the frontal view. This forms an indented area which could have held bindings in place. Indeed, the texture of the effigy at these points suggests they were not as exposed as the rest of the figure. The head is rounded. Smooth circular areas can be seen on each side of the head where the original bone surface was not removed. The bone may be from any of a dozen of large species of whale; the part utilized appears to be from the lateral process and centrum of the vertebrae.¹ The facial features are roughly suggested by two holes for the eyes and a slash for the mouth. The neck is partially shaped, partially natural—this being the area of bone where sutures are formed.

The body is perforated front to rear at about midsection. Traces of rust appear at these two orifices. A trace of rust can be seen at one spot on the lower back, and two faint rust spots appear on the head. The perforation is positioned so that if hung from this aperture, the figure would be suspended head down. This would also be true if nailed; however, there are no pressure marks near the holes that would suggest evidence of a nail head. Because of its full relief and apparent human form, the figure is both unique and striking.

The lack of provenience for this artifact presents a problem. It is part of a large collection of Chumash artifacts excavated in earlier days mainly from coastal Chumash sites. The excavator, however, kept no records of locations or associations. We have no reason to doubt the authenticity of this collection, and are thus assuming that the figure in question came from a local Chumash site. An alternate

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