

56. An Unusual Antler Zooform Club

From Northwestern California

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Distinctive polished slate monolithic zooform clubs sometimes referred to as "slavekillers" have been recovered in some numbers from the archaeological site on Gunther Island in Humboldt Bay, Humboldt County. These stone objects were discussed at some length by L. L. Loud (1918), and it was Loud who assigned the label "slavekiller" to the type.

On the British Columbia coast slaves were sometimes killed by their owners with a special club, and Loud seems to have assumed that this club was similar to those which he had excavated on Gunther Island. There is no evidence that the British Columbia coast slave-dispatching tool was like the animal-form stone clubs of northwestern California, and the implied function of the club is therefore almost certainly erroneous.

For reasons which will not be gone into here, it seems probable that the slate clubs of northwestern California were wealth items of the same general category as large obsidian blades and that such items were not used as everyday, casual tools.

The uniqueness of the present specimen is that it is the only known example made of elk (Cervus roosevelti) antler. The handle has been shaped and the two legs are artificially flattened and pointed. The animal's head could not, apparently, be fashioned from the main tine and this was simply cut off. (See Fig. 3c.)

It is clear that this specimen is a copy in a new material of the standard slate zooform club. Limitations in the natural form of the antler prevented a faithful reproduction, and this accounts for the absence of the head on the antler piece.

Such copying in different materials, while apparently a simple matter of technological transference, is nevertheless rare in California. From northwestern California we have one antler curved adze handle which obviously imitates the more common stone form, and from Central California there is the serrated arrow ground out of stone and the beautifully fashioned antler spearpoint described elsewhere in this Report.

On the whole one feels that there was a relatively unbending consistency or rigidity in prehistoric California Indian material culture which was the result of tradition, and which probably served to preserve the formal (and functional) aspects of material culture in conventional moulds.

The specimen now resides in the State Indian Museum, Sacramento. It bears the catalogue number WSW-336-7. Its provenience is Gunther Island.

Bibliography

- Loud, L. L.
1918 Ethnogeography and Archaeology of the Wiyot Territory. Univ. Calif. Publs. Amer. Arch. Ethnol., Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 202-422.