

THE  
NEVADA ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY

# REPORTER

NEVADA ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY

*A cooperative program of the University of Nevada System  
and  
the Nevada State Museum*

*A monthly report of news and activities  
of mutual interest to the several individuals  
and organizations within the framework  
of the Nevada Archeological Survey  
and for the information of friends and  
associates of the Survey.*

MARY RUSCO, EDITOR

## NOTES ON A COLLECTION OF CALIFORNIAN SHELL BEADS FROM THE HUMBOLDT SINK, NEVADA

By Donald R. Tuohy

The Humboldt Sink of western Nevada has long been known as an archaeological area of outstanding significance. Excavated cave sites in the Humboldt Sink have provided many fundamental facts for interpreting thousands of years of western Great Basin prehistory. Such famous caves as Lovelock Cave (Loud and Harrington 1929), the Leonard Rockshelter site (Heizer 1951), and Humboldt Cave (Heizer and Krieger 1956) have provided innumerable answers to basic questions concerning aboriginal Great Basin lifeways (Heizer and Napton 1969).

Among the facts clearly demonstrated for prehistoric Humboldt Sink cultures is one outstanding one; specific trade relationships between Central California cultures and those of the Humboldt Sink existed throughout six to seven millenia. The mute evidence for this trade is in the form of Pacific Ocean species of shell beads found in the western Great Basin.

An excellent paper by Bennyhoff and Heizer (1958: 60-92) rather thoroughly examined the possibilities of cross-dating western Great Basin sites by using Californian shell bead types. The paper conclusively demonstrated the value of shell artifacts in the determination of time synchronisms between aboriginal California and the western Great Basin. During the past twelve years, however, new data on shell bead type concurrences, with few exceptions (O'Connell and Ambro 1968: 132; Cowan and Clewlow 1968: 200; Tuohy and Stein 1969), have been almost non-existent.

For this reason, as well as for others, the following notes on a collection of Californian shell bead and ornament types from the Humboldt Sink are presented. The collection of 76 shell beads and ornaments is but a small part of more than two thousand artifacts recently donated to the Nevada State Museum. The collection was made by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Derby who ranched and farmed the bottom land of the Humboldt Sink during the 1940's and 1950's.

At least seven species of Pacific Ocean marine Mollusca are represented in the sample, and among them are: Haliotis rufescens, Haliotis cracherodii, Olivella biplicata, Dentalium pretiosum, Saxidomus sp., a single Turbinidae shell, and a single Turridae shell. These Mollusca, together with three glass trade beads and a single fragment of sea-urchin shell (Figure 1, row 7A-D), are illustrated in Figure 1. //

Ornaments of shell (3)

Not shown in the illustration is a portion of a Haliotis rufescens ornament, possibly a K2bII type in the Gifford (1947) classification. The other two shell ornaments in the Derby collection are illustrated as Figure 1, row 1A and B. The ornament shown as 1A is a whole Dentalium shell, or a type B2 ornament, while the one illustrated as 1B is a type 01aIII abalone shell, Haliotis cracherodii, ornament. Dentalium shell ornaments in the Central California sequence have been related to the upper half of Phase I of the Late Horizon (A.D. 700 to A. D. 1500), but they apparently occur

in Lassen County at least two centuries before Christ (O'Connell and Ambro 1968: 132). They continued to be imported into the Great Basin during ethnographic times (Bennyhoff and Heizer 1958: 62). The type OlalIII Haliotis ornament is one of the diagnostic types of Phase 2 of the Late Horizon (ca. A.D. 1600 to A.D. 1800) in Central California.

### Shell beads (73)

Type 3a2 split and punched Olivella beads comprise the most numerous group in the collection. They are illustrated as Figure 1, rows 4, 5, and 6. There are 31 beads in all, and the largest is 20.2 mm. long and 12.8 mm. wide. Type 3a2 Olivella beads have a wide distribution in the San Joaquin Valley, and according to Bennyhoff and Heizer (1958: 66) they achieve their highest frequency in Central California during the first half of Phase I of the Late Horizon (A.D. 700 to A.D. 1500).

The next most numerous group is composed of 17 thick and thin rectangular Olivella beads with central or end perforations. All perforations were drilled. There are eight thick rectangular beads with end perforations (Figure 1, row 1H, row 2D, and row 2G-L); seven thin rectangular Olivella beads with central perforations (Figure 1, row 1F, I-M, O); one thin rectangular Olivella bead with an end perforation (Figure 1, row 1G); and one thick rectangular Olivella bead with a central perforation (Figure 1, row 1N). The rectangular Olivellas with end perforations find equivalents in Central California during the latter half of Phase I of the Late Horizon (A.D. 700 to A.D. 1500). Thin rectangular beads with central perforations, according to Bennyhoff and Heizer (1958: 67) are diagnostic of the earlier portion of Phase I in Central California, especially when not associated with two other types of Olivellas. The thick rectangular bead with the central perforation may relate to the Central California "Early" period (ca. 5000 to 2000 B.C.). Gerow (1968: 54) noted the intergradation between smaller and larger rectangular Olivellas at the University Village Complex, an Early Horizon complex dated at 1500 to 1000 B.C.

Oval Olivella beads comprise the next most numerous group. There are 16 beads in all, six of which have been drilled, and ten of which have been punched. The drilled specimens are shown as Figure 1, row 2E, F; row 3A, D, E, G. The punched specimens are illustrated as Figure 1, row 2A, B, C, N, and row 3B, C, F, H, I, J. Bennyhoff and Heizer (1958: 70) indicate that the oval Olivella is too simple a form to have a single origin, and that it may be referable to the California Middle Horizon (2000 B.C. to A.D. 300). Thirteen oval Olivella beads recently found in a shaman's grave at Pyramid Lake, Nevada have been dated at 1820 $\pm$  180 years B.P., or A.D. 130 (I-2846) (Tuohy and Stein 1969).

The balance of shell bead specimens in the Derby collection is made up of two spire-lopped, type 1b, Olivella beads (Figure 1, row 7H, I); two Saxidomus sp. clam disc beads (type VIalIII), a single type 3e cup-like Olivella bead (Figure 1, row 1C); an Olivella scoop bead (Figure 1, row 2M); and one fragment each of a Turbinidae shell (Figure 1, row 7E), a Turridae shell (Figure 1, row 7F), and an Olivella shell (Figure 1, row 7G). Spire-lopped Olivella beads appear throughout the culture sequence in Central California. Saxidomus sp. clam disc beads relate to Phase 2 of the Late Horizon in Central California (ca. A.D. 1600 to A.D. 1800),



