59. An Extraordinary Central California Burial in Marin County

Eduardo Contreras

In the records of the University of California Archaeological Survey it is not unusual to encounter reports of burials which are unaccompanied by any grave goods whatever. Although the majority of the burials have associated with them such objects as obsidian projectile points, bone awls, or shell beads and ornaments, these artifacts, except for shell beads, seldom are found in any large quantity with any individual burial. When a burial which contains few or no shell beads, but which has over 100 of any other type of specimen is found, it is indeed a rare event.

During the excavation by the Department of Anthropology of site Mrn-266, on Tomales Bay in 1940, a burial (Burial 13) was excavated which had the following artifacts in close and definite association: obsidian implements or ornaments (121 specimens); bone implements (49 specimens); mica ornaments (160 specimens); quartz crystal (1 specimen). The skeleton lay in a semi-flexed position; powdered red ochre was present throughout the grave. Three other skeletons were thought to be associated with Burial 13 in a multiple burial, as indicated by their common occurrence in the sub-shell gravelly midden, the relative positions of the bones, and by the sharing of certain traits (powdered red ochre and one of the subtypes of the unique obsidian implements or ornaments) between Burial 13 and one of the other burials: No. 15.

So far as is known, this is the richest burial, from the standpoint of abundance of associated artifacts other than beads, ever to be discovered in a Central California archaeological site. Although this particular burial has been partially described or referred to by Beardsley in several publications (e.g. 1948, p. 13; 1954 passim) and in one manuscript (UCAS Ms. 116), this paper is an effort to bring all of the information together under one title.

Of the 26 other burials, including the three possibly associated with Burial 13 recovered from the site during the 1940 excavation and that of the following year, not one even approached Burial 13 in volume of artifacts. It is not known why one burial in a mass burial of four should contain such a disproportion of what are obvious marks of honor or distinction. Burial 13 has been identified as that of a sub-adult female; Burials 15-17 were identified as of a mature adult male, an infant (sex not determined), and a sub-adolescent male (?) respectively. The distribution of sexes thus offers no clue to the nature of the burial ceremony, for example a burial of a chief or headman with his family might be inferred if the grave goods were predominantly associated with the mature male skeleton. A more concrete example of how the individual's role in life may be represented by the artifacts closely associated with a skeleton is seen vividly in a burial recovered in 1936 from the Bennett Mound, a site in the Sacramento Valley (Sac-16). Here were found associated with an unnumbered burial a quantity of charmstones (ca. 25), quartz crystals, stone pendants, small mortars with no paint remains, implying use in grinding of medicinal herbs, and other miscellaneous specimens such as have

been noted in shamans' kits in observations of historic groups (cf. Freeland, 1923, p. 60; see also Heizer and Krieger, 1956, p. 11). These specimens are in the collections of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of California. Although much of the data about the site cannot be cited here, it can be said without hesitation that all of the associated grave goods with the skeleton point to the burial of a shaman. An equivalent assertion cannot be made about the Mrn-266 burial. Beardsley (n.d.) rejects as useless at present any hints of comparison with girl's adolescence ceremonies or other ritual phenomena involving young women as the center of attraction.

Besides the unusual number of artifacts associated with Burial 13, to be noted are the unique types represented by certain of the specimens. Most unusual is the array of 113 obsidian blades or points which were found grouped around the skull (Fig. 5). Complete specimens range in length from 5.3 cm. to 13.6 cm. Estimated length of one obsidian specimen, flattish in cross-section with portions broken off at both ends, is 18 cm. The specimens may be divided into three subtypes, as follows: (1) bi-pointed, heavy (almost lozenge-shaped) in cross-section, with a slight constriction at one end (Fig. 6a), (2) type similar to (1), but with less well-defined constriction (Fig. 6b), (3) flattish in cross-section, with constriction at one end; this subtype tends to exhibit the greatest average length of the entire group, and the longest specimen (18 cm. estimate) is in this subtype.

Although it is conceivable that these specimens were manufactured originally for some utilitarian function such as drilling or sawing, the grouping about the skull suggests that they might originally or at some time during their period of use also have served as bangles, for example on an elaborate head costume. Marked evidence of wear is seen on about half of the specimens, regardless of subtype, on both long edges. It cannot be determined whether this wear was brought about by drilling of objects such as pipes of soft stone, by use as knives or saws (on bone objects?), or simply by long continued use as "tinklers" on a dancing costume, for example. If the latter were the real cause of the wear, then we can assume that the specimens are simply carefully reworked elaborations of the prismatic type "tinklers" which have been found so frequently in both the Coastal and Interior provinces of Central California (see Heizer, 1949, p. 24; Heizer [ed.], 1953, p. 264; Beardsley, 1954, p. 46). Supporting this assumption is the observation that some of the possibly reworked objects have remnants of a clouded surface attributable to burning, for the purpose perhaps of reducing the natural brittleness of the obsidian and to increase the ringing quality of a tinkling object. Such clouding on the surface is a common characteristic of the prismatic type of bangle, as used for example in historic times on certain small forms on dance skirts from Northwest California (Beardsley, 1954, p. 147).

Other noteworthy obsidian specimens associated with Burial 13 were a stemmed projectile point (Fig. 6c), a reel-shaped eccentric (Fig. 6d), and three curved eccentrics, one example of which is shown in Fig. 6e. The curved eccentrics are decidedly different in form from the specimens referred to as "Stockton curves" (Schenck and Dawson, 1929, p. 371) but may have been used for a similar purpose, probably ceremonial. Whatever the purpose of these eccentric specimens and the stemmed projectile point as well, all are worn down to the same kind of dull edge that is exhibited by the putative

bangles already described. In summary, all of the obsidian specimens taken together suggest elements of a hood or some type of cloak placed around the head of the person to be buried. If this were actually the case, we may find the occurrence of a basically similar trait at site CCo-146, in the delta region of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Rivers. At the latter site bone pins or rods apparently were used on a cape or mat of some kind to cover the skulls of two separate burials (Cook and Elsasser, 1956, p. 36). The bone pins, however, remained in place directly over the facial bones of the skull, while the obsidian specimens of Mrn-266 were grouped under and around, but not covering the skull, which, it may be noted, was not intact when found. The disturbance to the skull could have been related to a possible displacement of the obsidian artifacts, but it is more likely that if the obsidian pieces were attached to a mat of some sort this was of a type that did not cover the entire head, i.e. was not designed originally to cover the face. The wear on a large number of the specimens might indicate either that they were previously used on some kind of garment which allowed the obsidian pieces lightly to strike against each other to produce a tinkling sound, or that a portion of the specimens at least were carried around together as talismans in a container in which they rubbed against each other and thus had their edges evenly dulled.

Placed near the left shoulder of Burial 13 was the greater part of the total of 49 bone implements or ornaments found with the skeleton. The majority of these artifacts, not including a pair of bird-bone whistles, are spatulate, pointed objects. Some of them might have served as basketry awls, though their relatively great length would suggest more accurately a use as hair pins or ornaments. As such they are not, with exceptions noted, essentially different from subtypes under the heading of types A1 or A2 of Gifford (1940, pp.161, 200). Some of the specimens are made from mammal long bones, with the heads either partly worked down or entirely removed (types A1c and A1a respectively). One specimen (Fig. 6j), made from a mammal leg bone, has an opening measuring 20 mm. in diameter at one end. This opening is much larger than that of any of Gifford's type P: eyed dagger, awl, needle, gouge, etc. (op. cit., pp. 163, 217).

Several specimens, one of which is shown in Figure 6h, were made from mammal ribs and have forked ends. These are like Gifford's type O2: hair ornament (?) or head scratcher (Ibid., pp. 163, 217). Examples of this type have been found at Ellis Landing (CCo-295) on San Francisco Bay, by Nelson (1910, p. 304, pl. 46).

The complete bird-bone whistle (Fig. 6i) with hole in off-center position and on the concave side of the bone, probably is another clue to the Middle Horizon association of the burial (see Hammel, 1956, p. 50).

Ornaments of muscovite mica numbering about 160, all with the same general dimensions as the specimens shown here in Figure 6f, g, were located near the pelvis of the skeleton, in such a way as to suggest attachment to an apron or cloak as an armor-like covering. All are perforated (both conically and biconically drilled) approximately in the centers, though some have an additional perforation near the edge. These objects were the only distinctive ornament types found with the burial. Similar types of ornaments have been recovered from various San Francisco Bay shell mounds, e.g. Emeryville (Ala-309) and Ellis Landing (CCo-295) in Middle Horizon association (Schenck, 1926, p. 266; Nelson, 1910, p. 399).

Finally the occurrence of a quartz crystal and several quartz pebbles with the burial, while not startling for any Central California burial, at least adds another trait which serves to aid in relative dating of the burial.

The burial position (semi-flexed), indications of inclusion in a multiple burial, presence of powdered red ochre, mica ornaments and quartz crystals or pebbles are all fairly common traits which point to a Coastal Province Middle Horizon date for the burial (Beardsley, 1948, p. 9 ff). However, the relative dating of the burial is not the chief point in question here. The unusual number and nature of the artifacts found with the burial has introduced a problem in burial customs which can only be solved by the excavation, preferably in sites at some distance from Mrn-266, of burials with artifacts of similar types and numbers and perhaps indications of similar circumstances surrounding the ceremony, such as the placing of the artifacts en masse as garments or at least as discrete groups. Until such data are forthcoming, Burial 13 at Mrn-266 must stand as a unique occurrence in Central California.

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