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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, 5(2)

ISSN

0191-3557

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Publication Date

1983-07-01

Peer reviewed

A Shaman's "Sucking Tube" from San Diego County, California

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A widely held disease concept among the Indians of western North America was that illness could be caused by the lodging of a physical object in the body due to witchcraft or accident (Jorgensen 1980:285, 568). Correspondingly, a shaman could restore health by removal of the object. While variations existed from culture to culture and even from shaman to shaman, typically the operation involved manipulating the patient's body, blowing air or tobacco smoke over it, letting out a small amount of real or pretend blood from the site of the "pain," and finally removing the intrusive object by sucking with the mouth directly or with a tube. The curing process usually culminated with the shaman showing the patient and spectators the foreign object as proof of its extraction. Such objects were generally small enough to fit into the mouth or closed hand of the shaman so that they could be hidden until the appropriate time for their presentation. The objects often were overtly mundane things such as sticks, rocks, small reptiles, insects, or worms. However, even inanimate objects were generally thought of as being more or less animate things under supernatural control (Kroeber 1925:855; Jorgensen 1980:285).

Among the Luiseño and Diegueño (i.e., Ipai and Tipai) of southwestern California, shamans commonly used shaped stone "sucking tubes" for such curing practices (Kroeber 1908:183; Polk 1972:16). The Luiseño shamans evidently held their tubes in high esteem and often conversed with them, or possibly

through them to spirit helpers who aided in curing. While the actual Luiseño curing process was mainly through sucking, it also, at times, included blowing smoke or water over the patient as well as rubbing the site of the "pain" with an unusual shaped or colored stone such as a tourmaline crystal. Curing could also be aided by a feather bundle or a stick with attached rattlesnake rattles being waved over the patient. The objects sucked out by the Luiseño shamans reportedly were green, black, or blood red liquids, stones, lizards, and, in one instance, a foot-long rattlesnake (Dubois 1908:97, 99; Kroeber 1908:183-4; Sparkman 1908:216). While the rattlesnake account would at first seem to be apocryphal, Dubois (1908:111) also describes a female shaman vomiting a small one during performance of the "Chatish" song series.

Archaeological finds of "sucking tubes" are rare in southwestern California. The largest reported collection consists of 21 found in a single cache near Julian in the 1930s. These and other presumably Diegueño specimens are cylindrical steatite or schistose tubes, smoothed inside and out, occasionally shouldered and/or decoratively incised, and averaging 15 cm. in length (Polk 1972:16). Luiseño specimens have not been described in print in similar detail.

During the spring of 1979, a "sucking tube" was excavated from W-1556 (San Diego Museum of Man designation), a predominantly late prehistoric site in northern San Diego County (O'Neil 1982). This site was very likely a seasonal camp for one or two nuclear families who were primarily exploiting the spring and early summer biotic resources of the San Marcos Valley. On the basis of artifact types and frequencies, W-1556 is seen as having been a late 18th through early 19th century Luiseño site, though the possibility of Ipai occupation cannot be ruled out since it is in the broad, poorly defined area between both groups.

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The "sucking tube" from W-1556 is a dark green-grey steatite cylinder, polished inside and out (Fig. 1). It is 12.6 cm. long. The outside surface gently tapers to both ends symmetrically from the center where the outside diameter is 3.6 cm. The outside diameter at the ends is 3.4-3.5 cm. The inside diameter is 2.8 cm. at both ends and only slightly less at the center of the tube. The wall thickness varies from 0.3 to 0.4 cm. at the tube ends. The consistently broad hole through the tube would prohibit its effective use as a tobacco smoking pipe. All surfaces on the tube are covered by abrasion scars pro-

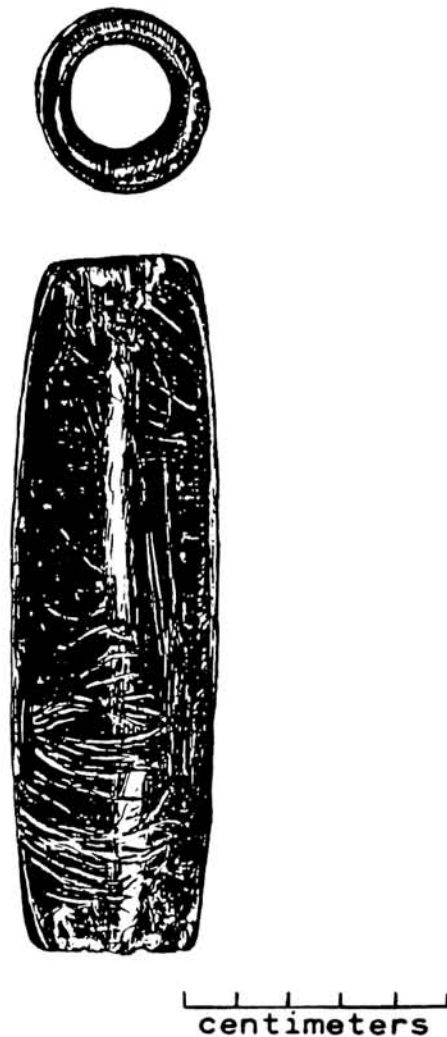


Fig. 1. Shaman's steatite "sucking tube" from W-1556, a late prehistoric campsite in northern San Diego County.

duced in the manufacturing process and not completely removed in the final polishing. No incised decoration is present.

The "sucking tube" was found loosely associated with three overlapping hearth features that mainly consisted of ash and charcoal concentrations, food processing tools, food refuse bones, and chipping waste. There was no evidence of the tube having been placed in a special cache. This mundane spatial context is surprising given the cultural importance of such shamanistic paraphernalia. It is equally surprising that it would have been left at a relatively temporary campsite.

If the W-1556 "sucking tube" is a Luiseño artifact, then it would appear that they either used a similar design to the Diegueño tubes or obtained them from the Diegueño. Sourcing of the W-1556 specimen material mineralogically, unfortunately, has not been done yet. If it is steatite from Luiseño territory, then it likely came from quarries in the Rincon and Valley Center areas (Joan Oxendine, personal communication 1981). If it is from Diegueño territory, it most likely would have been made from steatite quarried at Stonewall in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park or, perhaps, near Carrizo Gorge in Jacumba Valley (Polk 1972:7).

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An Early Incised Stone from Danger Cave, Utah

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While reanalyzing the faunal remains from Danger Cave (42TO13) in northwestern Utah, I was surprised to find an incised stone among the bones.¹ The provenience of the artifact indicates it was recovered from Feature 26, Level III. This level has been radiocarbon dated between 5150 B.C. and 4620 B.C. (Marwitt and Fry 1973: 3; Jennings 1978: Fig. 16). Only one other incised stone (of unknown provenience) has been reported from the cave (Jennings 1957: 219). Since the present artifact is considerably earlier than most incised stones from the Great Basin, it deserves a description and comparison with other such artifacts from the region.

DESCRIPTION

The specimen (Utah Museum of Natural History [UMNH] Catalog No. 22862/10) is a very small, elongated slab of fine-grained, light-brown limestone. It measures 7.8 cm. in length by 2.8 cm. in width by 0.6 cm. in thickness and weighs 19.5 g. The edges and incised surface have been artificially smoothed; the opposite side of the stone is rough and unmodified. The artifact has sustained some damage by the removal of small chips exposing a dark brown interior at the broad end of the incised surface (Fig. 1).

The lightly incised design is confined to the narrow tip of the smoothed surface and consists of several short lines forming a chevron, or branched pattern suggestive of a plant (Figs. 1-2). The design is so faint that at first glance it is easily missed. It is best viewed macroscopically if the stone is held at an oblique angle under a bright lamp.

Examination of the artifact at low magnification (7 to 15x) revealed some interesting aspects of the design and its manufacture (cf. Marshack 1972). In cross-section, the incisions are U-shaped and are wider than they are deep. All cuts appear to have been executed with the same engraving tool; a single stroke was employed to make each incision. Since the stone is a soft limestone, the incisions could have been produced by an unmodified flake. To test this assumption, the design was replicated on a piece of soft, tabular limestone using an unmodified flake held at a slight angle. The design was easily incised in a few minutes. A retouched flake or small engraving tool could also have been used.

The probable steps taken to incise the design can be inferred from the microscopic analysis and replicated design. The overlap of several incisions indicates that the upper portion of the design was etched first. Here, the design consists of the upper three diagonal

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