

55. A Steatite Dish and a Fragmentary Stone Pipe
from Butte County, California

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During the early part of 1956, a site on the Garst Ranch, about one-quarter mile east of the Sacramento River, at a point one and one-half miles south of the Tehama-Butte County line, was leveled as part of an extensive agricultural operation in the area. Mr. Perry Garst, at the time of leveling, recovered numerous artifacts from the midden deposit. These were mostly mortars and pestles, but among the collection were also some shell beads and ornaments, fragments of a steatite dish and of a fine-grained sandstone pipe.

Subsequently, the latter two artifacts and one abalone ornament were kindly donated to the University of California by Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Garst of Oakland and their son, Mr. Perry Garst of Vina, California. The artifacts have been placed in the collection of the Museum of Anthropology at the University.

A visit to the destroyed site by the writer confirmed the expectation, based on the artifact types, that the soil of the site, which was dark, friable, and "greasy," was like that of many other sites in the region from which artifacts of the Late Horizon of Central California have been recovered. The classification of the site, henceforth designated as But-59, as Late Horizon can of course only be tentative. The shell beads have not so far been seen by any archaeologist, and in any case the conditions under which all the artifacts were recovered were not such as to lead to accurate determinations of the depths in the mound at which they occurred. Neither Middle Horizon nor definite historic artifacts have yet been reported from the site. The shell ornament, of *Haliotis rufescens*, is of type C.l.a. This type occurs most frequently in Late Horizon sites, though it probably has been derived from the antecedent Middle Horizon (Lillard, Heizer and Fenega, 1939, p. 79).

The steatite dish and the tubular sandstone pipe appear to be unique types of specimens for any part of Central or Northern California. Tubular stone pipes were in such wide use in California in both pre- and post-Contact times that exact enumeration of their occurrence would be out of place here. Among the many occurrences, however, no example has so far been noted of a sandstone pipe which attains the length of the But-59 specimen (Fig. 3b; UCMA No. 1/142847). Dixon (1905, p. 317) describes a steatite pipe with a length of 20 cm. This was used by a Northern Maidu ceremonial clown and "has a peculiar form and is larger than other peoples." Loud (1918, p. 366) describes a steatite pipe with a length of 24 cm. from the Gunther Island site (Hum-67). In the State Indian Museum, Sacramento, California, are at least three steatite pipes which exceed 33 cm. in length. These are marked simply "Sacramento Valley, prehistoric" (personal communication with F. A. Riddell, Curator).

Although the But-59 pipe is not complete, its length in the broken state is 29 cm.; it probably had a maximum diameter of 41 mm., which is shown on the intact lip of the "bowl." The broken end has a diameter of 35 mm. The base or mouthpiece end is not present, hence neither the total length of the specimen, type of base, nor type of drilling, i.e., whether drilled from one or both ends, can be known.

So far as can be determined from the broken specimen the hole has been drilled from the bowl end, which has a maximum inside diameter or flare measuring 32 mm. The hole tapers to a diameter of about 18 mm. at a point 20 mm. from the bowl end, and the diameter at the opposite, broken end is 14 mm. A high degree of workmanship is displayed by the smoothness and symmetry of the hole and raises but does not answer the question of the type of implement and technique used in drilling the hole.

The almost brick-red appearance of the fine-grained sandstone from which the pipe was manufactured is not altered in the bowl or at any other spot by signs of burning such as would be produced by tobacco, for example. In any case the size and excellent finish of the specimen suggest a ceremonial use, which would not necessarily imply a smoking practice. On the other hand, it is possible that the pipe was used only occasionally for smoking, and that evidence of this simply has been worn away on the inside of the bowl and stem since the pipe was broken or discarded.

The steatite* dish (Fig. 3a; UCMA No. 142846) is 26 cm. long and 23.5 cm. wide; it is ovoid in outline. The thickness of the steatite is 9 mm. at the center of the specimen—this increases to a maximum of 25 mm. at about 45 mm. from the sharply tapered outer edge of the specimen. The height of the vessel is variable, but averages about 46 mm.

Few complete steatite vessels have been reported from archaeological sites in Central or Northern California. Specimens of varying degrees of shallowness are known chiefly from the ethnographic record, for example, among the Miwok (Barrett and Gifford, 1933, p. 211), the Northern Maidu (Dixon, 1905, p. 138), the Shasta (Dixon, 1907, p. 392), groups on the Northwest Coast (Driver, 1939, p. 388). Kroeber (1925, Pl. 16) illustrates a small steatite vessel with a handle-like protrusion at one end, from the Yurok; this specimen is not unlike a fragmentary one recovered by the UCAS from an archaeological site in Shasta territory.

Although Dixon's Shasta specimens are described as being "not over thirty or forty centimeters long" and could thus include the But-59 specimen so far as size only is concerned, there is no mention in his account of any other account known to the writer of the sub-annular ridge or boss which runs around the inside of the latter specimen. This ridge is about 11 mm. wide and 6 mm. high; its outline is nearly circular, measuring 16.5 cm. and 15.5 cm. in long and short diameters respectively.

It is possible that this ridge represents an attempt at reinforcement or strengthening of the vessel. On the other hand, the vessel is of such

* Actually, the material is a talcy schist, with heavy chlorite inclusions.

sturdy construction anyway that the ridge would seem superfluous for this purpose. If the ridge were for decorative purposes, it might be surmised that the specimen was manufactured during early historic times, and an attempt made to imitate the form of a dish used by Caucasian settlers. Certainly the vessel, though it has the ridge on the upper rather than the lower side, as in a conventional porcelain type dish of European manufacture, resembles the latter in general appearance.

Unfortunately, however, nothing is known of the historic background of the site. Even the linguistic boundaries are not well defined in the region. Probably the classification by Kroeber (1932, p. 266) as Valley Maidu territory is closest to actuality. If this territory were indeed occupied by a group with Maidu affiliations, it must be noted that neither the pipe nor the steatite vessel resemble in detail the types described by Dixon for the Northern Maidu. From the available evidence it is possible only to conclude that the two specimens described here are unique representatives of a prehistoric, most likely Late Horizon, culture. It is regrettable that more scientific information is not available concerning the site from which the specimens were recovered, or for that matter, from any other site in the immediate vicinity.

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