

13. OBSERVATIONS ON THE SCULPTURED STONE FETISHES IN ANIMAL FORM
DISCOVERED ON SAN NICOLAS ISLAND (CALIFORNIA).

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Among the numerous objects which we collected on San Nicolas Island during the course of our mission in California, there is nothing which has been found of more interest, in our eyes, than the stone fetishes in animal form which we here describe and illustrate.

These are certainly the products of the rudest of art forms. These works of sculpture are even inferior to those of the Mound Builders and various Indian nations such as the Makah, Haida, Kolosh (Tlinkit) etc. who live further north on the American coast of the Pacific. They have neither the naive, but remarkable reality in attitude and expression of the former, nor the strange whimsical² spirit of the latter. But still they show, as with the unknown Niminokotch² sculptor, a certain deftness of craftsmanship which deserves their ethnographic notice.

Among the fetishes, and quite numerous in our collection, those which represent cetaceans are particularly remarkable.

The countenance of the species has been caught often; the Californian artist has at times even succeeded in reproducing the character of the great sea mammals exactly enough so as to permit the specific identification of the animals he has represented.

We confess however, that of these fetishes, those which appear to be least imperfect, are not, from our point of view, the most interesting. There are others which at first seem to be only plain little bits of stone of no importance and which at first appear as unremarkable. These latter actually permit us to give an exact account of the progress of a piece of Indian work, and to follow the evolution of an artistic idea among the San Nicolas islanders.

When we found the small triangular piece of steatite, which we show here in fig. 26 (our Pl. 2A), we were far from questioning its significance. Actually, nothing could lead us to suppose that this fragment might be the schema, or, if one prefers, the embryo of a statue of a cetacean.

We shall even add that when, a few seconds later, we collected near the small triangular piece, the serpentine object which is shown in fig. 27 (our Pl. 2B), the notch which supports one of the angles aroused in us no idea whatsoever as to what to attribute it. Quite aware of the fact that archaeology must disdain nothing, and that since the smallest debris, the crudest thing, may bear the print of human hands, and must be scrupulously collected, we were careful not to throw away our little stones, and we were right, since what we had considered first an insignificant work, proved to represent a first rough-draft of a California sculptor.

1. See "Notes" at end of article.

The next morning, we actually came across, heaped up beside a male skeleton, twenty more or less well executed stone animals, and a medicinal or witchcraft pipe also of stone. The clue to the enigma was found, since among these objects was found one of triangular form, like those aforementioned, but on which the work had gone far enough so that one could easily recognize the mouth, the spout, the eye, the gibbosity, the pectoral fins and the caudal fin of a whale of which it would be temeritous to venture to give a specific classification.

Three other killer-whales, all of steatite, like the one we have just mentioned make part of our collection of fetishes from San Nicolas. They will be found illustrated in figs. 29, 30, and 31 (our Pl. 2 E, D, F). We call especial attention to the third; the groove on this statuette which separates the head from the rest of the body was undoubtedly intended to hold a suspension cord, which signifies unquestionably the intended use of this object and of similar ones.

These killer-whales are not easier to classify than the preceding ones, but it seems probable that one of them belongs to the species rectipinna Cope. The specific classification may take on more strictness where they concern the cetaceans of the genera Lagenorhynchus, Rachianectes, and Balaena.

Fig. 32 (our Pl. 2 G) actually seems quite likely to represent the Lagenorhynchus obliquidens Gill, Striped or common porpoise of which M. Scammon gives a good picture, in his remarkable work on the mammals of the Northwest Coast.³

We easily recognize the cetacean, which is quite well fashioned, in fig. 37 (our Pl. 2 L), as Rachianectes glaucus Cope, or the California Gray Whale which M. Scammon also represents in his book.

Finally the little whale, shown in profile and from above in figs. 33 and 34 (our Pl. 2 H, I), could be no other than Balaena Sibboldii Gray.

All the pieces of which we are about to speak, except one, the second (our Pl. 2 K), are carved from a kind of compact talc, which offers a variety of appearances. But we have encountered in the strata other rough drafts of animals, either from clayey schists, such as the attempt at a whale which shown opposite (our Pl. 2 J), or from ferruginous clays, and those which represent the two unspecified fish shown below (our Pl. 2 M-P).

Placed alongside the fish and whales in our excavation were several rudimentarily fashioned birds, the true nature of which it would have been quite impossible for us to discover if the Indians to whom we showed our finds had not assured us without hesitation that these simple and conventionalized forms represented in sculpture of the inhabitants of the air.

If one glances at the reproductions of some of the pajaritos (small birds) of San Nicolas Island (our Pl. 2 Q-S), one can understand very quickly why it is quite impossible to tell which group they might belong to.

Now indeed, they show themselves to be in the form of prisms or irregular cylinders, with an enlarged base, and more or less deeply notched at the top in the manner of a beak; now they disguise themselves in the shape of a slab hollowed out laterally on the higher half, and bearing at the top on one of the faces a transverse groove which leaves a cushion thicker than the rest of the piece

representing the head, whereas on the other face two vertical grooves, placed symmetrically on the side of the lower half, are supposed to represent the wings (our Pl. 2 Q-U).

A third type which we have not shown at all, and which one would easily enough take to be a representation of some pelican, is remarkable for the development of the portion of the piece which corresponds to the head and beak.

Note in passing that one of our slab-shaped birds bears near the top, the beginnings of two perforations, which again show the intended use which we attribute to the group of stones, worked by our San Nicolas magician.

One might perhaps regard those of our fetishes which are shown in figures 47 to 51 (our Pl. 2 V-Z), as figures of mammals. Instead of being shown from the posterior view, the lateral reliefs corresponding to the wings, these on the contrary show their relief in a more likely manner, turned toward the front, and could therefore represent arms. One can see on the end surface which represents the head, projections of varied appearance, but which really seem to have as an object the representation of a face, in spite of their more or less unelaborated character.

Why did our magician choose these forms more than others? Why did he choose to copy the whales, birds and mammals which we have just presented to the reader?

Perhaps it is in the ancient myths of the country that one would find the reason for these preferences. And their examination undoubtedly would aid in specific diagnoses which we have offered in this short work.

Actually we know from the preserved accounts from the last survivors of the southern Californian tribes, that together with whales, various birds and several mammals played very important roles in the local cosmogony and ethnogeny.⁴ In these myths, among the birds, one finds the eagle, and the coyote figures among the mammals. Would it not be images of eagles and coyotes which the Niminokotch artist would have wished to consecrate?

NOTES

1. Translated and reprinted from the original article entitled "Observations sur des fétiches de pierre sculptés en forme d'animaux découverts à l'île de San Nicolas (Californie)." Revue d'ethnographie, Vol. 1, pp. 30-40, 1882. The translation is by Mrs. Nancy E. Heizer, and the illustrations have been redrawn by Mrs. R. Bendix. The notes are by R. Heizer.
2. The word "Niminokotch" which appears here and in the last sentence of the article, is the Ventureño Chumash name for the Indians of San Nicolas Island. This identification occurs in the (unpublished) A. Pinart vocabulary constituting manuscript no. 34988 in the Bancroft Library, University of California.
3. Cessac here refers to C. M. Scammon. The Marine Mammals of the Northwestern Coast of North America Described and Illustrated; together with an account of the American whale fishery. San Francisco, 1874.
4. Cessac probably is referring here to the well known account of the Chinichin religion written by Fr. Boscana at San Juan Capistrano sometime between 1812 and 1826. It is most readily accessible in English in the Smithsonian Institution Miscellaneous Collections, Vol. 92, No. 4, 1934, Publ. No. 3255, the translation by J. P. Harrington. Harrington seems unduly secretive about his "discovery" of the "long lost Boscana original" treatise, and does not state where he discovered it or where it now resides. This "mystery" can be easily solved by a minimum knowledge of the anthropological literature. Thus, A. Morel-Fatio, Catalogue des manuscrits espagnols et des manuscrits portugais. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, 1892 lists, (p. 359), "No. 677. Relacion historica de la creencia, usos, costumbres, y extravagancias de los Indios de esta mision de S. Juan Capistrano, llamada la nacion Acagchemen, por el R. P. Gerónimo Boscana, misionero francisco en la Alta California, 1812-1822." The list further states, "Ce manuscrit a appartenu à Pinart; voir le Catalogue Pinart, No. 130. Papier. 31 feuillets. 184 mm. sur 152. XIXe siècle (Classement de 1860, No. 467; acquis en 1884." This statement would lead one to seek reference to Pinart's connection with the Boscana manuscript, and this occurs in an easily located article by E. T. Hamy, "Rapport sur la mission de MM. Pinart et de Cessac dans les deux Amériques", Archiv des Miss. Scientif. et Litt., 3e. ser., Vol. 9, pp. 323-332, 1882, where, on p. 329 it is stated that Cessac at Santa Barbara, "il se procure la texte inédit de Boscana, si précieux pour l'ethnographie, la linguistique, etc. de la tribu de San Juan Capistrano." Other accounts of this expedition to California and Peru are contained in an article by L. de Cessac "Rapport sur une mission au Pérou et en Californie." Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Littéraires, Ser. 3, Vol. 9, pp. 333-344, 1882, and in a note by Hamy in Revue d'Ethnographie, Vol. 1, p. 346, 1882. Cessac (op. cit., p. 341) says of his search of the archives of Santa Barbara Mission, "Je pus en outre me procurer un manuscrit original du père Boscana, missionnaire de l'ancienne mission de San-Juan Capistrano, manuscrit tres précieux pour l'ethnographie, la linguistique, etc. de cette contrée."

That the Boscana original is still in Paris is attested by my colleague, Professor John H. Rowe who, with Dr. Edwin H. Carpenter Jr. of the Huntington

Library, saw it there not over 5 years ago. Dr. Carpenter, it is hoped, will publish an exact copy of the original document from the microfilm copy which he possesses. Harrington gives us only his translation of the document but promises separate publication of notes on the Boscana manuscript. These notes are still being awaited, along with the "complete" archaeological report on the Burton Mound at Santa Barbara promised in Harrington's Burton Mound catalogue (1928).

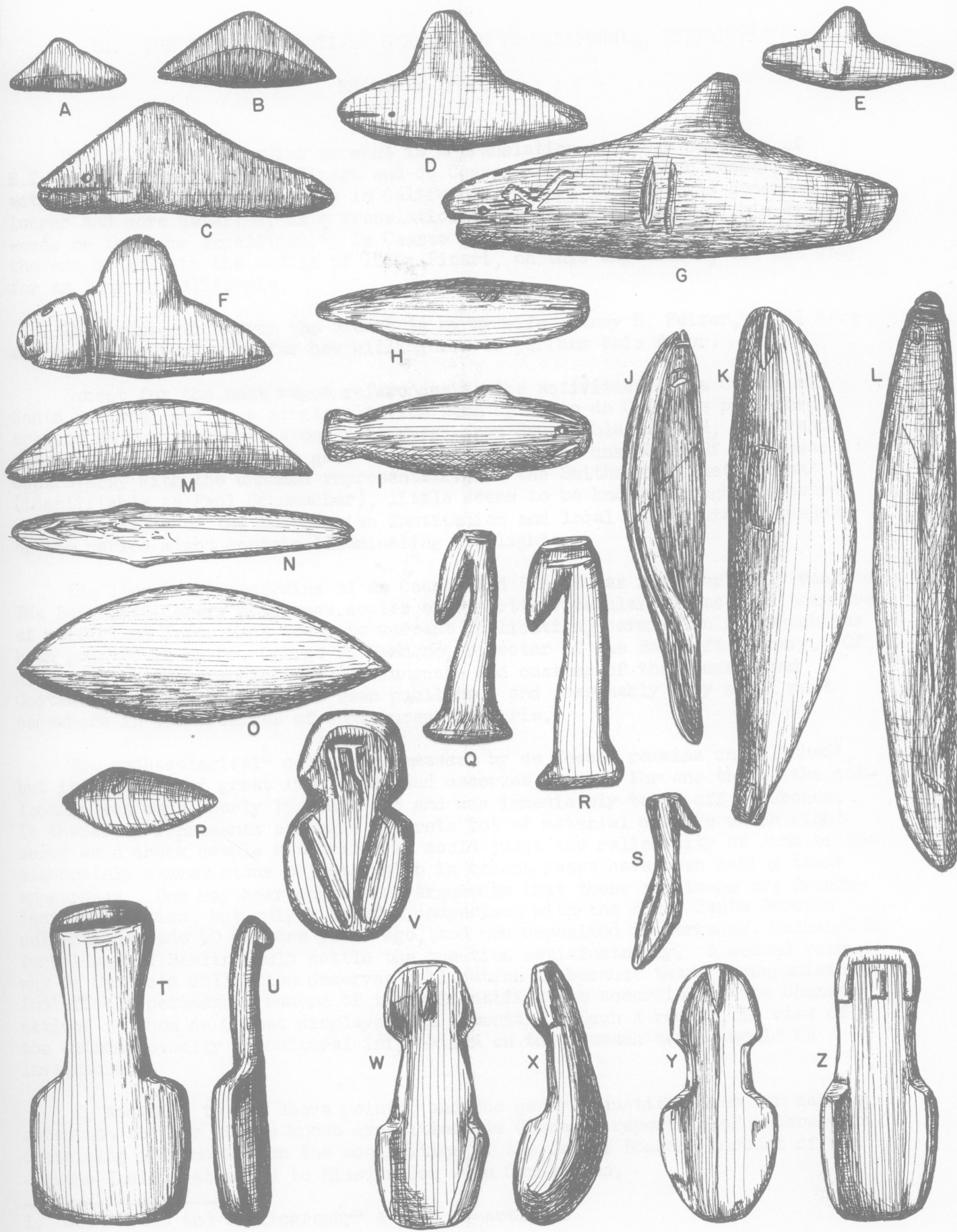


Plate I.

Stone "Fetishes" from San Nicolas Island