

More on Cetacean Effigies

Henry C. Koerper, Ivan Snyder, Galen Hunter, and
Joe Cramer

Abstract

This article first describes and discusses five artifacts curated by the Point Vicente Interpretive Center, Rancho Palos Verdes, at the center's off-site storage facility. These are three dolphin-like effigies crafted out of Palos Verdes stone (a.k.a. Altamira shale), a whale-like (basalt?) manuport, and a possible dorsal fin effigy fashioned from siltstone. Following that, two privately owned effigies, carved of Catalina Island steatite and found at CA-LAN-138, or the Malaga Cove site, are described and discussed, one a whale-like mimic and the other symbolizing a small cetacean.

The six whole-body representations are additional testimony to the importance of cetacean imagery in the iconography of regional world view during some phase or phases of the Del Rey Tradition (3500–150 BP) (see Sutton 2010). If the siltstone artifact is truly a body-part effigy, then it also speaks to the role of cetacean imagery in Native magico-religious thought and behavior in south central coastal California.

Introduction

Documentations of stone effigies having definite, probable, or possible cetacean referent continue to accumulate in the archaeological literature of coastal southern California. A recent contribution to study of the genre (Koerper et al. 2014) featured five specimens presently on display at the Point Vicente Interpretive Center (PVIC), Rancho Palos Verdes. Two of those effigies were donated to the PVIC by Charlene Logan, whose father, Hal Weddington, found them in the “early 1900s”; they are without provenance, but one of Weddington's relic collecting areas was the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The other three artifacts were recovered over seven decades ago by Thomas Tower I from the Malaga Cove site (CA-LAN-138), which is just north of the peninsula.

The present article first introduces five effigies curated at a PVIC storage facility located off-site from the interpretive center. They are three whole-body cetacean carvings, one whole-body, whale-like manuport, and a crafted object that may have been a dorsal fin mimic. Then we describe and discuss two LAN-138 representations of cetaceans that reside out-of-state with the grandson of Tower.

Three Cetacean Effigies Housed at the PVIC Storage Facility

Three whole-body (as opposed to body part) stone effigies, all likely representing dolphins, are housed at the PVIC storage facility. The one seen in Figures 1a and 2 easily recalls beaked dolphins for the protruding device at the lower right of the Figure 1a drawing and at the lower left of the Figure 2 photographic image. Just such a device, albeit more rounded and more three dimensional, was noted by Koerper et al. (2014:23, Figure 3) on an effigy displayed at the PVIC. Although this specimen lacks provenance, its material, Altamira shale (see Reiter 1984; Conrad and Ehlig 1987; Brown and Ehlert 2000), convinces us that it was probably crafted by an artisan living on or near the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The object's surface patina is medium gray, but along the top edge where a chip is missing, one observes light gray coloration.

This specimen has a maximum length of 143.7 mm. Maximum height is 75.3 mm. Maximum thickness occurs near the lower border and is only 20.4 mm.

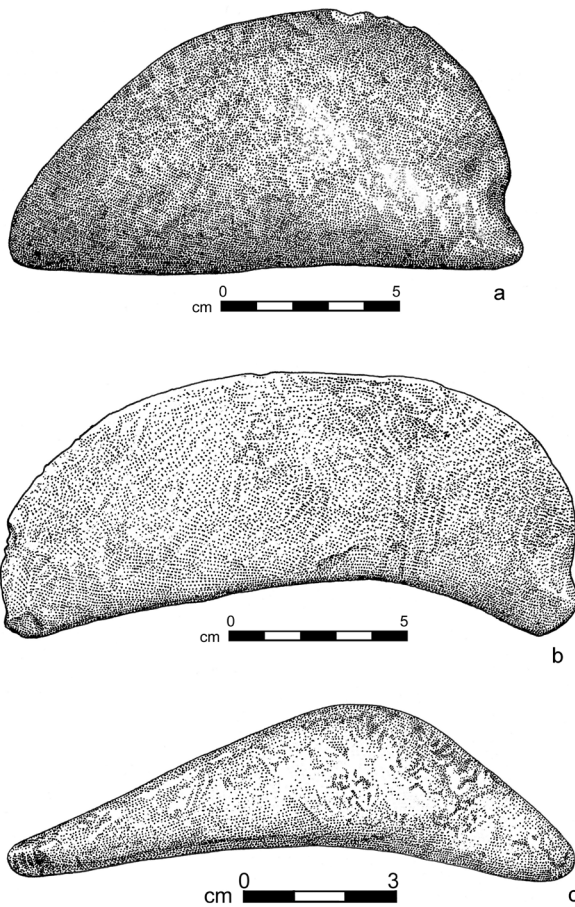


Figure 1. Dolphin effigies curated with the Point Vicente Interpretive Center.

It weighs 283 g. The side shown in Figure 1a bulges distinctly outward. The opposite surface (Figure 2) is nearly uniformly flat.

Another salient “beak” appears on the light grayish-white, Altamira shale effigy shown in Figure 1b. As with the previous beaked specimen (Figures 1a, 2), this piece exhibits a curved upper border, but of somewhat lower elevation. Whereas the Figure 1a/2 artifact has a relatively straight lower border, the effigy of Figure 1b possesses a lower border whose curve complements the artifact’s upper margin, thus communicating the posture of a dolphin leaping out of the water.

The edge of the effigy’s upper curve was ground thin, giving it a sharp feel, while the curved lower border has a flat surface (see Figure 3). Overall, the specimen has a somewhat two dimensional look for its thinness; maximum thickness is a mere 18.2 mm. It is 160.8 mm long, and height measures 76.1 mm. It weighs 243 g.

No beak-like device adorns what is yet another effigy fashioned of Altamira shale (Figures 1c, 4, 5). Crafted very smoothly on all surfaces, it was shaped to effect a pleasing symmetry. Although of conventionalized



Figure 2. Opposite side of dolphin effigy shown in Figure 1a.



Figure 3. Lower edge of dolphin effigy shown in Figure 1b.



Figure 4. Side and bottom view of dolphin effigy illustrated in Figure 1c.



Figure 5. Bottom view of dolphin effigy illustrated in Figure 1c.

style, the effigy easily evokes a small cetacean launched above the ocean.

The artifact's surface shows a tan patina. Some small amount of rodent gnawing reveals lighter coloration for Altamira material that is also referred to locally as both Palos Verdes stone and flagstone.

Unlike the two previously described effigies, this artifact is proportionally wide, maximum width being 30.6 mm. Its curved bottom border has a flat surface (Figures 4 and 5). Maximum length is 110.7 mm, maximum height is 34.6 mm, and weight is 105 g. Parenthetically, the artifact bears palpable similarity to a soapstone, or steatite, effigy that Bill and Edith Wallace (1974:62, Figure 1c) took to represent a dolphin (see also Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2012:71, Figure 31c).

A Whale-like Manuport

Figure 6 shows a manuport retrieved from an unnamed site by an anonymous relic collector. Its whale-like appearance results from its general morphology, particularly when exhibited in plan view, which allows observation of both an eye-like element and a mouth-like element. There is no "eye" on the opposite side, and the "mouth" on the other side is not quite as distinctive. There is no evidence of human workmanship on this (basalt?) object. Its general shape and features are indubitably the outcome solely of natural (rather than cultural) forces, and the object was almost certainly retrieved for its resemblance to some kind of cetacean.

Maximum length is 119.9 mm, maximum height is 43.7 mm, and maximum width is 46.0 mm. This whale-like manuport weighs 307 g.

Parenthetically, the manuport's shape is reminiscent of an effigy drawn by Steven Bowers (see Benson 1997:34, Figure 2.7, second from top). The PVIC manuport also resembles an effigy from the Malibu

site (CA-LAN-264) (see Gamble et al. 1996:Figure 7e).

A whale-like sandstone manuport from CA-ORA-58, which became technically an artifact when its surfaces were decorated with incised lines, appears in Koerper and Desautels-Wiley (2012:65, Figure 25a). Also, a recent *PCAS Quarterly* issue contains an article on a whole-body, cetacean-like manuport from CA-ORA-106/219, the Bonita Mesa site (Koerper and Cramer 2012b).

A Possible Dorsal Fin Effigy

It has been proposed (see Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2012; Koerper and Cramer 2012a) that certain objects shaped somewhat like isosceles triangles in plan view and comparatively thin were fashioned to stand for cetacean dorsal fins. An example of an elongated, slightly curvilinear isosceles-shaped effigy is illustrated in Figure 7. Unfortunately, it too is without provenance, and the artifact's material is of no help since light tan siltstone is found all along the coastal zone of the Los Angeles Basin.

Purposeful shaping of this 142 g artifact is evident along its edges. It is 138.1 mm long, and maximum width is 57.9 mm. Maximum thickness measures 11.2 mm.

Toward the artifact's flattened bottom end there are short, somewhat parallel striations. These are not decoration but reflect only the gopher's habit of gnawing to wear down incisors.

Two Small Cetacean Effigies from the Malaga Cove Site

Relic collector Thomas Tower I (see Koerper et al. 2014; Koerper and Peterson 2014) unearthed the two comparatively realistic cetacean effigies shown in Figure 8. He referred to the carving that displays a dorsal

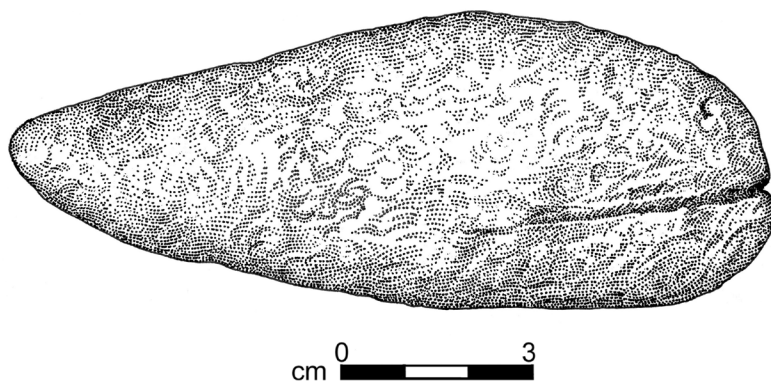


Figure 6. Whale-like manuport curated with the Point Vicente Interpretive Center.

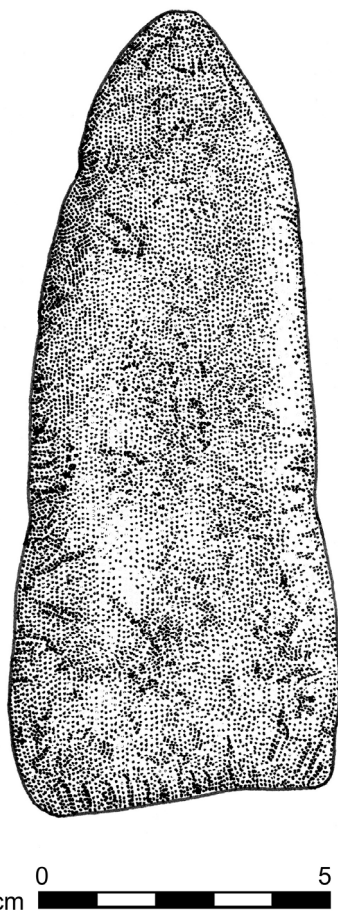


Figure 7. Possible dorsal fin effigy curated with the Point Vicente Interpretive Center.

fin (Figure 8a) as a “porpoise charm.” Tower (1942) explained that in the late 1930s he was investigating the contents of a “large slide of earth” that had ended up well below the bluff at Malaga Cove on a rocky projection. The “black Indian soil” filled up cracks in the rocky shelf. He referred to the retrieved objects collectively as “Find No. 1,” and obviously this does not qualify as a feature. The soil description suggests that Tower was referring to what Edwin Walker identified as the Malaga Cove site’s Level 2. Walker (1937:213–214, 1951:51) characterized Level 2 soils as fire-blackened sand that was almost solidified by camp debris.

Tower listed only the “perfect pieces”; they include: one 14 in x 15 in (ca. 36 cm x ca. 38 cm) metate; three “plain” pestles; eight manos; nine hammer stones; three chipping hammers; one double-holed paint mortar (each hole, 2.5 in [ca. 6.4 cm] in diameter); a steatite bowl (inside diameter 3 in [ca. 7.6 cm] and 2 in [ca. 5.1 cm] deep); a donut stone; a steatite shaft straightener; three knives; five arrow points; three “ceremonial” arrow points; six flint drills; a large scraper; three “digging” rocks; a “bolo” rock; five war club heads (“pointed at both ends”); three pendants (two steatite, one slate); one “spindle whorl shaped doughnut”; 12 small, finely made pieces of a “shaman’s outfit”; and two steatite “charms,” one being the “porpoise” and the other being a “seal charm,” which is best observed in Koerper et al.

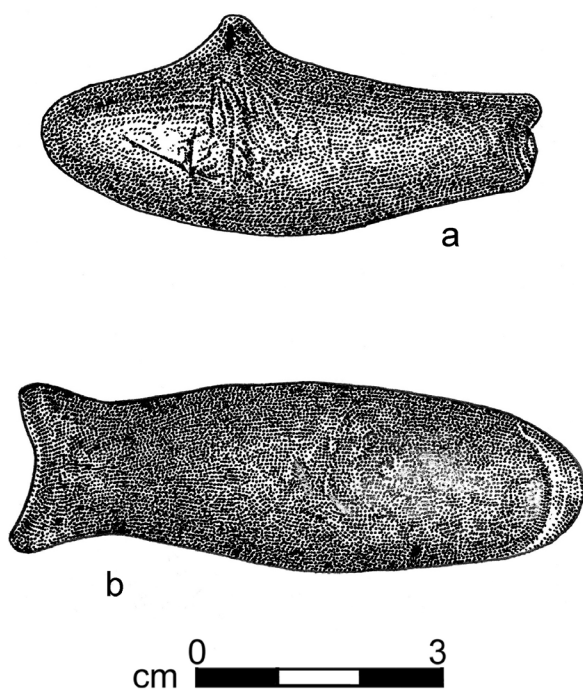


Figure 8. Steatite cetacean effigies from the Malaga Cove site found by Thomas Tower I. (a) Tower called this a “porpoise charm”; (b) Tower called this a “whale charm.” After photographs provided by Thomas Tower III.

(2014:25, Figure 4, center of Riker-like display).

Thomas Tower III, grandson of Thomas Tower I, provided the authors with photographs of the porpoise effigy as well as its measurements—60 mm long and 14 mm at its widest. Height was not measured, and the specimen was not weighed.

Among the artifacts of Tower’s “Find No. 3,” there was found what the relic collector called his “whale charm” (Figure 8b). “Find No. 3,” or “The Sunken Dwelling of the Chumash,” also was referred to as the “headquarters of importance.” In this *PCAS Quarterly* double-issue, Koerper and Cramer note the artifacts from “Find No. 3” listed by Tower (1942) (see also Koerper et al. 2014:30–31). The feature was associated with Walker’s (1937, 1951) Level 2, and thus it may be assignable to one of the later phases of the Del Rey Tradition (3500–150 BP). The arrival, divergence,

and development of the Gabrielino in southern California constitutes the essence of Sutton’s (2010) Del Rey Tradition concept.

Tower’s manuscript gave no measurement for the “whale charm,” but length (3 in) was provided elsewhere (T. Tower to E. Walker, letter, 5 February 1941, Edwin F. Walker notebook, Braun Research Library, Autry National Center, Los Angeles). Grandson Thomas Tower III measured its length (70 mm) and its width (22 mm). The artifact was not weighed.

Concluding Remarks

It appears that whole-body cetacean effigies became symbols in regional worldview at some period during the Del Rey Tradition. We are unfamiliar with any specimen of such attributed to Middle Holocene or Early Holocene contexts. Thus, we suppose that the three Altamira shale specimens without site provenance and the single manuport are probably from the Palos Verdes Peninsula. These items along with the two Malaga Cove steatite artifacts are all reasonably placed within the Del Rey Tradition.

Artifacts that are similar in varying degrees to the specimen shown in Figure 7 are purported to have evoked dorsal fin imagery (Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2012; Koerper and Cramer 2012). Most such objects occur clearly in Del Rey Tradition contexts.

The recognition of yet another whale-like manuport should effectively address the concerns of skeptics who have questioned whether any natural objects had been retrieved and carried back to villages or camps for their resemblance to any kind of marine mammal. The descriptions and discussions of the two beaked cetacean effigies (Figures 1a, 1b, 2) also address certain skeptics’ concerns regarding whether a purported dolphin effigy seen in Koerper et al. (2014:23, Figure 3) had actually communicated cetacean imagery. That artifact possesses a beak, but the protrusion is

comparatively subtle, prompting skepticism from those who have not actually handled the piece. The Altamira shale carvings together with the earlier published effigy just noted would seem to identify an artistic device (modeled beak) and thus establish a pattern to set off at least some beaked dolphin representations from other cetacean mimics. Of course, some representations standing for the beaked animals were not artistically equipped with the telltale protrusion.

Acknowledgments

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