

ENGRAVED STONES OF ORANGE COUNTY

Constance Cameron
Department of Anthropology
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 93645

ABSTRACT

Engraved stone artifacts have been reported from all counties in Southern California, with the most elaborate coming from Chumash territory in the area of Santa Barbara and on the Channel Islands. Most of the information on the patterned artifacts from Orange County has heretofore been available only in unpublished manuscripts. This report will remedy that situation by describing many of the carved objects found during the past fifty years in Orange County. Illustrations and measurements of these artifacts are included.

INTRODUCTION

Engraved stone artifacts are occasionally found in archaeological sites throughout coastal Southern California. While the size, type of stone material, and design vary considerably, they should not be confused with the more commonly found "incised stones" which are obviously honing or sharpening instruments. The latter range from a few random lines to seemingly elaborate patterns, but the lines are not deeply cut.

Lee (1981) wrote a comprehensive study of the various motifs appearing on carved objects from coastal Southern California. While her main focus was on the Chumash culture area, she also included items from Gabrielino territory (Figure 1). Her book emphasizes the premise that designs on "portable art" (as opposed to pictographs and petroglyphs) are symbols which can give important insights into all phases of prehistoric life ways.

No artifacts from Orange County were included in this monumental work, possibly because so many site reports which describe these items remain unpublished, and thus unknown. This report corrects the problem by reproducing drawings and descriptions of some of the carved stone objects found during the past fifty years in Orange County.

NEW EXAMPLES FROM ORANGE COUNTY

Two of the finest examples of engraved stones were found in Orange County archaeological sites during the last two decades. The first, accession number 378-8022, was found on CA-Ora-378, a site which was tested by Orange Coast College archaeological field classes from 1975 to 1976. It was actually found on the surface, in a wash by the site. The location is less than four kilometers east of the Upper Newport Bay and approximately 10 km from the Pacific Ocean.



FIGURE 1 Some Southern California Cultural Groups. (after Lee 1981)

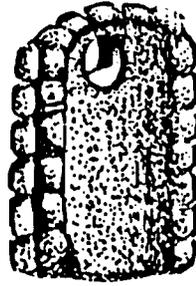


FIGURE 2 Ora-378 378-8022

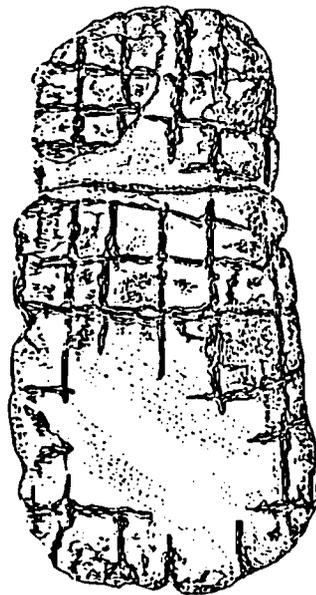


FIGURE 3 Ora-198 100-690

The object is slightly curved with a square pattern carved into one side and continuing around all four curved edges (Figure 2). It measures 3.5 cm long, 2.4 cm wide, 0.8 cm thick, and weighs 14.4 gm. There is a biconically drilled hole near one end which measures 5 mm at the exterior. Other artifacts recorded from this site include manos, metates, scrapers, bifaces, bone awls, and an abalone bead and bead blank.

The second, accession number 100-690, was recovered from the 20-40 cm level of CA-Ora-198. This Buck Gully site was located by Marguerite Street in Corona del Mar, less than two kilometers from the ocean. This was one of the first sites to be excavated in Orange County by a college field class (CSU Fullerton). These classes were held in the spring from 1968 to 1970.

The artifact is made of fine-grained red sandstone and measures 7.1 cm long, 3.8 cm wide, 1.4 cm thick and weighs 31.4 grams. It was carved into square to rectangular patterns on both sides although one side has been damaged by scraping (Figure 3). While it is not perforated, there is an indentation at either side of one of the incised lines which would facilitate holding a string. Other artifacts from Ora-198 include groundstone, bone awls, bone needle, stone pipes, spindle whorls, and an abalone fishhook. Both of these sites are shell middens.

Two small engraved stone fragments were uncovered in 1988 from sites inland from Corona del Mar, approximately 4 1/2 kilometers from the ocean. The analysis is not yet complete but the patterns on the stones include zig-zag lines and parallel lines.

Another small fragment (18.26), 3.0cm by 2.9 cm by 1.0 cm thick, was recovered during excavations in 1976 at Ora-185 in Huntington Beach (Cameron 1980). In this case, two parallel lines bisect a faint diamond pattern (Figure 4). The artifacts and radiocarbon dates place the habitation of this site at approximately 1105 B.C. to A.D. 160.

A neatly carved piece of siltstone with one broken corner (Figure 5) was found in 1970 at Pelican Point (Ora-147) after the area was plowed. This site overlooks the ocean just south of Corona del Mar. It is 8.3 cm square and 1.2 cm thick with a square pattern on one side. Other artifacts which have been found on this site include grinding stones, hammerstones, choppers, a stone pipe, and a steatite pendant fragment (PCAS Smoke Signals 1970).

Many of the Rancho San Clemente sites were located along the Segunda Deshecha (Cameron 1987). Thirty-five pieces of incised siltstone were found in these sites, but only three can be said to have fairly precise patterns and only one can be described as carved rather than incised. That piece, accession number 636-267 was found on the surface of Ora-636, which is less than 3 km from the ocean. This artifact is 5.3 cm by 3.3 cm by .8 cm thick and has a diamond pattern on both sides (Figure 6). Two other pieces

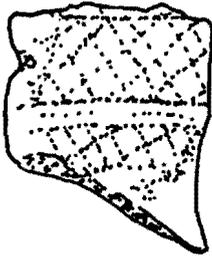


FIGURE 4 Ora-185 18.26

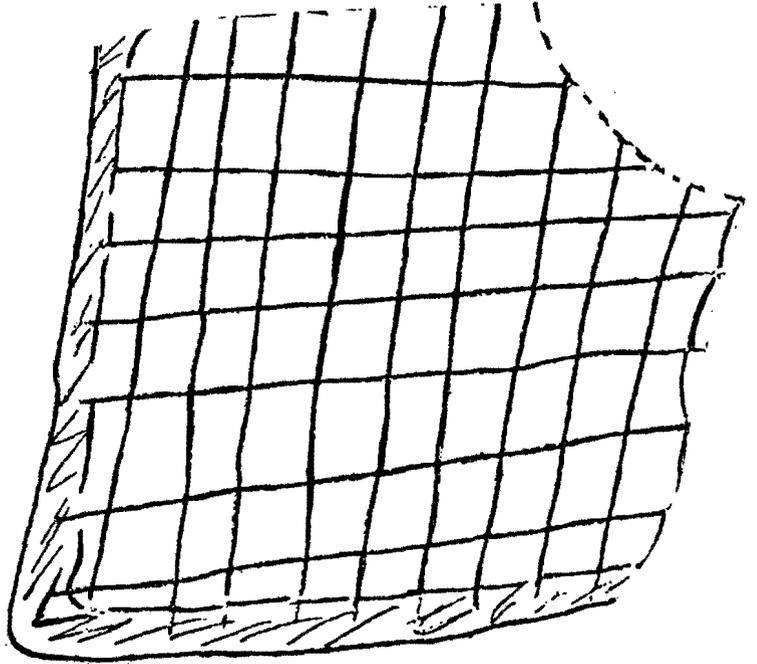


FIGURE 5 Ora-147

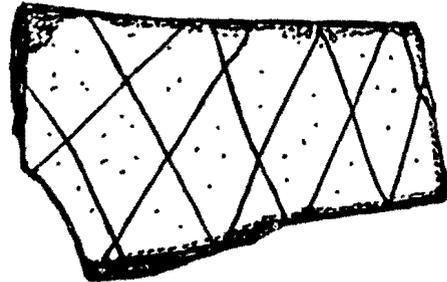
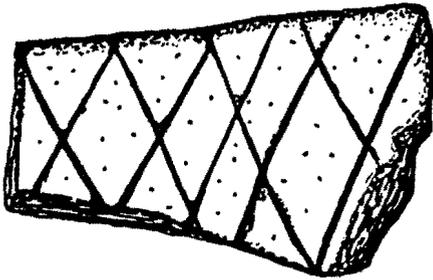


FIGURE 6 Ora-636 267

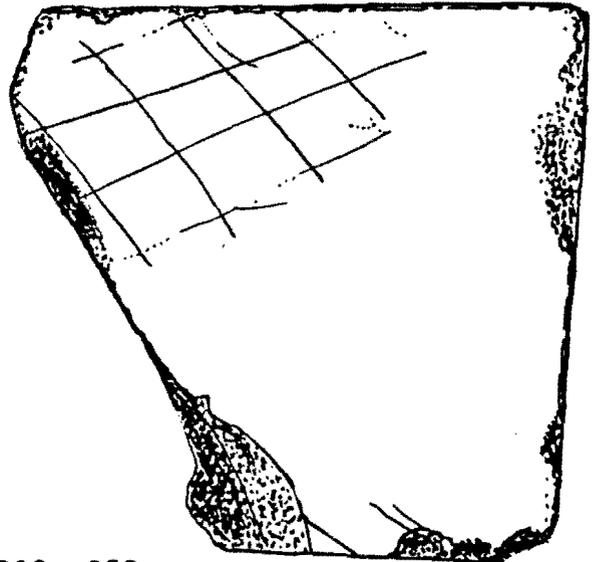
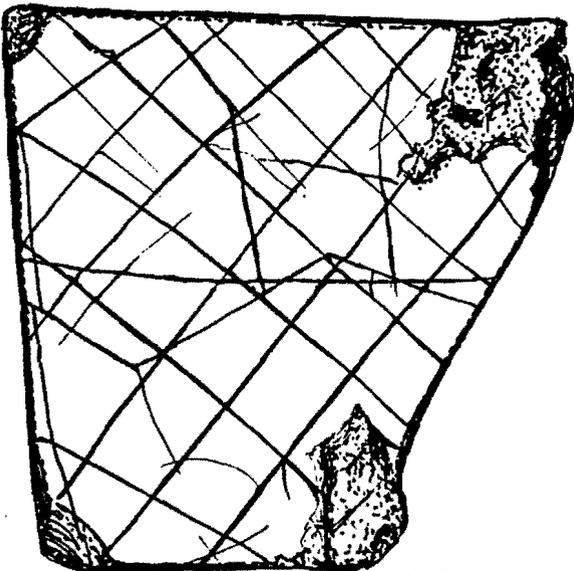
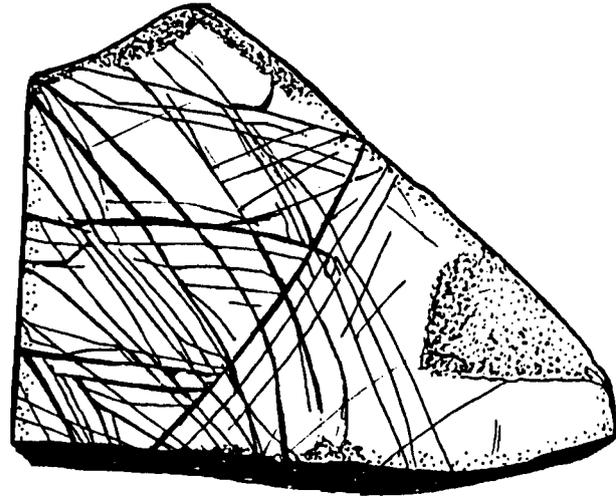
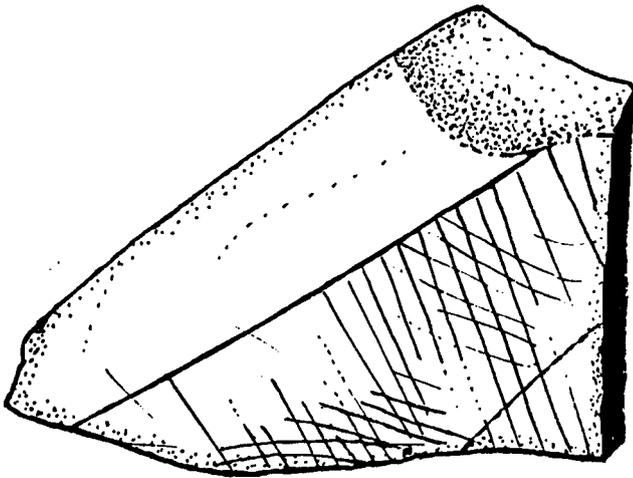
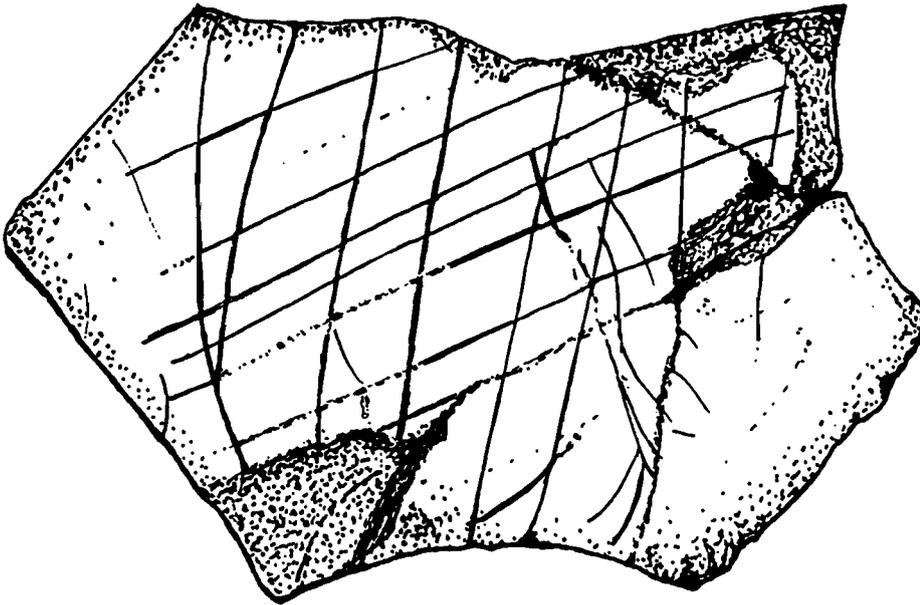


FIGURE 7 Ora-636 050



640-934



640-938

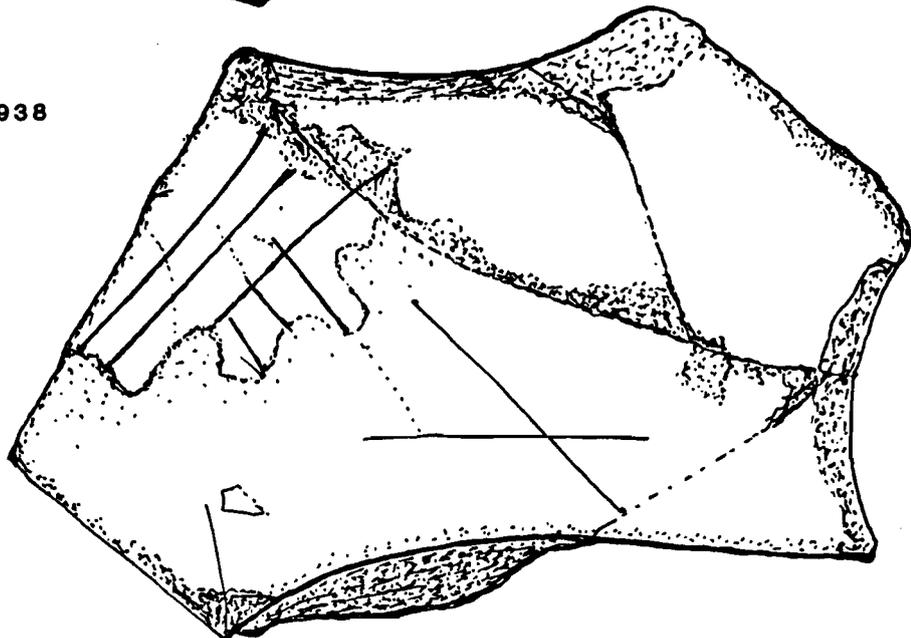


FIGURE 8 Ora-640

of siltstone with incisions were found in this site; 636-050, with a fainter diamond pattern on both sides (although one side is partially exfoliated) (Figure 7) and another which has two parallel lines. One of the few additional artifacts from this site is a small bowl, which was reshaped from a piece of a larger mortar and then continued in use.

Fourteen pieces of incised siltstone were recovered from Ora-640. This site was the furthest along the Segunda Deshecha, being 4 1/2 km from the ocean. Two of the the stones with the most definite patterns have cross-hatching on both sides, with one also having a herringbone design (Figure 8). Four of the total have marks on both sides, usually vertical lines or cross-hatching. Many of the incisions are very faint and they may have been whetstones for sharpening bone and wood tools. 640-934 is 7.8 cm by 5.9 cm by .7 cm thick and 640-938 is 11.7 cm by 7.6 cm by 1.1 cm thick.

CARVED STONES FROM THE 1930s

Several "Shaman Stones" and "Carved Stones" were excavated by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during their work in Orange County in the 1930s. They are described in Anthropological Project #4465 (1937) and Anthropological Project #7680 (1938).

The sites where these stones were found include the Norris-Banning Site (Ora-58), the Bonita Mesa Site (Ora-107), the San Joaquin Gun Club Site (Ora-77), and Black Star Canyon (Ora-132).

Seven additional stones are depicted in an article entitled "Indian Art" which was also funded as Anthropological Project #4465 in 1937. Most of these latter objects cannot easily be matched to the size or description listed in artifact data from the various excavations, but they are undoubtedly from Orange County and possibly from Ora-58. A list titled "Banning Artifact Group" includes "Steatite pendant - or Shaman charm stone richly carved perfect", "Steatite pendant - or Shaman charm stone richly carved (fragment)", and the daily journal notes "Fragments of beautifully carved ceremonial stone of steatite and 3 abalone shells were found." (Winterbourne 1968:16).

These stones are usually of sandstone, with an occasional piece of shale, steatite, or slate mentioned. Two of these unprovenanced artifacts are depicted in figure 9. The largest and most outstanding example has, unfortunately, an unidentified provenience. Its multiple diamond pattern is far more elaborate than anything described by Lee (1981).

At least ten other "carved stones" are described from the Norris - Banning Site (Ora-58). This site is located east of the Santa Ana River, 4 km from the ocean. The descriptions range from "several lines running in all directions" to "4 lines cross in the center in a spoke-like way". One "Shaman Stone" (#1954) is made of clay shale. It is 18.2 cm long, 7.1 cm wide at the base, 2.6 cm wide at the narrow end, and 1.1 cm thick (Figure

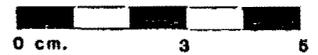
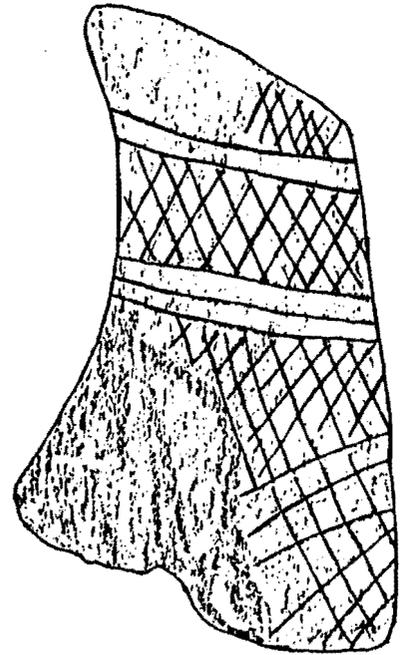
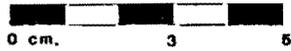
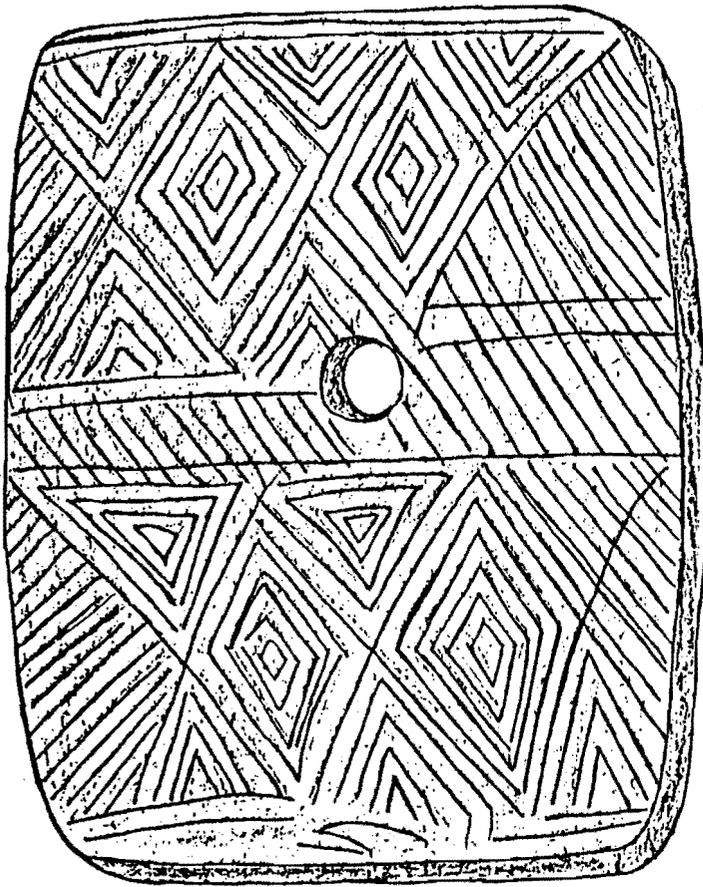


FIGURE 9 Works Progress Admin. (W.P.A.) Artifacts With No Provenience.

10c). It was found broken, with the larger pointed fragment being placed with the decorated surface up, while the blunt end was found with the carved surface down. It was thought to have been purposefully buried in this manner (WPA 1938). Other artifacts from this site include: grinding stones, cogstones, discoidals, large and small points, plummet stones, pestles; bone hair ornaments, awls, whistles; Haliotis and Cardium shell dishes; beads of Haliotis, Olivella, Dentalium, limpet; and deer antler tools.

Bonita Mesa (Ora-107) contained a carved stone (#2810) with zig-zag lines on one side and random lines on the reverse (Figure 10a). One end is broken but the present measurements are 7.0 cm long, 5.1 to 2.4 cm wide, and 1.8 cm thick. It came from a 12" deep test hole. Other artifacts from this site, which was 3/10 of a mile south of the Bonita Dam Spillway and 5 1/2 km from the ocean, include pestles, abalone disc bead, steatite pendant, obsidian blade, bone awl, small projectile points, abalone dishes, and a shaft straightener.

The engraved stone (#2909) from the San Joaquin Gun Club (Ora-77) is cylindrical in shape and carved in a square pattern with the exception of one end (Figure 10b). It is 7.8 cm long and 2.8 cm in diameter and was found 18" deep. This site once overlooked the Upper Newport Bay and other artifacts found include pestles, Olivella beads, plummet, cogstone fragment, bone awl, small points (one of obsidian), Glycimeris bracelet (also 18" deep), steatite, and a shaft straightener.

The "problematic stone" (#1365) from Blackstar Canyon (Ora-132) is described as a piece of corundum shingle, 4.5 cm long, 1.2 cm wide, and .6 cm thick. It has eleven vertical lines, six horizontal lines, and six diagonal lines on one side; and thirteen vertical and eight diagonal lines on the other (W.P.A. 1937). No picture seems to be available at this point in time.

DISCUSSION

The square and diamond patterns are not unique to Orange County. There are nearly identical carved stones in such diverse areas as Santa Barbara and Los Angeles Counties, Nevada, and Ohio. Twenty-six pieces of incised paper shale laminae were recovered from SBa-205 (Jalama Beach) during test excavations in 1950 (Lathrap and Hoover 1975:96-99). Four examples are reproduced as Figure 11. The authors note a "consistency of style" among incised stones found at SBa-205 (also known as Shilimaqshtush) and those from SLO-56 (a coastal site near the city of San Luis Obispo), SBa-477 (Cachuma Dam Site), the Burton Mound Site (Santa Barbara County), and an unnamed site near Redlands. All of these occurrences are in Late Prehistoric sites. They note two instances of examples found in Early or Oak Grove strata, at SBa-7 (near Carpenteria) and LAn-1 (the Tank Site in Topanga Canyon). The latter do not appear to be very similar to those from Orange County (Treganza and Malamud 1950:plate 23).

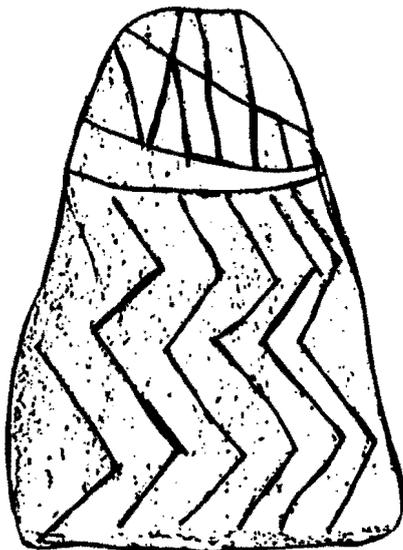


FIGURE 10a Bonita Mesa Ora-107 #2810

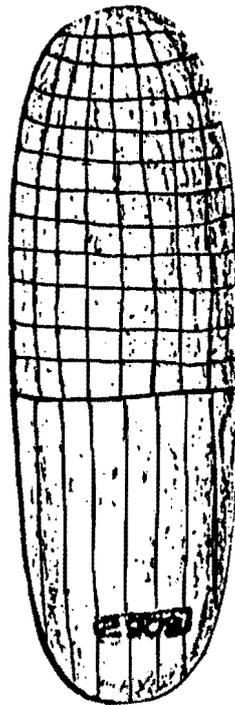


FIGURE 10b San Joaquin Gun Club Ora-77 #2907

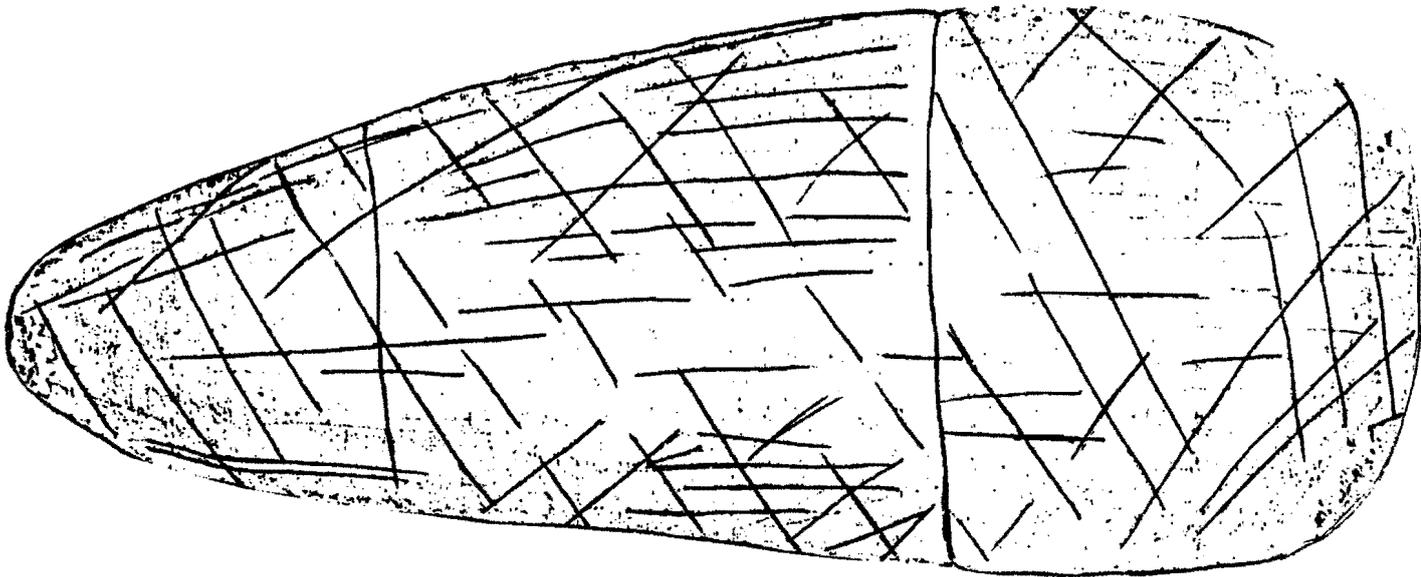


FIGURE 10c Norris-Banning Ora-58 #1954

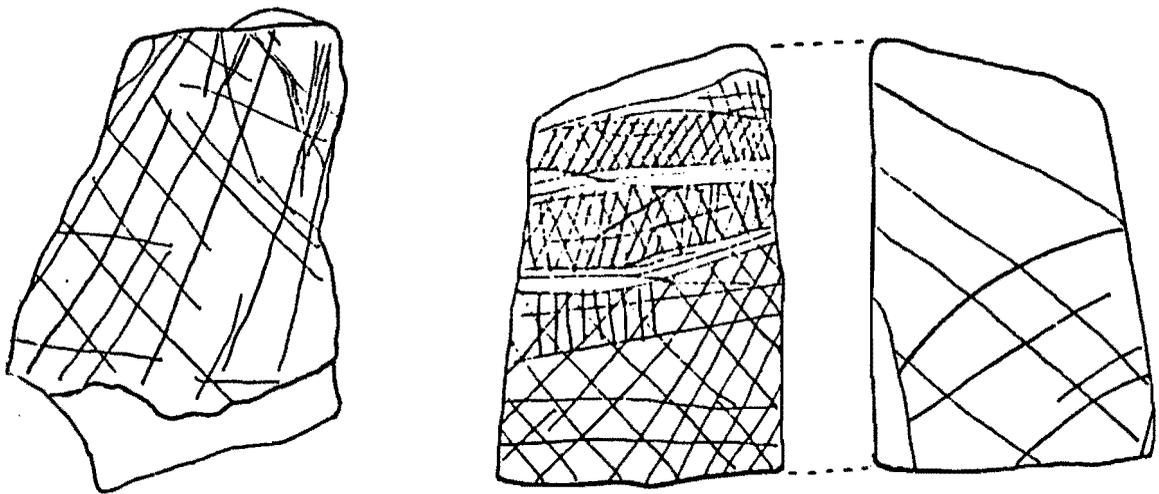
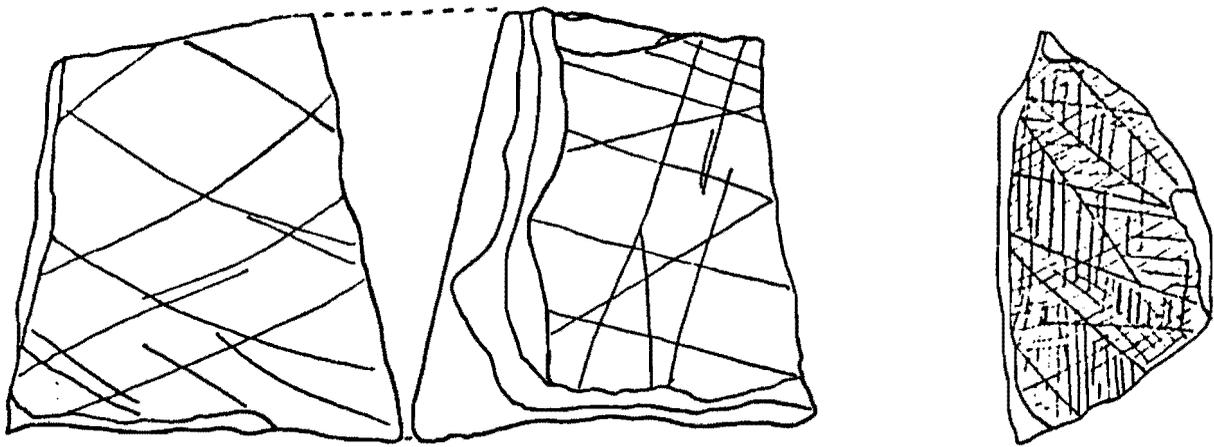


FIGURE 11 Jalama Beach (SBa-205)

An artifact with a comparable pattern to those from Rancho San Clemente was excavated from LAN-808 (the Salsipuedes Site) (Shepard 1989:64). It is of tuff with a diamond pattern on both sides (Figure 12). Some of the steatite plaques found on Catalina and San Clemente Islands have diamond patterns as have a number of museum specimens which have no precise provenience. Three large tablets in the Murphy Collection from San Clemente Island have diamond patterns but lack the perforation which is characteristic of plaques. The latter artifacts are very similar in pattern and size to two of a cache of three tablets found in the second level at Malaga Cove (Pond 1968 fig. 1). Diamond and, to a lesser extent, square patterns are common in rock art designs.

An object with a square design was recovered from Gypsum Cave, Nevada (Harrington 1933:139). It is of solidified volcanic ash, not found near the cave, and measures approximately 6.3 cm by 5 cm by 2.5 cm. Its square pattern occurs on only one side (Figure 13), with a less regular pattern on the other. It came from 80 cm below the surface, in a "Basketmaker Horizon".

The same style is depicted under "Incised Bars" in Ohio Slate Types (Converse 1978:91). These "bars" are described as "scarce", predominately made of sandstone, usually 8 to 10 cm long, and "almost always fairly crude and the incising is haphazard"; although one of the three pictured is definitely not "crude" (Figure 14). One was found on a Hopewell Village site in southern Illinois, but they have never been recovered from Hopewell sites or mounds in Ohio. Their cultural and temporal periods remain obscure.

Small engraved stones with perforations were undoubtedly ornaments. Determining a purpose for those without is more difficult. When writing about the Chumash, Harrington mentioned small warming and curing stones although his Chumash informants had no knowledge concerning this use (Hudson and Blackburn, 1986:275-280). Hudson (personal communication 1984) believed Harrington may have gained this information from other Indian groups and inferred such a use for the Chumash. Harrington described curing stones as very small, at less than 4 cm long. The carved stones under discussion are, for the most part, larger than that and are found so rarely that it hardly seems likely that they were a common item used on a regular basis.

A number of carved steatite plaques from San Diego County, larger than those under discussion, have also been described as curing stones (Moriarty 1982:87). These objects were heated and then placed on the area of the body where there was pain. Steatite is the material of choice when heating is involved (along with ease of carving) but most of the carved artifacts from Orange County are not made of steatite.

The WPA excavations have not been dated, however many are described as probably being occupied during the last 800 years and up to the time of contact. While most of the artifacts found tend to support a date within the Late Prehistoric Horizon, the

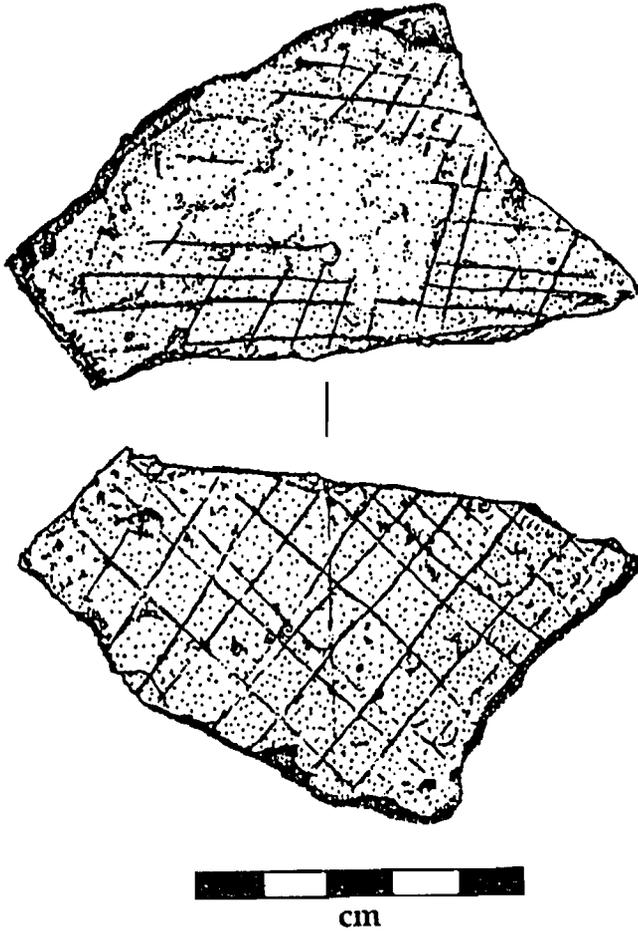


FIGURE 12 Salsipuedes Site LAn-808

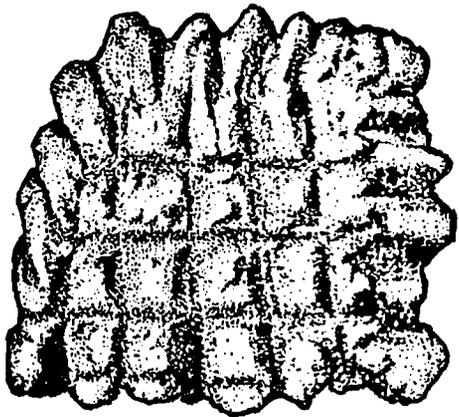


FIGURE 13 Gypsum Cave, Nevada

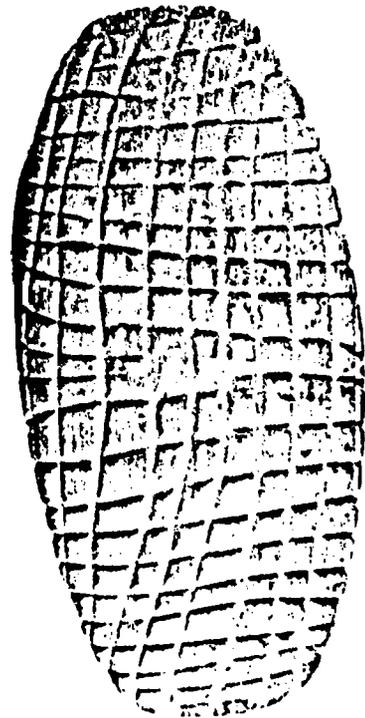


FIGURE 14 "Inclined Bar" Ohio

Banning-Norris Site (Ora-58) with its cogstones and discoidals is obviously a multi-component site. Indeed, more recent work on Ora-58 has resulted in radiocarbon dates spanning 3500 years (Dixon 1970).

All of the carefully carved stones found in Orange County, with the exception of the small one from Blackstar Canyon, come from what may be called coastal sites. They are all "shell midden" sites located within 10 km of the ocean (Figure 15). While there are almost no absolute dates for the majority of these sites, the other artifacts in the assemblages can give reliable relative dates. This relative dating places the temporal period for these carved stones in the Late Prehistoric Period, from A.D. 500 to A.D. 1500.

That some of these stones are ornaments is indisputable, however their rarity may also mean that they held a special meaning for the people and are doubly significant. So few have been found in situ or in direct association with other artifacts that a rank or status symbolism cannot be proven.

NOTES

The artifacts are all illustrated to size unless otherwise indicated.

Drawings were prepared by Anne Duffield, Pamela Maxwell, Joseph Cramer, and reproduced from the reports cited.

REFERENCES CITED

Cameron, Constance

1980 Archaeological Report on CA-Ora-185, Huntington Beach, California. Ms. on file at the Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles.

1987 Archaeological Investigations on the Rancho San Clemente, Orange County, California. Ms. on file Museum of Anthropology, California State University, Fullerton.

Converse, Robert N.

1978 Ohio Slate Types. The Archaeological Society of Ohio.

Dixon, Keith A.

1970 A Brief Report on Radiocarbon and Obsidian Hydration Measurements from Ora-58 (The Banning-Norris or Fairview Hospital Site) Orange County, California. Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly 6(4):61-68. Costa Mesa, California.

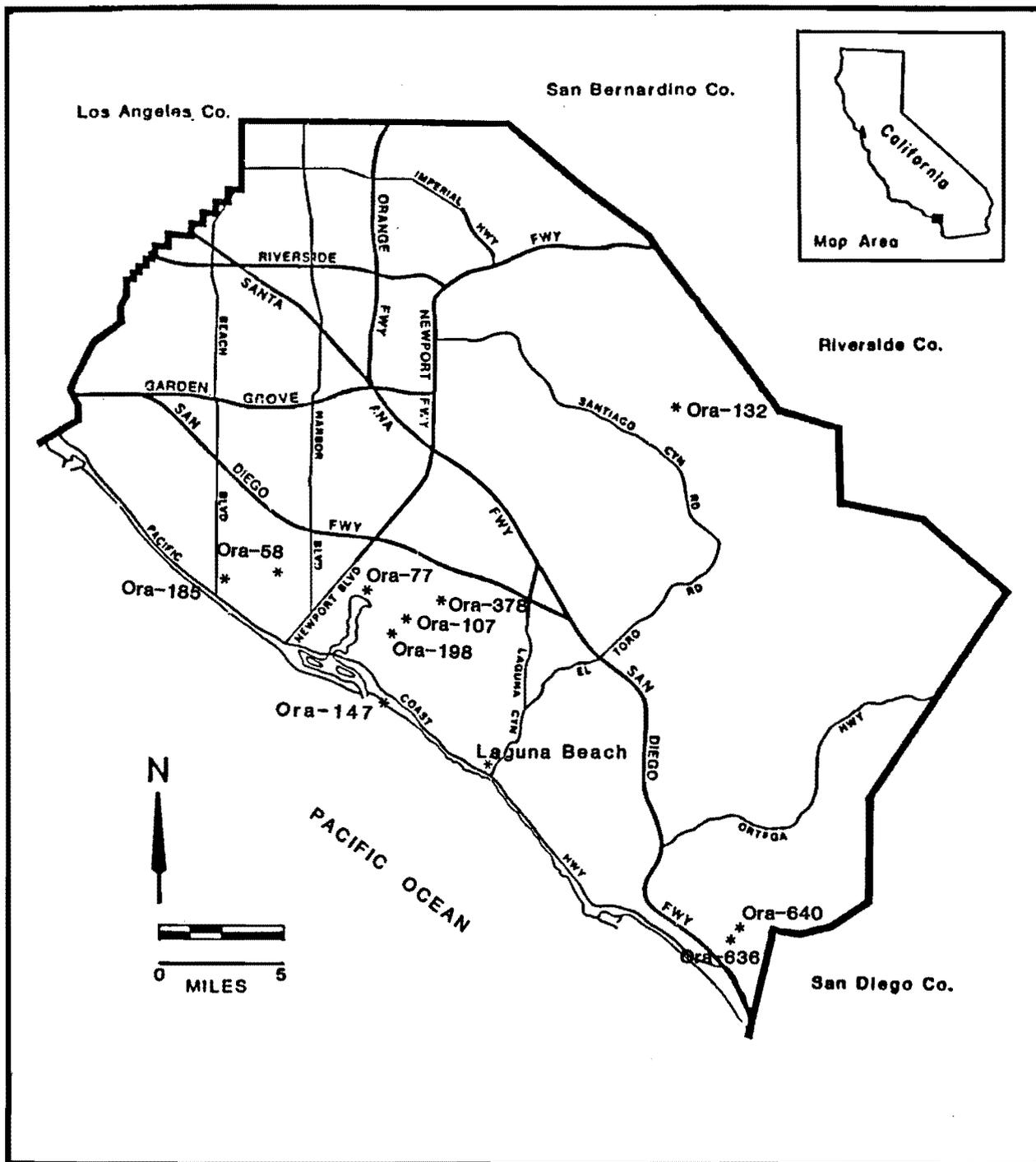


FIGURE 15 Location of Orange County Sites Discussed in Text.

Harrington, Mark R.

1933 Gypsum Cave, Nevada. Southwest Museum Papers 8. Los Angeles.

Hudson, D. Travis and Thomas Blackburn

1986 The Material Culture of the Chumash Interaction Sphere: Volume IV: Ceremonial Paraphernalia, Games, and Amusements. Ballena Press/Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.

Lathrap, Donald W. and Robert L. Hoover

1975 Excavations at Shilimaqshtush: SBA-205. Occasional Paper No. 10. San Luis Obispo County Archaeological Society.

Lee, Georgia

1981 The Portable Cosmos: Effigies, Ornaments, and Incised Stone from the Chumash Area. Ballena Press. Socorro, New Mexico.

Moriarty, James Robert III

1982 Ritual Plaques from Southern California. Masterkey 56(3): 85-94. Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.

Pacific Coast Archaeological Society

1970 Smoke Signals 9(10). Costa Mesa, California.

Pond, Gordon G.

1968 Steatite Tablets From Malaga Cove. Masterkey 42(4): 124-131. Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.

Shepard, Rita S.

1989 Archaeology of LAN-808 in Archaeology of the Three Springs Valley, California Monograph 30. Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles.

Treganza, A.E. and C.G. Malamud

1950 The Topanga Culture; First Season's Excavations of the Tank Site, 1947. Anthropological Records 12:4 University of California Press, Berkeley.

Winterbourne, J. W.

1968 Orange County California Historical Research Project. Report of Banning Estate Excavation (Norris Property). Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly. 4(2):10-17. Costa Mesa, California.

Works Progress Administration

1937 Orange County California Anthropological Project #4465. Manuscript on file Museum of Anthropology, California State University, Fullerton.

1938 Orange County California Anthropological Project #7680. Manuscript on file Museum of Anthropology, California State University, Fullerton.