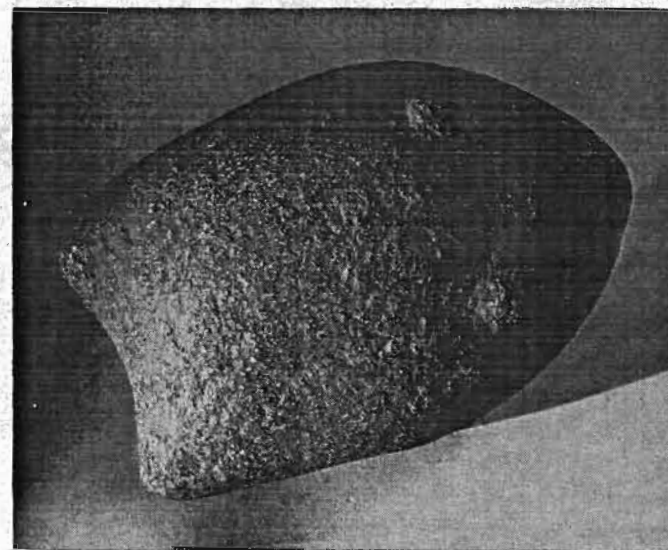


Side view of curious stone carving from the Browne Site.
(Photo by Joseph Haworth)

A STONE CARVING FROM THE BROWNE SITE

By Roberta S. Greenwood

IT HASN'T HAPPENED too frequently in New World culture history that the archeologist and the art historian have had occasion to share surprise, delight and bewilderment in the same object. But the recent discovery in Ventura County, California, of a stone representation which may prove to be one of the oldest



Stone effigy as seen from the top. Note fishlike tail.
(Photo by Joseph Haworth)

works of art in this hemisphere has afforded great excitement in both disciplines. That the discovery was made in the course of scientific excavation of a large, unmixed and highly productive site makes it particularly significant.

The figure was found *in situ* by Mr. R. O. Browne as he was supervising field work at the site registered with the University of California Archaeological Survey as Ven-150. It was lying in undisturbed soil at a depth of one foot—the same level which produced the greatest artifact yield. In position, the dorsal aspect was uppermost, with the head oriented toward the south. The recovery was not in the burial area, but rather toward the northern periphery of the site, a location which has given up numerous grinding tools. One mano was discovered within 10 inches of the figure.

At first glance the effigy resembles a fish. However, the site deposit is entirely devoid of fish bone or fishing

equipment, and since it is located about 10 miles inland from the present coastline it would appear that fish were neither economically nor ritually important.

It seems more likely that the figure is intended to represent a toad or some intermediate evolutionary form. The protuberant eyes, pointed jaw, incipient chin and wide mouth are all suggestive of an amphibian. There is some shaping along the sides near the tail which may be an indication of the developing legs or a squatting position. Whether the form was prompted by the outline of the original cobble or by some ceremonial or totemic association remains in the realm of conjecture.

The lithic material is diorite, a dense and heavy intrusive igneous rock, with glistening schistose crystal inclusions. It occurs near Lockwood Valley and in the San Gabriel Mountains east of Saugus. The technological aspect is entirely in accordance with the estimated age; the stone has been shaped by pecking, in contrast to the ground and polished steatite and serpentine effigies from later sites. The incised mouth was probably worked with the sharp edge of a chert flake.

The figure measures 16.5 cm. in length, 11.8 cm. in diameter near the midpoint, and 7.5 cm. in height. It weighs 2833.98 grams (6 pounds, 3 ounces). It is in good balance from both front to back, and side to side, so that it will rock but not tip over.

Miss Pegot Waring, noted sculptor, says of the figure, "This sculpture from a primitive era produces an effect which is stunning to our civilized minds. Not only in the formal perfection which cannot be surpassed, in the organization of volutes and planes, and the masterly handling of an intractable material, but in the tremendous spiritual impact. It establishes the existence of an American tradition in sculpture for the artistic expression of the metaphysical urge. It endows an animal form with something of the eternal. We are familiar with this in the Jaguar of Teotihuacan, the sculpture of Egypt, etc., but the American sculptor has long felt that he was working outside of any native tradition."

The Browne Site conforms to the Oak Grove culture as defined by D. B. Rogers and further expanded by the excavations in Topanga Canyon. It has yielded 1300 manos, 130 milling stones, and a complete tool kit of crude core and cobble choppers, hammerstones and scrapers. Among the eccentric objects recovered are two "doughnut" stones, an array of stone balls, one perforated charmstone, and one fragmentary chipped crescent.

An attempt is being made to recover enough charcoal for a Carbon-14 date, and even relative dating must await the complete analysis of the artifacts and the final report now being prepared by Greenwood and Browne. Until either absolute or relative dates can be established it appears that the site belongs to one of the earliest milling stone horizons in the Southwest, and that the Oak Grove culture has certain affinities to the Topanga and San Dieguito assemblages. An age of 5,000 years for the Browne Site, and for its most remarkable artifact, is entirely possible.

A Note on the Effigy from the Browne Site

By Ralph C. Altman¹

The zoomorphic statuette from the Browne Site is a beautiful work of abstract sculpture in the round. The purity of the closed form, the simplicity of lines and the self-contained compactness create an impact of power in spite of its small dimensions. The surface texture resulting from the fine pecking technique, and the sparkle of the crystalline inclusions of the diorite, give exciting life to the smooth flow of the curved planes.

Lacking a base, it presents a pleasing aspect from any angle. Photos cannot do justice to this piece. One has to hold and feel it and look at it while it moves in one's hands. It seems inconceivable that it was intended to be appreciated otherwise. And it invites to be picked up. One's fingers fold so naturally around the concavity of the one end that one wonders whether this object had not served as a tool. However, the surface does not show any place revealing marks of battering on gross examination.

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¹ Art Department, U.C.L.A.

TULE SPRINGS REPORT WELCOMED

"Tule Springs, Nevada—With Other Evidences of Pleistocene Man in North America," by Mark Raymond Harrington and Ruth DeEtte Simpson, the Museum's curators, has received a warm reception in scientific circles. This is evidenced by the numerous letters of congratulation and approval that have been received since publication of the work.

This long-awaited report of one of its most significant expeditions appears as Southwest Museum Paper No. 18, the latest of a scholarly series of contributions to knowledge in this country. The Museum gratefully acknowledges the grant from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation of Los Angeles which made this important publication possible.

Attractively printed by the Cole-Holmquist Press, this valuable work features many maps, drawings and photographs as well as a useful bibliography. The publication is now available at the Museum for \$3.75.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of members of the Southwest Museum, Incorporated, will be held at 11 o'clock a.m. on Wednesday, February 21st, at the Museum, Highland Park, Los Angeles 65, Calif. The Board of Trustees will meet on the same date at the same place at 12 o'clock noon.

Browne Site Effigy

(Continued from Page 7)

The carving probably represents a frog or toad, a widely diffused motif in two- and three-dimensional American Indian arts of diverse or frequently unknown symbolic value. The style is unique and recalls only superficially the quality of certain prehistoric Indian animal sculptures, *e.g.*, from the Eastern United States or the Santa Barbara Channel area.

According to the excavators, there is no doubt that the piece comes from an undisturbed Oak Grove site and that it was not intrusive. If future tests don't disprove the current assumption of the great age of this assemblage, one is confronted by one of the oldest known sculptures in the round from this hemisphere, as Greenwood emphasized. In contrast to the truly crude Texan Malakoff stone heads, presumably dating into the Pleistocene, or to the famous Tequiquiac animal head (a natural formation, a sacrum, barely "touched up" for the sake of imagery), it is a mature work of art.

One hopes that this piece will not remain a unique specimen, that other visual artistic expressions of this culture were not confined to perishable materials, and that future excavations will provide the means of placing the statuette into a style sequence.

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