

## 52. A Decorated Stone Implement from

Mono County, California

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In August, 1955, during an archaeological reconnaissance conducted by the Archaeological Survey of a portion of the West Walker River region, south of Coleville, California, an unusual artifact, a fragmentary decorated mano-like implement was recovered from a site which has since been designated Mno-367 in the files of the UCAS. The site does not appear to be different essentially from many other sites in the region, i.e., there is no midden deposit evident, and the chief characteristic is the presence of profuse obsidian chippage lying scattered over its surface. Some of the chips are artifacts, projectile points or blades, in various stages of completion. This situation gives rise to the assumption that the site was a chipping station for hunting tools, and perhaps a camp spot for hunters as well.

A small intermittent stream (dry in August, 1955) at one edge of the area of concentration of chippage could certainly have been used aboriginally during the early summer by the temporary inhabitants of the site. It is possible also that this stream has been subject to late-summer drying only in recent years, and that the period of occupation of the site originally could have continued through most of the summer. The altitude of the site (7300 feet) would seemingly favor summer occupation if water were available, although no sites were noted or reported on Hot Creek, a permanent stream about one-half mile south of Mno-367.

Grinding implements at the site, represented by the incised specimen described here and one large flat granite boulder with three shallow (ca. 3 cm. deep) mortar or metate depressions on its upper surface, presumably were used for seed-grinding. No piñon (Pinus monophylla) was observed within useful distance, e.g. several miles, of Mno-367, and wild grasses at or near the site probably were not abundant enough to require anything but a mere token assemblage of grinding implements.

The decorated specimen (UCMA No. 1-142680) is fragmentary (see fig. 1e, f)—it is about one half of the original specimen, broken longitudinally. Present measurements are 17 cm. in length and 7.8 cm. in thickness, across the break at the center of the specimen. The material is fine grained basalt, and one of the sides or faces shows definite smoothing, indicating use as a mano; one end, however, is roughly shaped in the form of a pestle which shows little sign of use. The simple, geometric incising probably was executed with a hard stone tool; it consists mostly of encircling, longitudinal, and diagonal lines of fairly uniform depth (ca. 1 mm). One of the longitudinal lines does not seem to be part of the decorative scheme. It is deeper than the other lines (ca. 2 mm.) and shows signs of additional wear. It might have served some practical

purpose, as a sharpening groove, for example, for pointed bone or stone implements. If colored pigment had ever been rubbed into any of the incisions, all traces of it have by now been obliterated.

It is not the intent of this paper to suggest that the Mono County specimen has a specific relationship to other decorated stone objects, such as incised tabular shaped stones or pebbles, which occur fairly commonly in California and the Great Basin. However, since a generic similarity does exist between the incised designs on the latter and the Mno-367 specimen, the following outline is presented:

- (1) Examples of occurrences in California west of the Sierra Nevada:

Treganza, Smith and Weymouth, 1950, p. 17.  
Pilling, 1952, p. 170.  
Riddell, 1951, p. 22.

- (2) Known occurrences in that portion of California lying in the Great Basin:

Inyo County (Panamint Mts.): Lathrap and Meighan, 1951,  
p. 24.  
Inyo County (Owens Valley): Steward, 1933, p. 275.  
Inyo and/or San Bernardino Counties - "Amargosa Culture":  
Rogers, 1939, p. 63.  
Lassen County: Pilling, this Report, p. 6.

It should be noted that all of the Great Basin specimens cited above are tabular in form; the Amargosa and Owens Valley specimens were undoubtedly ornamental pendants and the Panamint Mountains and Lassen County specimens also might have served the same purpose. It is clear that the Mno-367 specimen was not meant to be a decorative pendant.

Pilling (Ibid., p. 6) has suggested the possibility of the relationship or parallelism between decorative motifs on small tabular stones and large petroglyphs. It is apparent in the Mno-367 specimen that if the design were derived from a decorative motif in another medium, that medium would almost certainly be basketry.

In the opinion of the writer, the Mno-367 specimen was either acquired elsewhere as a trade piece, or was originally shaped and incised locally, perhaps to serve as a ceremonial object. This might partially explain the pestle shape at one end: shaped pestles so far have not been noted in this region (Meighan, 1955, p. 13). After the specimen was broken, it retained a shape that suggested further usefulness, and thus was employed subsequently as a mano, perhaps in conjunction with the bedrock grinding stone at the site, the holes of which were not yet deep enough to require even such a point for grinding as offered by an unshaped pestle.

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