

A SNAKE RATTLE EFFIGY FROM CA-LAN-62, LOCUS A

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Rattlesnake imagery/symbology figured prominently in the Native worldview of coastal southern California and beyond. Material manifestations of such included three-dimensional representations of the viper's tail rattle. The primary focus here is description and interpretation of one such example, a soapstone effigy excavated at CA-LAN-62, Locus A. Also, our article brings together varied snake lore as augmentation to a recent larger treatment of the rattler in Native culture (see Koerper 2006). We draw on these background data to suggest possible meanings that once attached to the LAN-62A artifact, particularly as regards its association with mortuary remains.

The rattlesnake is an object of great admiration among all the Indians of California, and its habits are well known to them [Taylor 1973].

In Native Alta and Baja California and elsewhere, the rattlesnake repeatedly intruded on people's sense of well-being. The reptile's physical threat and the resultant anxiety predisposed the rattler and its imagery for incorporation into varied cultural settings, ranging from the everyday mundane to magico-religious beliefs and practices.

From an initial focus on a siltstone whole-body rattlesnake effigy discovered buried in a San Joaquin Hills rock shelter (CA-ORA-1080), a recent article (Koerper 2006) expanded to include discussions of several topics, including: practical and supernatural means employed by California Indians to prevent venomous attacks and to minister to those victimized; viper anxiety and the infusion of rattlesnakes and their imagery into varied sacred venues, including Native world view, some of which embraced a fertility/fecundity/increase thematic; and the roles of natural objects, including rattlesnake parts, and visual art, both graphic and plastic, in symbolic communications.

The initial focus of the present paper is likewise on a rattler effigy, but a rattlesnake rattle rather than a whole-body representation. The rattle effigy was discovered at CA-LAN-62, Locus A (Figure 1), adjacent to the Ballona wetlands in the Santa Monica Bay area. This artifact (Figure 2) will be described, and immediately following, there is information on its spatial and temporal associations. Here, there will be a comparison of the specimen against selected artifacts bearing rattle-like design elements that were first published in Koerper (2006; Figure 3) and other artifacts more recently recognized and brought together by the authors (Figure 4). Speculation will be offered as to possible functions and meanings for the carved soapstone mimic of the rattler's warning device.



Figure 1. Location map.

Just as the whole-body snake effigy from ORA-1080 offered a segue into an expanded treatment of rattlesnakes in Native California lifeways (Koerper 2006), so too the LAN-62 rattle effigy offers the opportunity to further promote a more comprehensive treatment of rattlesnake lore in California prehistory and contact period culture. One goal of the Koerper (2006) article was to force certain observations that might bring together additional examples of snake rattle effigies and of whole-body rattlesnake effigies from California and the Great Basin, thereby helping to build a formal inventory of such objects. Many such effigies go unrecognized as having a rattler referent, and some are misidentified. Our more intensive investigation revealed additional examples of both snake body part effigies (Figure 4) and whole-body snake effigies (Figure 5). As noted above, Figure 4 will allow a broader comparative analysis. Again, this paper also serves as a repository for additional snake related lore, an augmentation of certain subjects broached in the Koerper (2006) study.

DESCRIPTION AND SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL INFORMATION

The 50.2 mm long, 19.7 mm wide, and 14.5 mm thick soapstone object was ground into the form of a curved and tapering rattlesnake tail (Figure 2). Five V-shaped grooves approximately 3 mm deep and 3.5 mm wide were incised and/or abraded around the circumference to create a six-button rattle. The object is slightly flattened on one face, providing a stable support surface, suggesting that it may

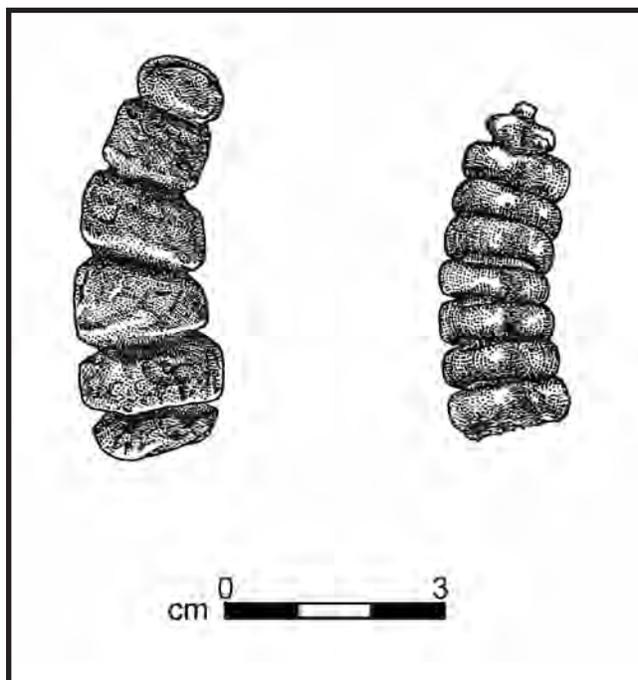


Figure 2. Soapstone snake rattle effigy from LAN-62A illustrated alongside a drawing of a rattlesnake rattle (right).

have been made for display. Alternatively, the object may have been suspended by a cord wrapped around one of the segments and worn as a pendant, though there is no use wear to support this.

The rattle effigy exhibits a rare level of naturalism for regional plastic arts. Such realism is more common in representations of rattlesnakes in pictographs, basketry designs, and some ground paintings (e.g., Dawson and Deetz 1965:220; Hoover 1974:70; Waterman 1910:Plates 24, 25;).

The artifact was discovered in association with isolated human remains in Level 52 of Unit 155 at LAN-62A in the center of a Mission-period Gabrielino burial ground. The context implies that the object was used as a mortuary offering.

COMPARISONS

The Playa Vista rattle effigy was previously illustrated (Koerper 2006: Figure 15c) as were other objects whose shapes suggested mimics of the rattler's tail end (Koerper 2006: Figures 15, 16, 17). Illustrations of nine of those objects are depicted here (Figure 3) with the permission of the editors of Coyote Press. Two of the artifacts in Figure 3 had been likened to rattlesnake rattles by those who first described them in print. The southern San Joaquin Valley specimen of Figure 3a bore "a striking resemblance to the rattles of a rattlesnake" according to Gifford and Schenck (1926:98, 120, Plate 21r), and that of Figure 3e, from Santa Catalina Island, according to Abbott (1879: Figure 90) "looks as if designed to represent the rattle of a rattlesnake." The steatite object of Figure 3b found at SCAI-137 was interpreted as a "sculpted phallus" (Rosenthal 1988:58) despite the anatomical incorrectness of its transverse grooves.

Comparison of the LAN-62A rattle effigy (Figure 2) with the artifacts of Figure 3 shows that it is the most graphic of the varied representations. It remains the best visual fit to the viper's tail buttons even with consideration of the nine additional specimens shown in Figure 4.

The pendant of Figure 4a is presently displayed at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Snake rattle buttons are at the bottom of this amulet which may have been worn to protect the owner from being bitten. The objects of Figure 4c and 4i are from NAP-1 and may be conventionalized snake rattles; Heizer (1953: Plate 33n,o), while not specifically stating so, certainly recognized their similarities to the reptile rattle since he compared these objects to the artifact of Figure 3e, which, as noted, Abbott (1879:211) suspected as standing for rattlesnake buttons. Heizer (1953:261) also compared the NAP-1 artifacts to similar artifacts recovered from the Emeryville shellmounds on San Francisco Bay (Uhle 1907:Plate 12, Figures 7, 8) (Figure 3d) and from Arizona (Hough 1914: Figure 45; Sayles 1945:Plate 50b) (Figures 4b and 4g, respectively). Stephen Bowers drew the steatite pendant seen here in Figure 4d (Benson 1997:Figure 3.3). Its curvature and transverse grooves allow the reasonable guess of a viper's rattle.

The object illustrated in Figure 4e was unearthed by WPA archaeologists in Orange County (Works Progress Administration 1937). It was interpreted as a phallic symbol despite the transverse incisions, yet the cleft at the apex does help convey the look of a glans penis. Given the rattlesnake's connection with fertility/fecundity and related themes, it is conceivable that the symbology might have covered both the rattler and male genitalia.

The probable rattle effigy of Figure 4g is particularly noteworthy, for it began its cultural life as a manuport (see Sayles 1945:Plate 50b). A Hohokam artisan then ringed this

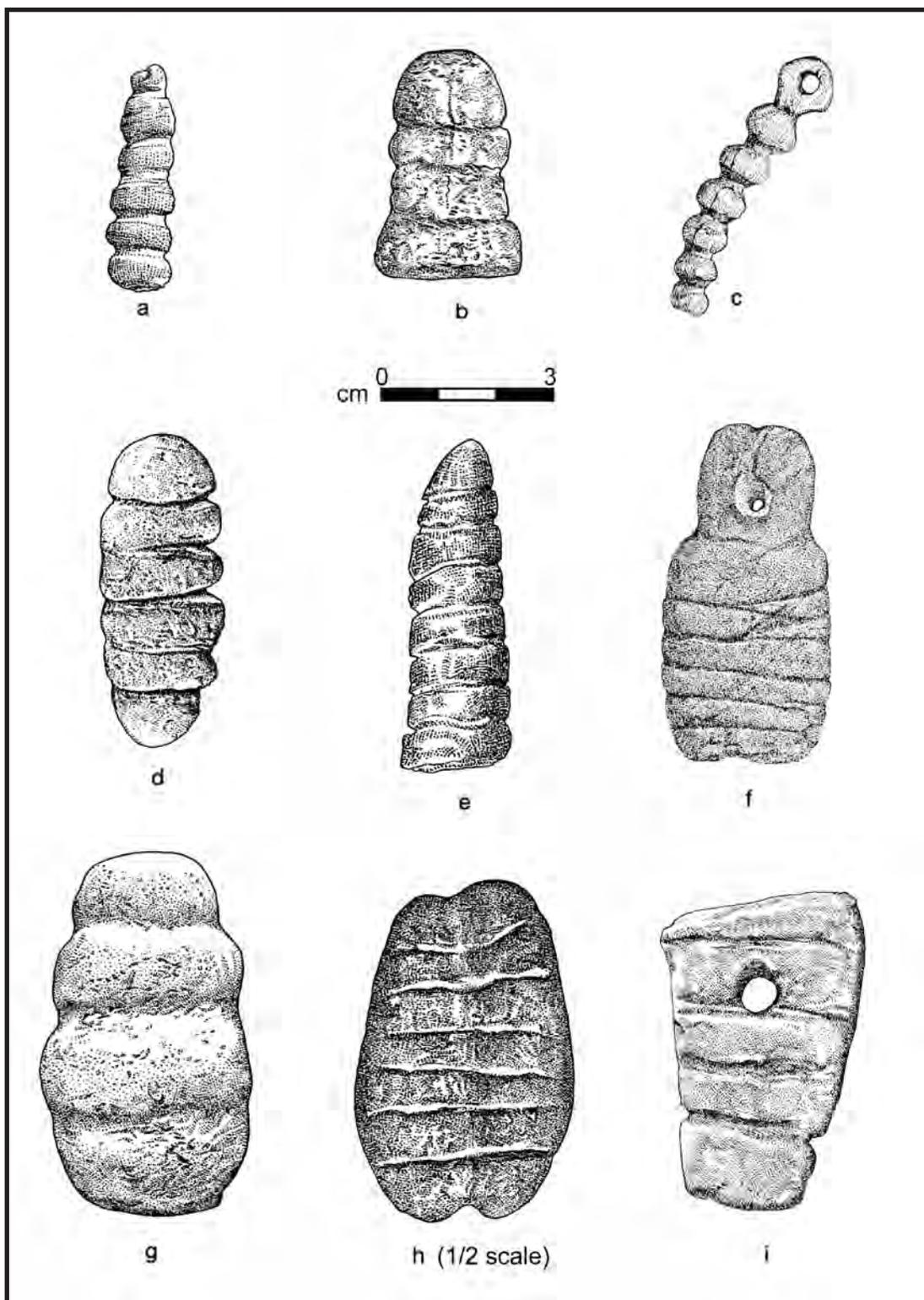


Figure 3. Effigies previously illustrated in Koerper (2006). (a) Southern San Joaquin Valley (after Gifford and Schenck 1926:Plate 21r); (b) Steatite effigy, SCAI-137 (after Rosenthal 1988:59); (c) Bone Pomo rattle effigy (courtesy Grace Hudson Museum); (d) Rattlesnake rattle representation, Emeryville Shellmound, San Francisco Bay Area (after Uhle 1907:Plate 12, Figures 7 and 8); (e) Serpentine rattlesnake rattle amulet, Santa Catalina Island (after Abbott 1879: Figure 90); (f) Rattle effigy pendant, Ellis Landing Shellmound, San Francisco Bay Area (after Nelson 1910:Plate 47, Figure 17); (g) Sandstone effigy (courtesy Lompoc Museum); (h) Steatite warming stone (?) from near the Cuyamaca Mountains, San Diego County (after Parkman 1985:35); (i) Amulet, Buena Vista Lake, San Joaquin Valley (after Wedel 1941:Plate 33w). All illustrations reproduced with the permission of Coyote Press, Salinas, California.

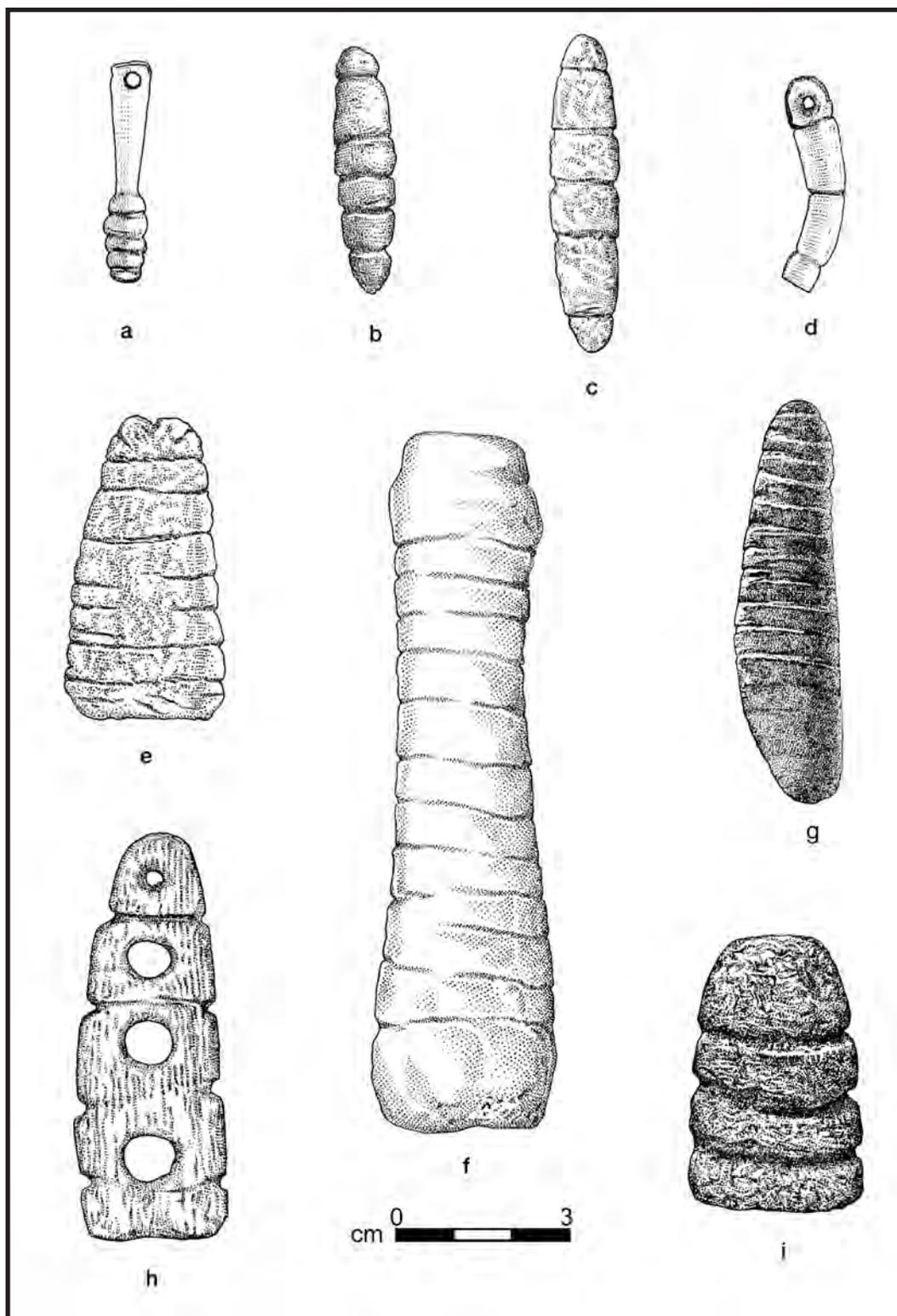


Figure 4. Possible/probable snake rattle effigies. (a) Chumash steatite pendant with snake button representation (after King 1981:369, Figure 12); (b) Martin Ruin, Upper Gila Region, Arizona, fine grained purplish stone (after Hough 1914:29, Figure 45); (c) NAP-1 (after Heizer 1953:Plate 33n); (d) Chumash steatite pendant, Goleta (after drawing by Stephen Bowers, in Benson 1997:47, Figure 3.3); (e) Orange County WPA find (after Works Progress Administration 1937); (f) Sea mammal flipper bone gaming die, San Nicolas Island (after Hudson and Blackburn 1986:404, Figure 378-5); (g) Natural pebble with manmade incised parallel lines, Hohokam, southern Arizona (after Sayles 1945:Plate 50b); (h) Thin sheep horn object from the Great Basin (after Kelly and Fowler 1986:372, Figure 2i; collected in early 1870s in Southern Paiute territory by John Wesley Powell); (i) NAP-1 (after Heizer 1953:Plate 33o).

pebble with parallel incisions. Sayles (1945:55) considered the artifact as a possible “atlatl balance weight.”

Two artifacts in Figure 4 were made of hard tissues of mammals. The specimen of Figure 4h, with its curved and tapering shape and with segments delineated by grooves perpendicular to the main axis, seems an excellent candidate for listing as a possible rattlesnake representation. It was crafted of mountain sheep horn. Kelly and Fowler (1986:372, 373) believed this Southern Paiute artifact to be a “shaft straightener-diameter gauge,” no doubt because of the several holes. However, the hole at the rounded end is quite small, suggesting suspension on a string or cord. Artifact thinness may belie any suggestion of a wrench shaft-straightener function. The holes might have been for smoothing shafts rather than for bending them straight (see Gifford 1932:215). Consideration should also be given to its possible use as the target element of a ring-and-pin game. The second animal material effigy (or possible effigy) is the sea mammal flipper bone “gaming die” from San Nicolas Island (Hudson and Blackburn 1986:403, 404, Figure 378-5) that is shown in Figure 4f.

To reiterate, the LAN-62 rattle effigy (Figure 2) when set against the artifacts of Figure 4, remains the most graphic and obvious representation of the viper’s tail end. The bringing together of the varied specimens of Figures 2, 3, and 4 for a thoughtful consideration of design factors, overall morphology, etc. forces observations that might be directed toward searching museum collections and other repositories in a more considered and rigorous effort at identification of similar pieces. There might also be reconsideration of previous interpretations. Taken as a group, the artifacts displayed here offer a reasonable fit to a bygone world in which the poisonous reptile would have been, above all others, the animal most feared, if not revered, in hunter-gatherer workaday existence.

AUGMENTATION

A Broader Comparative Analysis: Whole-Body Effigies

A number of specimens, each purportedly representing the “whole-body” rattlesnake, rather than merely the warning device, were illustrated in Koerper (2006). These included objects created in stone (Koerper 2006:Figures 1, 4), wood (Koerper 2006:Figures 13, 14), and bone (Koerper 2006: Figure 15a). Three more objects interpreted here as whole-body specimens are shown in Figure 5.

Roland Dixon (1905:Figure 56) published a drawing of what he called a steatite “Head of Fish” (Figure 5a) ploughed up from a field in El Dorado County (Northern Maidu territory). It is, rather, a severely truncated snake composed of a head behind which are encircling transverse

lines demarcating three buttons of a rattle. Dixon (1905:219) noted that “The Indians in the vicinity regarded the object with some awe and declared that nothing like it was known to them, but that they had heard of such things as sometimes belonging to shamans.”

M. R. Harrington (1927:45-47, Figure 14) described the “curious composite monster” of Figure 5b as having the head and fins of a fish but the tail and markings of a rattlesnake. He offered a humorous speciation, “rattle-fish,” for this Humboldt Lake bed (Nevada) find. Smooth grooves, one at the middle of the slate artifact and the other forward of the tail, may have facilitated suspension. Later, Loud and Harrington (1929:Figure 10b) seemed more inclined to interpret it as a fish. Tuohy (1986:Figure 1) published a photograph of the object but avoided species interpretation. The round cross section and the rattle-like appendage should unambiguously establish the animal as a snake.

Loud and Harrington (1929:43-44, Figure 10a) identify what they believed was another fish-like effigy. This specimen (Figure 5c) is from Lovelock Cave, Nevada. Its material is from the back and the side of the horn of a bighorn sheep (Loud and Harrington 1929:Figure 9). Tuohy (1986:227) more correctly recognized the effigy as “a snakelike figure with eyes.”

Other Snake-Related Material

Perusal of California and Great Basin ethnographic sources subsequent to Koerper’s (2006) study has yielded additional useful and interesting information. These data cover several domains, including the following: employment of natural objects (other than rattlesnake parts) as talismans that invoke the viper; employment of snake parts for magico-religious and other purposes; taboos and other supernatural beliefs regarding rattlesnakes; the poisonous reptile in cosmology/mythology; the rattler in avenger roles; quasi-medical treatment of viper bites; rattlesnakes in communications of fertility/fecundity/increase symbology; and practical means of bite prevention. Selections from the newly resurrected data appear below.

Koerper (2006:51) noted instances of natural objects employed as talismans for the fact of likenesses they shared with snakes or snake parts. To the Yana example of rounded pebbles with light colored bands (interpreted as rattlesnakes) sought out as “luck-stones” (see Sapir and Spier 1943:282), this study adds the Wintu retrieval of pebbles resembling rattlesnake buttons to serve as charms (DuBois 1935:82). Interestingly, the most common kinds of Wintu rattler charms were ammonite shells found in great numbers near the Sacramento River below Redding (DuBois 1935:82). DuBois surmised that the coiled shape had suggested association with the viper. In much the same vein there is the speculation that coiled gastropod shells, such as those reported for ORA-

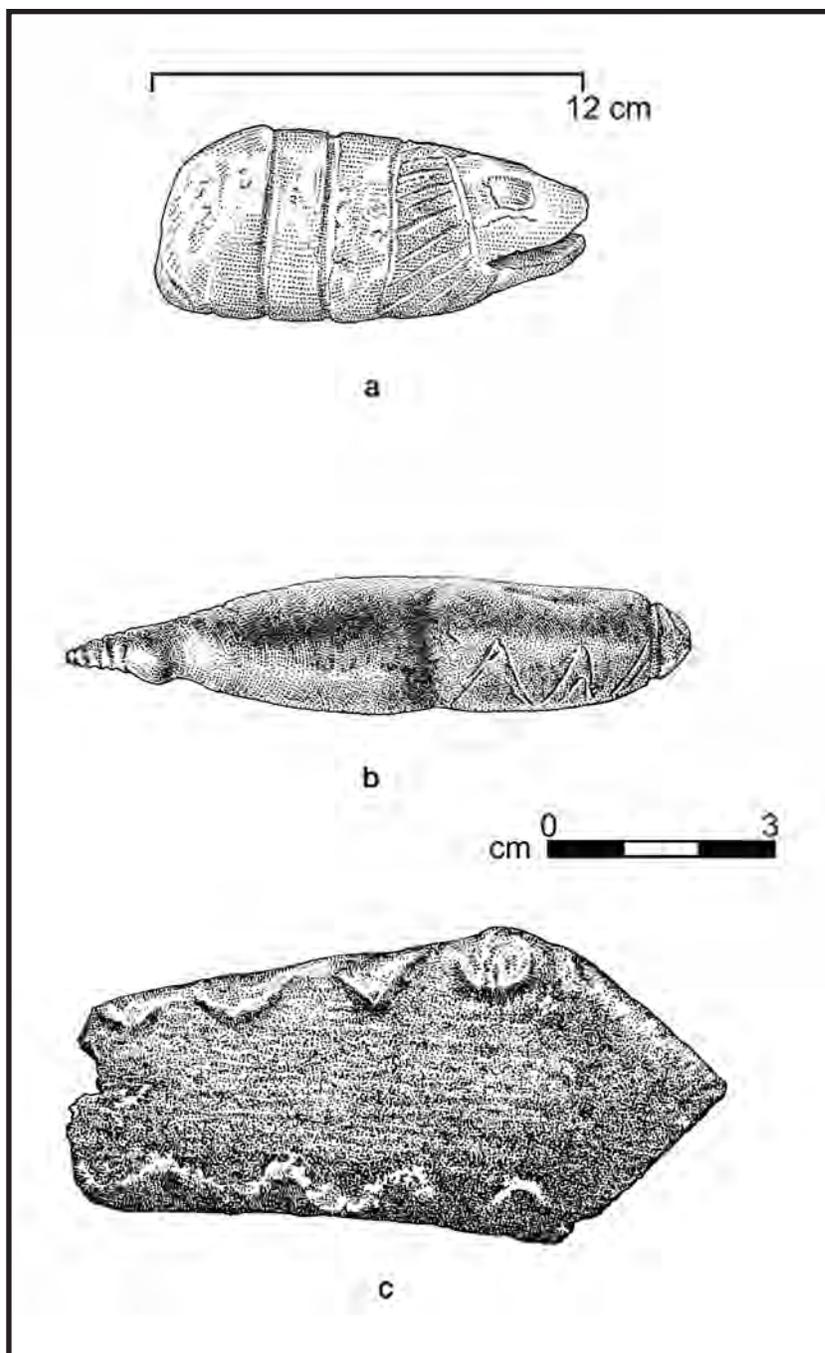


Figure 5. Whole-body snake effigies. (a) Steatite representation from El Dorado County, California (after Dixon 1905:219, Figure 56); (b) Slate carving of rattle from dry Humboldt Lake bed near Lovelock Cave, Nevada (after Tuohy 1986:227, Figure 1); (c) Horn (bighorn sheep) sculpture from Lovelock Cave, Nevada (after Loud and Harrington 1929:Plate 15f).

119-A, might have been collected for their resemblance to the tail ends of rattlers (Koerper 2006:51).

Koerper (2006:50-51) had previously reported that other natural objects, specifically rattlesnake parts, were applied to magico-religious and other purposes; skins, rattles, skulls, heads, and venom were all listed. There are interesting tidbits to add here. For instance, the snake's warning device functioned as an amulet among the Wintu (DuBois 1935:82). Klamath men who kill a snake tie the rattle into their hair (Spier 1930:129), as decorations or perhaps also as a charm; Spier offered few details. The Maidu, however, may have had a taboo against using the skin or rattles of the viper (see Spencer 1908:243).

One female Shasta snake doctor wore a necklace of tail rattles as well as a rattlesnake skin headband; her pipe stem was covered with a rattler's skin. After finishing her sucking and dancing, this practitioner reported the appearance and actions of the rattlesnake spirit, who indicated the gifts the spirit wanted for himself and for the doctor (Kroeber 1925:303).

Salinans fashioned musical rattles from the tail buttons (Mason 1912:158), as also occurred in southern Sierra Nevada territory (Driver 1937:85). Rattlesnake rattles were also made into toy buzzers (a kind of whirligig) in both the southern Sierra Nevada (Driver 1937:84) and the central Sierra region (Aginsky 1943:423).

Lowie (1909:230) described how the Great Basin Northern Shoshone might prepare an evil charm, one that would be carefully sequestered in a buckskin bag worn on the body of its owner who could then kill a person by murmuring incantations while at the same time looking intensely at the victim. The charm was the liver and/or gall bladder of a wild animal that had supposedly absorbed the poison of rattlesnake heads that had been set upon hot coals in a hole in the ground and then covered with the said wild animal parts.

Also, with regard to snake skins, the Klamath bind a snake wound with a "fresh snake skin" (Spier 1930:129). Among the Wintu, snake skins (presumably from rattlers) served as talismans deserving of the same sacred treatment provided pebble charms, namely wrapping in grass, sequestering well away from any dwellings, and propitiating with offerings of smoke and acorn meal (DuBois 1935:83-83). Profane treatment courted punishment, specifically, blindness.

With the Atsugewi, rattlesnake fangs were one ingredient of one kind of arrow poison (Garth 1953:153). Some Atsugewi chopped up wild parsnip roots along with the heads of rattlers, and then placed the mixture in a skin with arrow points. This caused the points to "all get the germ" (Garth 1953:153).

Parenthetically, some Mexican period Californiano women in a parturient state were fed pulverized egg shells and a decoction of snake rattles "to assist the expulsive pains" (Bard 1006:106). Speculatively, at this time it is conceivable that some acculturated Native midwives might have applied a similar practice.

Our extended survey of California and Great Basin ethnographic records pulls together additional instances of taboos and other folklore regarding rattlesnakes. For instance, according to Spencer (1908:243), Maidu believed rattlesnakes to have been non-poisonous when drinking; they laid aside their venom until they had slaked their thirst. For the Southern Paiute, ring-and-pin play is tabooed as a summer activity, and violation of the taboo precipitates snakebite (Steward 1941:248). Kelly (1964:112, 116), however, reports the Southern Paiute tabooed ring-and-pin play for any season other than winter, but snakebite was also expected if the cord broke during play. Additionally, telling of myths was tabooed during summertime, and violation of the taboo would earn the narrator a snakebite (Kelly 1964:120). In his study of the Ute, Stewart (1942:291) gives snakebite as the punishment for violating a taboo against playing cat's cradles, but again only during the summer season.

Also from the Great Basin, there seems to have been a Washo taboo to prevent a man who has been scarred by snakebite from gazing upon pine nuts before the piñon crop is mature (Lowie 1939:331). Violation causes the fruits to be killed by the sun, resulting in the nuts drying up.

Among the Kato (Cahto), the southernmost Athabascans on the Pacific Coast, shooting a rattler with an arrow causes the archer to suffer lameness (Loeb 1932:46). Clubbing is the method selected to dispatch the animal. This prescription undoubtedly directs behavior toward surer and safer outcomes for one who would attempt killing the viper. In a similar vein, Lake Miwok kill the snake with stones, explaining that they are afraid to hit it with a shot arrow (Loeb 1932:120). Whether this derives from a formal taboo is not indicated.

Loeb (1932:46) records that uttering the rattlesnake name precipitates bad luck for the Kato. Further, rattlesnake songs in the winter bring a stop to the rain, but the Kato are forbidden to sing these songs during the summer (Loeb 1932:46).

In California, for the River Patwin, a person would stay at home the day following a dream about being struck by a rattler, or else he would actually be bitten (Kroeber 1932:288). In Hill Patwin territory, a man bitten by the venomous snake would immediately beseech two deities, and indicate aloud his emergency, calling out for certain close relatives who should make a food offering (Kroeber 1932:292-294). The deities and the snake are thus somewhat mollified, and

consequently the poison is weakened. The relatives do make the offering and a shaman is sent for. The medicine man then sucks blood and poison from the patient.

With the Valley Nisenan, a snake victim was isolated in a shelter, and there he was cured by a shaman. The shaman would administer a special medicine, without which the patient would surely be bitten again (Kroeber 1929:274). Stephen Powers (1976:325), writing on the Nisenan's "very genuine terror of rattlesnakes," also recorded their practice of temporarily excluding the unfortunate one from the settlement. Powers' informants provided the rationale that the snake, having once tasted that person's blood, would follow him home, thus endangering the lives of others in the village. A parallel exclusionary practice likewise applied to those mauled by a bear (Powers 1976:325).

Gayton (1948:162) recorded that Kechayi (Northern Foothills Yokuts) men and women wore abalone shell gorgets for snake protection. The glittering of the gorgets was supposed to cause the rattlers to issue their audible warning.

The rattlesnake enjoyed a high profile in Native California cosmology/mythology (Koerper 2006:40-41, 64-66). Constrained by space limitations, Koerper was necessarily selective in addressing this subject, his frame of reference restricted to coastal southern California. Among the many observations drawn from a variety of scholars, the study made the point that "for the Chumash especially, rattlesnakes have associations with the sky and heavens" (Koerper 2006:41), noting also that Hudson and Underhay (1978:136) were unsure whether the Chumash ever had a Rattlesnake constellation. Also, drawing on Luiseño and Cahuilla mythology (respectively, Henshaw 1972:94-95 and Hooper 1920:321-326), it was explained that the often-humiliated snake had been provided fangs to protect himself against the physical and verbal jabs of his tormentors (Koerper 2006:41). Koerper's study was remiss in overlooking a particularly interesting Luiseño narrative (DuBois 1906:54-55) with content touching on constellation stuff, which at the same time supplies detail on the abuse suffered by the pitiful snake before he had acquired the wherewithal to fight back. DuBois titled the story, "The North Star and the Rattlesnake." Its entertainment value alone justifies an abridged retelling.

To begin, North Star was the worst among the bullies who taunted Rattlesnake, derisively poking fun at his lack of arms and legs. North Star would fling dirt into the face of the snake, throw him about, and drag the helpless creature by the hair. When Rattlesnake complained of his treatment to a sympathetic Earth-Mother, she provided the reptile with two sharp-pointed sticks (fangs). Afterwards, when North Star resumed his cruelty, Rattlesnake retaliated, biting off most of one of North Star's fingers. Corroboration of this account

can be witnessed in the night sky. DuBois writes:

Starting from the North Star as a centre, there is a vortex of small stars, which in the clear air of the southwest are very plainly seen. They may easily appear as the five fingers of a hand; a line of three or four stars for the thumb, with several curving lines for the fingers, of which the last, a straight line shorter than the rest, and pointing towards Cassiopeia, is the one bitten off by the rattlesnake [DuBois 1906:54, Note 1].

Turning elsewhere, from Northeastern Maidu worldview, Loeb (1933:197; see also Spencer 1908:243) offers an excellent demonstration of the mythological prominence of the viper, for it is a rattlesnake that causes the very first human death. The victim in this story was the son of Coyote, who so angered Wonomi that this culture hero sent the serpent to avenge the insult (see also Dixon 1912:53-54).

Worth repeating from Loeb (1933:182) is yet another example concerning the snake as avenger. Among the Yuba River Maidu, should a boy by chance or otherwise approach a girl too closely at the time of her first menstruation and when she was being led outdoors or when she was being danced over in her puberty ceremony, the girl's guardian might break a stick over his penis "to make the boy like a woman." In lieu of such punishment, he stood at risk for being struck by a rattler. Here, the intersection of onset of female sexual maturity, male genitalia, and the rattlesnake in this cycle of taboo, violation, and punishment possibly reflects a subtext (subconscious?) of logical associations in Native mindset.

Parenthetically, another intersection of male genitalia and the rattler occurs in the "armed vagina" concept identified in California Indian myths and tales (Kroeber 1908:224). The armed vagina possesses teeth, flint, or a rattlesnake; this motif clearly involves castration anxiety.

Returning to examples of rattlesnakes involved in communications of fertility/fecundity/increase (see Koerper 2006:65-66), Loeb (1932:124) describes a Lake Miwok first fruits ceremony. A first fruits ceremony is one kind of rite of intensification where reverence and/or other attitudes are expressed regarding nature's forces of generation and fertility (Haviland 2002:376-377). Lake Miwok dancers participating in the four-day activities shuffled and swayed with rattlesnakes coiled around their necks. Loeb (1932:124) relates that each performer sought out vipers prior to the first day of the dance, and that it was the "onerous duty of the fire tenders to relieve the dancers of their squirming charges." It is not explained how bites were prevented, but perhaps the reptile's mouths had been sewn shut, a procedure for a rite of intensification documented by Barrett (1952:57) for the Northern Pomo. Barrett (1952:57) reported on the rattlesnake ceremony in which a male religious practitioner danced with

a rattlesnake whose jaws were so secured, and this dancer was regarded as a “pregnant man.” The rattlesnake dance performance was part of a larger “pole ceremony,” the purpose of which was to guarantee “good crops and bountiful harvests” (Barrett 1952:57).

Loeb (1926:372-374) had earlier described the pole ceremony for the Inland Pomo Kuksu cult. It was on the second day of the pole ceremony that the rattlesnake ceremony took place (Loeb 1926:375-376), the account of which differs in important particulars from that of Barrett (1952:57).

The central player of this ceremony was a “snake swallower,” or *k'o'o baan*. Loeb explains that *k'o'o* stands for both snake and poison, while *baan* means to give birth or to produce. After the snake has been procured, its jaws were sewn together. There are several ritual components, including two acts of propitiation toward the reptile. The swallower performs an illusion in which there appears to have been a swallowing and then a regurgitating of the rattler. It was taboo to kill this snake, and at the end of the ceremony, the animal was set free uninjured (Loeb 1926:376).

In other ritual behavior not identified as to any specific increase rite, there might be associations aligning the rattlesnake with sex-based or related communications. For instance, one might ponder Stephen Powers' (1976:324-325) description of a set of three dances performed in one “galad-day” by Nisenans (a.k.a. Southern Maidus) at springtime, ostensibly to prevent snakebites from occurring during the summer. The affair reads like a spring rites celebration.

While there is some sly hesitancy in Powers' descriptions, the imagery conveyed seems clear enough. In the first act, girls and women, their hair decorated with flowers in fillets, and wearing “only narrow cinctures [girdles] of woven bulrushes about the waists” perform a “voluptuous, dithyrambic dance.” Powers' enthusiasm for the display is evident in the following:

Faster and faster, keeping time with the accelerating chant, until finally [the girls and women] run riot over the whole place. They break asunder with screams and laughter, and every one of the spectators finds himself pelted with girls and flowers [Powers 1976:325].

In the “second act,” men perform a dance, after which women circulate among the spectators with baskets to solicit gifts of “acorn-bread, fish, shell-money, and other articles” for payment to the singers. The degree of immunity from snakebites is believed to be proportional to the largess of a donor of such gifts. Speculatively, these valuables are perhaps a metaphor invoking nature's bounty.

The “third act” Powers explains thusly:

A bevy of young maidens dance around two young men in succession, singing a very gay and lively chorus, and ever and anon, they make a dash at him [sic], catching him [sic] by the shoulders, laughing, stretching out their arms toward him [sic], tantalizing him [sic] etc. [Powers 1976:325].

When this last dance ends, some old men go among the women to solicit presents for the singers. Occasionally the oldsters seize the women who are “dragged along sportively,” an amusement for the bystanders (Powers 1976:325). One might reasonably wonder whether Powers had not been witness to a devolved bacchanalian-like debauch.

Koerper (2006:36-38) brought together examples of a range of practical means by which Native peoples avoided the threat of poisonous attacks. Missing from those discussions was any reference to snake leggings. Stewart Culin (1907:132), collecting Pomo manufactures at the turn of the century, commissioned Nancy Graves to produce a pair of tulle leggings in the “old style.” What she created were flat mats that were tied at the ends and then folded in fourths. Any archaeologist who has donned the normal snake protection for survey work will immediately recognize the artifacts (see Fane et al. 1991:186) as probable snake leggings. In contrast to these 4-ply leggings, Graves told Culin (1907:147) that the Pitt River (Achumawi) type of leggings were fashioned of skins.

Also, adding to the list of quasi-medical treatments of bites are additional examples involving primitive surgery. The Klamath might gash the flesh to the bone, or at least cut flesh well away from the fang punctures (Spier 1930:129). The procedure was finished when a fresh snake skin was wrapped around the wound. The Kato (Cahto) too would cut at the site of the damage to bleed the victim, and then an analgesic poultice was applied, followed by rattlesnake songs (Loeb 1932:48). The River Patwin are reported as one of the few tribes drinking an emetic, something vile such as excrement (Kroeber 1932:286). Various medicines were then applied and the wound bandaged up. Among the Yuma, a bite wound is stroked and jabbed, either with arrowweed tips or with feathers, before a snake doctor sucks the wound. The doctor also sings curing songs (Forde 1931:196).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article and an earlier work (Koerper 2006) provide a visual inventory of California and Great Basin rattlesnake effigies and purported effigies, some of whose shapes indicate or at least suggest whole-body representations, but many more appearing to be symbols of the viper's warning device. These studies also bring together a rich and varied

rattlesnake lore. The combined archaeological, ethnographic, and ethnohistoric information demonstrate the high profile accorded the poisonous creature and its imagery in past lifeways, regionally and beyond. These data might force observations allowing identification of additional effigies, artifacts presently languishing unrecognized in museum, CRM, or other collections, and identification of future discoveries from field and laboratory work.

The ethnographic record inspires various suggestions bearing on possible functions of the LAN-62A stone tail rattle, including: prophylactic amulet to ward off snake strikes; talisman for treating bites; and shamanic prop for use in the toloache ceremony, where initiates learn of the rattlesnake's role as Chinigchinich avenger. A flood of associations and/or emotions possibly attended contact with the LAN-62A soapstone effigy and similar artifacts, thoughts and feelings drawing perhaps on cosmology/mythology, on established taboos, or, say, on the consequences of carelessness when vipers are about.

Perhaps it was the effigy's final disposition as a funerary offering that plumbed the deepest emotional levels. To explain, rattlesnake imagery might simultaneously communicate fertility/fecundity/increase thematics while carrying connotations of death. Conceptual integration of these basic facts of existence, reproduction, and mortality possibly effected symbolic expressions of regeneration. Perhaps selection of the rattler representation for a mortuary setting was owing to the artifact's symbolic projection of death as generator of life (see Arriaza 1995; Bloch and Perry 1982; Burkert 1979; Donovan 1985; Geertz 1973; Salomon 1991). If so, the metaphoric content of the LAN-62A effigy likely reinforced belief in eternal life, thereby mitigating the angst occasioned by mortality, assuaging the sorrow of loss, and sustaining the awesomeness of the supernatural world (see Geertz 1973:110).

These and many more unstated suggestions provide much food for thought. Interpretations of function and meaning, however, remain an outstanding conundrum.

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