

# CUPEÑO IDEOLOGY REVEALED THROUGH RITUAL OBJECTS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF RITUAL ARTIFACTS AT CA-SDI-2508

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## INTRODUCTION

I teach an introductory cultural anthropology class at a local community college. During the past week we have been discussing the role of mythology within an anthropological context. During one lecture I stated that myths are true; this was met with some dissatisfaction. I continued by stating that in the symbolic sense, myths are indeed true; they encode information about values and social relationships. Within their proper social context, myths can define the essential nature of human beings as seen by a particular culture. The following text will present and discuss the ritual artifacts obtained during the 1997 field season from CA-SDI 2508, located at the northeastern end of Lost Valley. Their importance in terms of Cupeño mythology will be highlighted as well as their significance as determined through the ethnographic record.

With respect to Cupeño clans, William Duncan Strong (1929) reports a distinction between the coyote clan and the wildcat clan. He states that the three coyote clans, according to their mythology, are of Cahuilla origin, while two of the wildcat lineages claim to be of Diegueño origin, and the third is said to be Luiseño in origin (1929: 186). The mythology of the Cupeño confirms the notion that their social and ceremonial organization is an amalgamation – one influenced by the intricate interaction with the people all around. It is because of this that the choice has been made to draw from Cupeño, Luiseño and Cahuilla mythology and ethnography to gain a holistic perspective. The goal of this research is to present a coherent discussion of several artifacts using an approach rooted in the real and the symbolic. Artifacts recovered from SDI-2508 that appear to have ritual or ceremonial significance include: a steatite pipe fragment, quartz and tourmaline crystals, a stone bowl, a steatite heating stone, a stone bead and graphite.

### Discussion

The stone pipe is mentioned in the mythology of southern California's indigenous people,

primarily creation mythology. Passages from the Luiseño creation myth refer to stone tobacco pipes used to settle a dispute by the first two created beings (DuBois 1908:129). The Cupeño creation myth makes reference to the use of a stone pipe by the creator. By blowing tobacco smoke from his pipe, Mukat, the creator, would put people to sleep (Strong 1929:269)

In his account of the Cupeño girls' adolescence ceremony, Strong reports a pipe image, as well. The image appears within the context of the ground-painting. Made from clean white sand, charcoal dust, iron oxide and a multitude of colored seeds, ground-paintings consisted of ritual representations within which the pipe was included (Strong 1929:256).

The stone pipe fragment recovered from SDI-2508 is most likely the end of either a cylindrical or cone-shaped pipe, its widest end measuring 27 mm in diameter. The pipe is made from steatite, a major source of which is located at nearby Stonewall Peak. Steatite pipes are shaped by grinding the outside surface and drilling out the center. The ritual significance of the stone pipe and tobacco smoking associated with it is evidenced not only in the mythology of the Cupeño and Luiseño, but also throughout the ethnographic record.

Anthropologists including Kroeber (1925) and Strong (1929) discussed the importance of the stone tobacco pipe as part of the clan bundle. The sacred clan bundle has been described as the symbolic center of the clan among the Cupeño, Cahuilla and Luiseño. According to the ethnographic literature, all groups which had a religious leader and formed an independent ceremonial unit owned a bundle. The contents of the bundle varied among groups and in addition to the stone pipe, may have included: head plumes, eagle bone whistles, strings of shell money, skirts of eagle feathers, sharpened sticks tipped with plumes, snake rattles that were worn on the head and crystal tipped wands. Given the references within both the ethnography and the mythology of

the Cupeño, it can be inferred that the stone tobacco pipe fragment is identifiable as an important ritual object, possibly part of the sacred clan bundle.

Recovered in close association with the stone pipe fragment were four tourmaline crystals. A total of six tourmaline crystals were recovered as well as four quartz crystals, all of which were predominately six-sided prisims. To distinguish crystals from flakes and debitage, a crystal had to have at least one facet. The presence of the quartz crystals is not surprising considering the geological composition of the Peninsular Ranges, in particular, Lost Valley. The significance of crystals to the indigenous peoples of California and in particular the Cupeño lies in the mystical power associated with them. According to Rebecca Langenwaller (1980:236), crystals were believed to possess benevolent or evil powers and thought to have a will of their own. The ethnographic record points to the ritual use of crystals both individually and as part of the tipped wand. Given the breadth of this research, it cannot be stated with certainty whether the crystals were held in the hand or used as part of a wand. It can be hypothesized, however, that the crystals found in association with the stone pipe fragment were also part of the sacred clan bundle.

Also recovered from the site was a portion of a stone bowl. This granite fragment measures 64 x 70 x 40 mm with its concave curvature measuring 15 mm. Along the bowl's convex side is a longitudinal groove which terminates at the bowl's rim. This bowl has been identified as a ritual object based on information from the ethnographic record. Strong (1929), DuBois (1908) and Sparkman (1908) all make note of the sacred stone bowl, either with regard to the mysticism surrounding it or with respect to the boys' puberty ceremony. According to Strong, the boys' ceremony was originally given to the Cupeño by the Luiseño, thus forming a parallel in social organization between the two groups.

Sparkman states that of the various types of mortars, the ones considered sacred and used by medicine men were quite symmetrical, polished with considerable care and exhibited ornamentation in the shape of grooves on the outside (1908:207). Sparkman as well as Strong report the ceremonial pounding of *jimson weed* in this type of bowl, with DuBois reminding us that the sacredness of the bowl lies in its mythical origins. According to Luiseño creation myth,

sacred stone bowls were not the result of human manufacture but rather of divine creation. The Luiseño believed these bowls were among the first people, born of the earth mother. If the individual to whom the bowl belonged did not take proper care of it, it went away. It is said that one can follow its track in the dust – like a rattlesnake (Du Bois 1908:156)

Also reported as part of both girls and boys' initiation ceremonies is the smooth, flat stone, much like the heating stone found at the site. Strong considers the use of them in the boys' ceremony and explains, "a design of a human figure with arms extended was made of twine in the bottom of the pit. Three flat stones were placed in the pit, one below the feet, one in the center, and one above the head" (1929:260). Sparkman elaborates on the use of the smooth, flat stones within the girls' ceremony. He states that the girls are made to lie down in the ceremonial pit of heated stones and coarse grass (1908:224). Mention is also made of warm, flat stones being placed on the abdomens of the girls as they lie in the heated pit.

The pear-shaped steatite heating stone was collected from the surface. It measures 100 x 75 x 26 mm and has a biconically drilled hole. A possible source for this steatite has been identified as Stonewall Peak at Cuyamaca Park. Although included here with other ritual objects, this heating stone may have had a strictly utilitarian function. In reality, the possibility of ritual use is only slightly substantiated, while its utilitarian function is evident in the ethnographic records of indigenous populations throughout the southern California region.

References to beads and their significance within Cupeño culture can be found throughout the ethnographic literature. Strings of shell beads were often part of the sacred clan bundle or gifted by clans during ritual gatherings. One stone bead was recovered from SDI 2508; it is 17 millimeters in diameter. The material has been identified as chlorite schist and it was manufactured through grinding and polishing. The wall thickness of the bead is 7 mm, and the diameter of the biconical hole is 8 mm. According to an oral history told by Salvadora Valenzuela to Paul Lewis Faye, beads play a role in the girls' initiation ceremony. Headpieces and wristbands were made from human hair, beads were put on them and these adornments were placed on the girls (Hill and Nolasquez 1973:35a). The faces of the girls were

then painted. It is not stated within the oral history whether the beads were stone or shell.

Recovered throughout the site were ten pieces of graphite. Graphite is a mineral which may occur in three conditions: as disseminated flakes in metamorphic rocks, as graphite schist, and as veins in igneous rocks and pegmatites. Characteristics of graphite are softness, a greasy feel and its ability to mark surfaces. All ten pieces recovered have been ground. In some instances the surfaces of the pieces are smooth and in other cases, as with the larger pieces, the striations are visible. Graphite has been found in other identifiable Cupeño sites, including excavations performed at Puerta La Cruz by Chris White in 1979.

Strong reports that the Luiseño made black paint from a "light soft, black rock" (1929:298). Face painting was prevalent among southern California groups including the Cupeño. The practice of face painting has been reported most often in connection with the girls' adolescence ceremony, although brief mentions of it among the boys are present. Depending on the clan, the face was painted accordingly: those of the wildcat clan had a spotted face design, while those of the coyote clan donned a striped one. Cupeño girls are said to have worn their clan paints for two

months, with different designs applied each day by their mothers. It is likely that graphite recovered from site is the soft black rock about which Strong had written.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this research has been to establish a paradigm for the investigation of the ritual artifacts recovered from Lost Valley. Drawing from myth and the ethnographic record, the intention was not merely to describe the ritual artifacts, but to reveal – at least in part – the underlying ideology associated with them. In considering the mythology of the Cupeño and their neighbors, the goal was to make use of a rich body of socio-cultural information, the assumption being that myths communicate information about the organization of social relationships.

Again, I will stress – as I did to my students – that myths are true. Within myths are definitions of the nature of human beings and glimpses of social values. Indeed they are a social charter. The Cupeño have left a fingerprint on the historic record and it is through archaeology, ethnography, and certainly, mythology, that we as researchers can gain a clearer understanding of what it meant to be Cupeño.

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