

Additional Grooved Stone Artifacts from CA-LAN-62

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Abstract

This article serves as an addendum to a study (Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. 2008) that provided descriptive, spatial, and associative data regarding nine grooved stone artifacts recovered at CA-LAN-62, a Ballona Creek site with a large mortuary/mourning component. Here, six additional LAN-62 grooved artifacts are illustrated and discussed. Evidence indicates that arrow shaft straighteners and/or their mimics and awl polishers were regarded by some southern California Native peoples as highly suitable objects for offerings in death rites. We interpret these artifacts as life-force symbols.

Introduction

A recent publication (Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. 2008) considered why arrow shaft straighteners and/or their effigy mimics and certain other grooved artifacts were associated, often directly, with mortuary and/or mourning remains at CA-LAN-62, a site along Ballona Creek and near the Ballona Wetlands. The study proposed that a culture change process, “sexualization-sacralization” (see Koerper 2006a, 2006b, 2007), helps account for how certain life-force symbology/imagery had been projected onto such objects, thus recommending the objects for embedment in death rituals.

For such ritual venues, regional peoples employed a range of offerings that had likely carried life-force and/or death-force communications, aiding bereaved persons to navigate both the highly emotional landscapes of loss as well as the dynamics attendant with death rites of passage (e.g., Koerper 2006a, 2007; Koerper et al. 2009). We theorize that such sacred objects

help guide celebrations of two powerful themes: (1) the mutual interdependency of life and death and (2) resurrection or some similar statement of immortality, which might resolve tensions arising from the apposition of life imagery and death imagery.

Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. (2008) postulated that certain kinds of grooved stone artifacts had served as visual approximations of the female vulva, which in congress with an arrow or other kind of shaft evoked fertility/fecundity and/or male/female dualism, similar to evocations of other utilitarian artifacts, such as food processing mortars and pestles (see Koerper 2001:30-33, 2006a, 2006b). These artifacts were eight shaft straighteners or straightener mimics and one LAN-62 grooved stone that had probably served as an awl polisher. Provenience had been discussed, with five of the eight straighteners/mimics directly associated with interments and another deposited as part of a mourning ceremony. Another could not be directly associated with any single burial, but it was recovered from a unit with three inhumations. One was discovered far away from any feature. The grooved polisher could not be assigned to a particular skeletal individual; however, it was found in an excavation unit having the remains of three persons.

This addendum is a consequence of subsequent laboratory sorting of warehoused LAN-62 midden that had been collected into several thousand five gallon

buckets. All buckets carried provenience information. The continued collecting and cataloging efforts by Statistical Research, Incorporated (SRI) personnel yielded three additional shaft straighteners and/or straightener mimics (Figures 1-3) and two awl polishers (Figures 4-5). Also discovered was a small object (Figure 6) whose morphology and size suggest either a straightener-like charm/amulet, an arrow shaft polisher, or possibly a toy straightener. These artifacts along with their associations will be described, thus providing further indications that certain kinds of grooved objects had likely communicated images/symbolologies abetting mortuary/mourning thought and behavior.

The Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. article (2008) traversed a broad range of ethnographic and archaeological observations, one of which will be revisited. This involves those archaeological data that inspired Delbert True's (1970:92) suggestion that some Diegueño shaft straighteners were manufactured "especially to be included as grave goods" (see Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. 2008:62). Herein, we pass on further information relevant to an additional assessment of True's hypothesis.

Three Additional LAN-62 Shaft Straighteners and/or Straightener Mimics

Specimen 03005AAE7

This artifact (Figure 1) is incomplete but retains remnants of two U-shaped grooves on the convex dorsal face. The maximum dimension of this straightener fragment is 62.4 mm. When resting on its ventral surface, its maximum height measures 44.0 mm.

The material is a very high quality, dense, dark grey schist. Surfaces of the finished artifact had been highly polished, the grooves showing even greater polishing owing presumably to repeated friction from arrow shafts. Fire stress had possibly caused the breakage.



Figure 1. Fragment of a double-grooved schist artifact (No. 03005AAE7) from CA-LAN-62.

Specimen 03005AAE7 came out of Unit 154, which is in the southwestern portion of the center of the main burial concentration. This is the area associated with the greatest concentration of burials having solid contact period assignments. The artifact was not directly associated with any burial feature, and indeed it was from midden approximately 40 cm higher than the burial features in Unit 154. The spatial context of the straightener was disturbed midden, possibly the result of grave digging.

Specimen 030018E24

This artifact is a highly micaceous steatite straightener fashioned from the sherd of a cooking pot (Figures 2a [upper face] and 2b [underside]). Striations over the concave surface are undoubtedly from manufacture of the pot. The convex surface shows some light polish, also probably due to bowl manufacture. The broken edges of the sherd, forming the straightener circumference, exhibit smoothing/rounding. The straightener snapped along part of the grooving, possibly during manufacture. Maximum dimension of the artifact is 81.9 mm, while maximum width is 55.6 mm. Maximum thickness measures 19.4 mm.

Specimen 0300184E24 came from Unit 165, which is near the center of the main burial concentration. It had been in midden 10 cm above the uppermost extent of Burial Feature 175, and thus it could not with certainty be directly associated with any skeletal material.

Burial Feature 175 was almost completely encompassed by the boundaries of Unit 165. This burial feature consisted of the disarticulated remains of at least three individuals. Time sensitive beads indicate the contact period.

Specimen 0300331DD

Yet another LAN-62 shaft straightener (Figure 3) had been fashioned from a bowl/pot fragment. Only a small part of a very smooth shaft groove remains on the straightener fragment whose material is a whitish grey, relatively hard steatite. Maximum length of the artifact is 62.6 mm. Maximum thickness measures 18.5 mm. The outer surface of the modified sherd is decorated with incised grooves, some running roughly parallel to one another, others more haphazardly arranged.

Specimen 0300331DD came from Unit 599 which had no burial features. Unit 599 is located northeast of the major concentration of LAN-62 burials, an area where there is a more diffuse pattern of burial features.

Two LAN-62 Shaft Polishers for Working Bone

Specimen 030005B7F9

This greyish serpentine polisher exhibits a curved groove on the face that is shown in Figure 4. There is also a smaller polishing groove on the opposite face. Length of the artifact is 47.8 mm, and width is 28.3 mm. Maximum thickness measures 17.0 mm.

Specimen 030005B7F9 came from Unit 146, which is within the central area of the main burial concentration

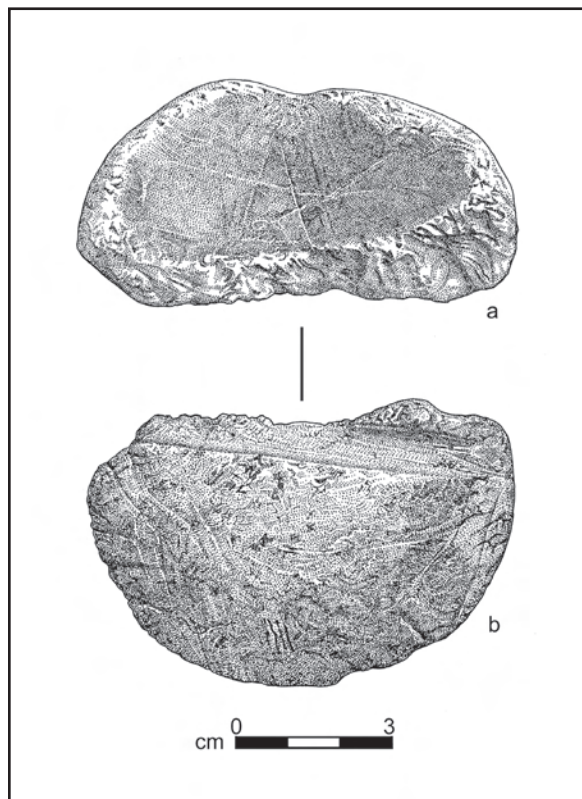


Figure 2. Two views of a broken grooved artifact (No. 030018E24) from CA-LAN-62. Crafted from a micaceous steatite pot sherd.

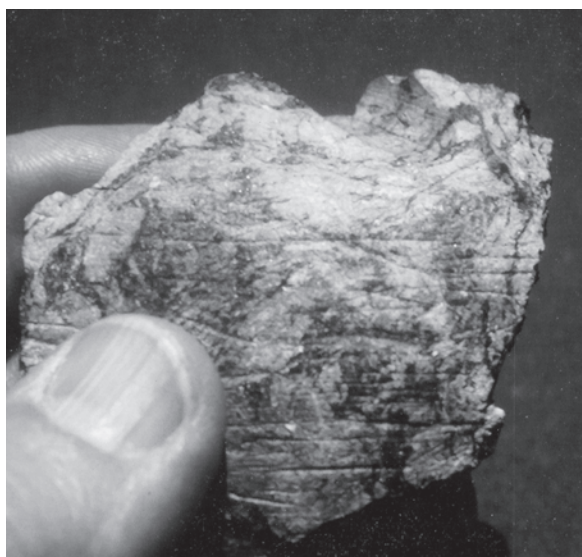


Figure 3. Fragment of a grooved, steatite artifact (No. 0300331DD) from CA-LAN-62.

at LAN-62. Of the numerous human remains in close proximity to the artifact, two individuals from Unit 146 (Burial Features 39 and 164) and one from Unit 145 (Burial Feature 171) were at the level associated with the polisher. No direct association of this object with any of these burials could be established with certainty.

Specimen 03003AE37

Another awl polisher (Figure 5) was crafted of a greyish, micaceous steatite bowl sherd. It exhibits a single curvilinear groove on one side. Its length is 84.2 mm; width is 73.8 mm. Maximum thickness is 26.8 mm.

This specimen is from Unit 825. Its horizontal and vertical coordinates place the shaft polisher as having been only about 4 m away from the remains of a mourning feature (Feature 331). A shaft straightener (Inv. 03000SD45) was previously reported from Unit 717 in Feature 331 (Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. 2008:55, Figure 4c, 60).

A Unique Artifact: Charm/Amulet, Shaft Polisher, Toy, or What?

Specimen 03002511F (Figure 6) has the appearance of a miniature shaft straightener. Only 22.6 mm in maximum dimension, close to 20 mm wide, and 10.8 mm thick, this artifact was crafted out of a dark grey, waterworn andesite pebble.

Both faces of this squarish object have a groove. On the “obverse” are three parallel incisions to one side of a deep groove and running roughly perpendicular to the groove (Figure 6a). Opposite these incisions are three more incisions and a large notch. The groove on the “reverse” side (Figure 6b) runs at the diagonal. One also sees the previously noted notch and also two smaller notches.

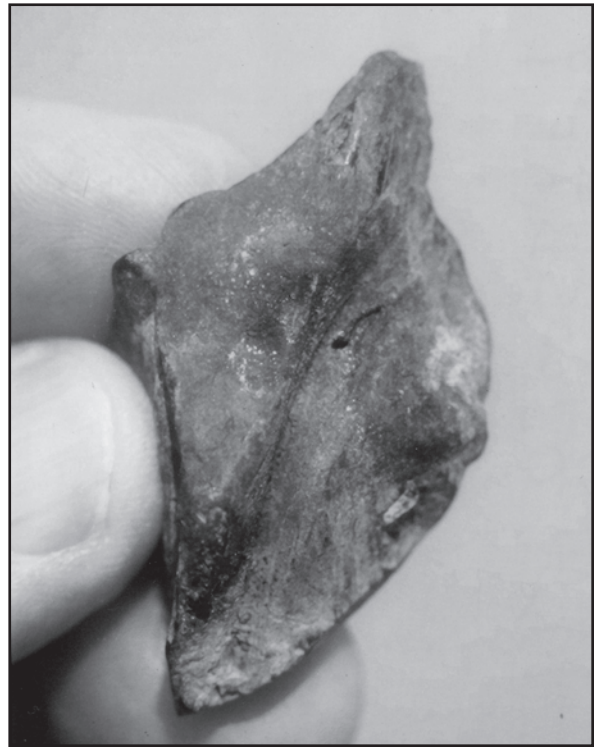


Figure 4. Serpentine awl polisher (No. 030005B7F9) from CA-LAN-62.



Figure 5. Steatite awl polisher (No. 03003AE37) from CA-LAN-62.

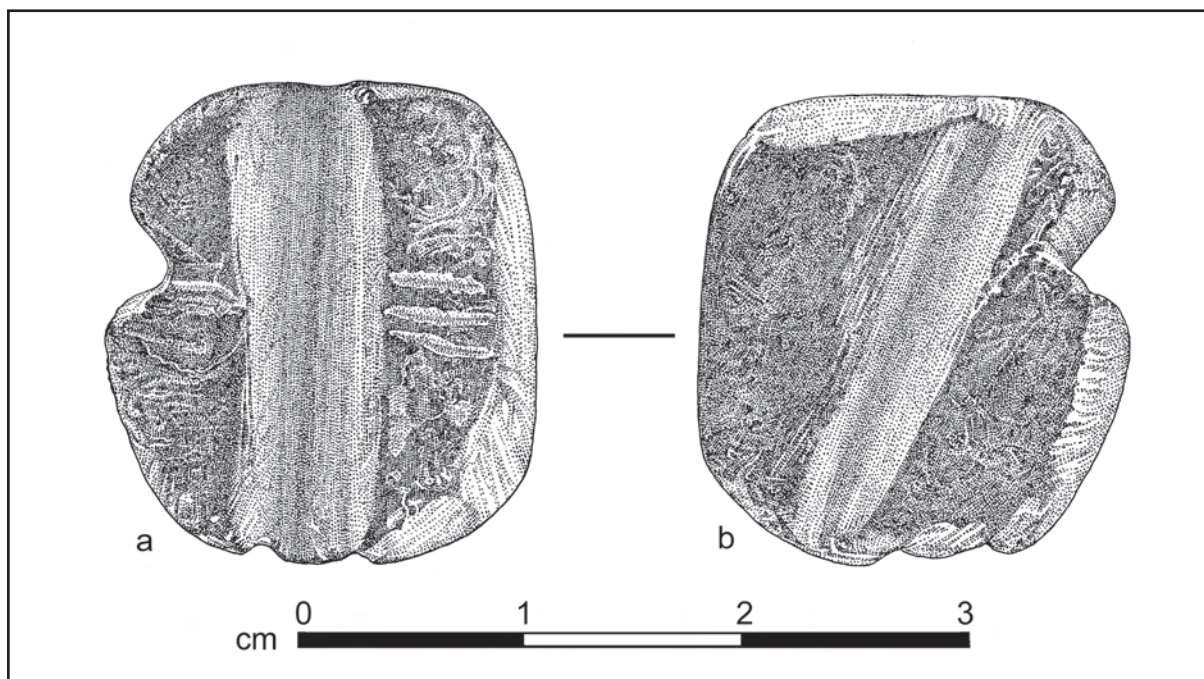


Figure 6. Two views of a small, andesite, double-grooved artifact (No. 03002511F). (a) "Obverse" side; (b) "Reverse" side.

This andesite artifact came out of Test Pit 31, which is in the south central region of the main burial concentration. It can not be directly associated with human remains. Several burial features intersect the test pit, but only two (Burial Features 396 and 481) were found at the same level as specimen 03002511F. Of these two burial features, Burial Feature 481 intersected Test Pit 391 to the greater degree.

Burial Feature 481 consisted of a primary inhumation of a fully flexed 18 to 30 year old female. There were also isolated remains of an infant no older than six months of age, possibly even a stillborn or newborn, all of which raises the possibility that the woman was the mother and that she died giving birth. Also, the diminutive size of the andesite artifact begs the question of whether it had been a burial good associated with the baby. No artifacts were directly associated with Burial Feature 481, but a semi-ground Olivella bead was recovered from the feature matrix, and this type dates to the Mission period.

Burial Feature 396 consisted of a primary inhumation and isolated bone. These individuals were, respectively, a 32 to 55 year old male, interred in a semi-flexed position, and an infant aged between birth and one year. No mortuary offerings were associated with either individual.

True's Hypothesis and Additional Evidence

Delbert True's investigations of a Late Prehistoric complex at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, San Diego County, fed his growing awareness of the relative infrequency of finds of grooved arrow straighteners for most of southern California compared against the many discoveries of the tool in Tipai (Southern Diegueño) territory, particularly the area from east of and through Cuyamaca territory and continuing coastward (True 1970:49). To illustrate, 200 grooved straighteners were documented just in the San Diego Museum of Man excavations at CA-SDI-913 (Cuyamaca region) (True 1970:49).

True speculated that such comparative abundance reflected some employment of the type as offerings in mortuary rites. He noted those that seemed “unusual,” that is, nonutilitarian, including specimens characterized as miniatures (see True 1970:92, Plate 6, nos. 6, 21). The grooved objects of True’s field research, including the small versions, were fashioned from Cuyamaca quarry steatite. Documentation of direct associations of straighteners, whether utilitarian or possibly not, with Tipai cremation remains would be relevant to weighing True’s speculation. It is uncertain whether True was aware of Heye’s reporting (1919: Plate XIII, 38) of five steatite arrow shaft straighteners that had been recovered from as many ceramic cremation urns in San Diego County.

McKinney (1972) reported on a 1940s discovery of an olla shaped ceramic cremation urn. Among the large number of artifacts contained within, there was a steatite arrowshaft straightener. Cognizant of True’s hypothesis, McKinney (1972:40) noted that this “handsome” specimen gave “little evidence of use and may well have been made for a grave offering.” The cremation burial urn was found at Descanso, a few miles south of Cuyamaca State Park. We believe that this urn together with some of its contents, not just the straightener, represents a spectacular display of varied sex-based symbolism/imagery.

Consider first that the outer walls of the olla display incised diamond patterns, the referent likely to have been the rattlesnake who probably projects fertility/fecundity communications (see Koerper 2006c; Koerper, Peterson, and Douglass 2008). (There are other snakes that relate to male-female duality [see Koerper 2006c]). We note that the Descanso urn contained a drilled steatite pendant in the shape of a snake’s head. The bulbous shape of the urn is not unlike the morphology of the bottom end of certain ceramic female figurines that are likely to have carried a message of pregnancy (see e.g., True et al. 1974:67; Freeman and Van Horn 1990:30-31; Sawyer and Koerper 2006).

Especially noticeable is the “eye-shaped hole” apparently carefully crafted at the lower end of the body of the urn. The imagery here is that of a vulva against a fertile body. If these clues were not enough, a clay pipe had been placed across the mouth of the receptacle, and the contents also included a cowry shell (see Koerper 2001; Koerper and Whitney-Desautels 1999:87-88).

Recently, while gathering data unrelated to the present study, one of us (HCK) made a serendipitous discovery, this occurring among the curation stacks at the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art, Santa Ana. The surprise find was a fired clay cremation urn containing burned bone, replete with information penned on an attribution label that listed the artifactual contents it had held when discovered in Mason Valley, San Diego County.

Mason Valley sits along the western border of Anza Borrego Desert State Park and about 10 km east from Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. The shortest distance from this valley to the Salton Sea is 60 km in an east northeast direction. In cultural terms, Mason Valley is in Tipai (Southern Diegueño) territory, but very close to the border with the Ipai (Northern Diegueño) (see Luomala 1978:593, Figure 1).

The attribution card recorded a Bowers catalog number (8724) that helped confirm the cremation urn as a gift to the Bowers Museum Foundation from the Irvine Foundation. It had entered the museum collection on August 25, 1953. The urn was part of a larger donation of Indian relics that had been purchased from Herman Strandt, a collector best remembered for his role in Depression era government work relief archaeology in Orange County (see Anonymous 1953, 1963; Smith and McKinney 1965; Koerper and Chace 1995, 2008; Koerper et al. 1996). Outside of Orange County, Strandt’s favorite collecting area was Mason Valley (e.g., Strandt 1954; see McKinney and Knight 1973).

The attribution card listed the artifacts once contained within the urn: a complete arrow straightener as well as one that was broken; an obsidian knife; some projectile points (arrow and spear); and a string of beads. While the beads (clam shell discs) were still present, all other artifacts noted were missing from the 21.1 cm high, 22.7 cm wide ceramic receptacle.

Strandt (1936) produced a catalog of artifacts that pertained to objects the collector had sold to Heye (Dockstader 1963). It is unclear when the catalog was mailed to Heye or when any of the artifacts were sold. The twenty-third item on the list (Cat. No. 18/9388) was a two grooved arrow shaft straightener that had been found by Strandt in June 1926, at a Mason Valley “cremation burial ground.” One wonders whether this was one of the two straighteners associated with the aforementioned Bowers Museum cremation urn. Parenthetically, in a March 22, 1954, missive to Heye, Strandt discussed the sale of two carrying nets and two arrow shaft straighteners that had been contained in a single olla. Unfortunately, provenance was neglected, and the correspondence offered no content relating to cremation or burial behavior. In the early 1950s, Strandt and his wife Minnie were carrying on a three decade acquaintance with Mason Valley. The circumstantial evidence hints at the possibility of yet one more Mason Valley cremation urn containing shaft straighteners.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Nine grooved stone artifacts from LAN-62 were previously described and discussed in Koerper, Peterson, Vargas, et al. (2008). Additional grooved stone artifacts from LAN-62—three shaft straighteners and/or mimics thereof, two awl polishers, and one very small double grooved object—have provided the main focus of this addendum article. Since these six additional specimens came to light in a laboratory rather than a field setting, none could be directly and unequivocally associated with burial or mourning features.

Provenience data indicated that five were recovered in the vicinity of graves and that one of the awl polishers occurred only 4 m away from a mourning feature.

Joining these most recent LAN-62 data to information previously published (i.e., Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. 2008) shows that eight certain shaft straighteners/straightener mimics, two awl polishers, and two unusual artifacts with straightener-like grooves were documented as either directly associated with burials or as having occurred at least close to burials. The “unusual” specimens are a cup-like artifact with a grooved bottom (Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. 2008:54, Figure 3c) and the miniature object illustrated in Figure 6. A straightener (or mimic) and an awl polisher were associated with a mourning area situated at only a small distance from the main concentration of burials. Two shaft straighteners (or mimics) were recovered away from any known burial and away from the mourning area. We think it reasonable to suppose that of those artifacts not known to have been directly associated with human remains, but which had come from near graves, most, if not all, likely had a connection to some person’s final disposition or ritual of remembrance.

With the information provided in our previous study (Koerper, Peterson, Vargas et al. 2008), additional LAN-62 data presented in the present study, the several observations from Tipai territory, both those of True (1970) and those reported by McKinney (1972), and those notes either relating to or possibly relating to Strandt’s activities, there is strong testimony that straighteners and/or their mimics and certain other grooved artifacts played important roles in late prehistoric death rites. If we are correct in this, then added credibility accrues to the hypothesis that straightener/polisher imagery and symbology, inspired by morphology of the artifacts and the kinetics of their employments, recommended these kinds of objects and their life-force symbolisms to mortuary and mourning venues.

It is problematic whether historical connections might account for similar employments of grooved stone artifacts in death rituals among both the Gabrielino at LAN-62 and the Tipai. (The Gabrielino tongue belongs to the Uto-Aztecan language family; the Tipai speak Diegueño [Yuman language family]). Another question is whether sexualization/sacralization operated independently in Gabrielino and in Tipai groups to effect similar ritual behaviors and life-force symbolisms.

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