

ON SHELL MOUNDS IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA*

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Some two miles north of the City Hall, Oakland, on the shore of the bay, are two conspicuous tumuli, which are composed of shells. They are situated on a low, level tract of alluvial land. On one of these, which is some 300 feet in diameter at base, the dwelling house of Mr. W. stands, surrounded with shrubbery. The shells are so much decayed on the surface, that plants and trees find perpetual moisture and grow without irrigation. A well 30 feet deep sunk in this ancient pile passed through a layer of shells 12 feet deep before the native black soil was reached. A vault dug 10 feet went through shells interspersed with layers of ashes and charcoal. Back and west of the house is a bold tumulus of more strength of feature. It is within a few yards of the shore of the bay; the shore or west side of the mound is thickly belted with willow trees. No deep exploration into this mound has been made, but it seems composed wholly of shells, a few animal bones, and occasional fragments of charcoal. It is 240 feet in diameter at the base and circular in shape, truncated at the summit, which is 150 feet in diameter. Without accurate measurement, it is estimated to be 35 to 40 feet high. From the north side runs an arm or a kind of pan-handle, 270 feet long, and originally 5 or 6 feet high. About two feet of the surface of this pan-handle has been scraped off by the proprietor of the land, to fill up a "pond hole" which lay immediately at the east side of it. A few human bones, and some mortars and pestles, were exhumed by the plow and scraper.

The mound now occupied for a dwelling-place is analogous to the kitchen-middens of Denmark. Not so with the neighboring tumulus, which evinces design. The pyramidal mound - represented in the accompanying sketch - cannot be looked upon as the result of accident. It is as shapely in outline as a well laid pile of brick or stone. Abbe Domenech, who spent seven years among the aboriginal inhabitants of the Pacific, says: "Indians do no special work for mere whim or pastime - they have a definite object in their labor." This mound bespeaks a similar sentiment. It conveys the idea that human hands gave it existence and figure, for a purpose. That purpose may have been for an oratory, for sacrificial customs, or feasts for the tribal chiefs.

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