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A DECORATED MORTAR IN COLUMBIA VALLEY ART STYLE

The stone mortar discussed here was called to my attention by William S. Laughlin of the Department of Anthropology, Willamette University at Salem, Oregon. The specimen (No. ACR, 1219, Willamette University Museum) was collected by a Major McCleary from a burial site at the north end of Miller's Island, at the confluence of the Deschutes and Columbia rivers. This island has abundant archaeological remains, some of which have been discussed by Strong, Schenck, and Steward in their *Archaeology of the Dalles-Deschutes Region*.¹ The mortar may be from site 22 or site 19, but this is not certain.

The basalt mortar is 7.3 cm. high, 11.6 cm. in diameter at the top and 8.6 cm. in diameter at the base. The walls are 1.6 cm. thick at the rim and the cavity is 4.0 cm. deep. The bottom and interior are undecorated. The design is incised with firm lines on the outside wall of the mortar, and when the mortar is in normal position (i.e., resting on the base), the faces point upward toward the rim, the forefeet grasping the edge. The design is thus inverted, and has been shown in "normal" perspective in the accompanying drawing.

ANALYSIS OF DESIGN PANELS

The exterior surface of the mortar is divisible into four separate "panels" (A-D). The bottom surface and interior are plain.

Panel A. An animal's face with the ears on top the head. A square between the ears may represent a headdress or hat, or may simply be a filler for a blank area. Beside each cheek are two hands or feet which look like bear paws. Above the head is a lateral section containing two similar feet and two triangles. These may be simply decorative elements, but they may also represent schematically the hinder end of the animal, with only the feet pointed laterally and the tail represented by the space between the two triangles. A native artist of the Northwest Coast would probably interpret this whole panel as representing a complete animal (bear?).² If the design is a complete animal, the square between the ears may represent the body of the animal. A small inverted face to the right is more difficult to explain; it may be simply a filler between the design of Panels A and B.

Panel B. Similar to the figure in Panel A except that the inverted face is omitted.

Panel C. Two animal faces at the bottom. The ears are pointed, and are unlike those of the figures in Panels A and B which are in typical Northwest Coast style.³ Above the head in the central section delimited by parallel lines is the square design common to all four panels, but with three concentric lines at each side. At the top is the now familiar feet and tail (?) design representing the hinder part of the body. At each side of the panel next to the head is a bent foreleg and foot.

¹ W. D. Strong, W. E. Schenck, and J. H. Steward, *Archaeology of the Dalles-Deschutes Region* (University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1930). See map of Miller's Island, p. 12.

² For an analysis of this conventionalized style see F. Boas, *The Decorative Art of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast* (Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. 9, pp. 123-176, 1897), (Also accessible in his *Primitive Art*, Oslo, 1927, pp. 183-298).

³ Cf. Boas, *op. cit.*

Decorated Mortar from Miller's Island, Columbia River

Panel D. This design resembles both the figures of Panels A and C. The inverted face to the left (Panel D) is identical to (but on the left rather than right side) that in the

Design Element	Panel	Northwest Coast	Columbia Valley
Eye	A, B, C, D	Like* Cf. Boas, 1927.	Like. Cf. Steward, 1927; Strong, Schenck, Steward, 1930: Fig. 22.
Cheek line	A, B, C	Unlike	Like. Cf. Strong, Schenck, Steward, 1930: Fig. 22a.
Cheek line	D	Unlike	Like. Cf. Strong, Schenck, Steward, 1930: Fig. 9d, f.
Feet	A, B, D	Unlike	Like. Cf. Steward, 1927: Pl. I, k.
Nose	A, B, C	Unlike	Like. Cf. Steward, 1927: Pl. I.
Ears	A, B	Like. Cf. Boas, 1927: Figs. 157-159, 165.	Unlike
Ears	C, D	Unlike	Like, Strong, Schenck, Steward, 1930: Fig. 22 b.
Mouth	A, B	Unlike	Unlike
Mouth	C, D	Unlike	Unlike
Eye**	A, D	Unlike	Like. Cf. Strong, Schenck, Steward, 1930: Fig. 22 c.
Inter-eyebrow triangle	A, B, C, D	Unlike	Like. Cf. Steward, 1927: Pl. I.
"Syntax"		Like Cf. Boas, 1927	Unlike

* But only occasionally. The characteristic eye motive is more representative.

** Of the inverted faces at the side.

Panel A figure. The front feet are not extended as in Panel C, but are in the same position as in the figures in Panels A and B. The rest of the Panel D figure is similar to that of Panel C, except that the nose is not shown and the cheek lines are separated.

Steward⁴ has discussed the peculiar carved art development of the Columbia River, pointing out that it is a peculiar conventionalized style which contains features of the Northwest Coast, Plateau, and Plains areas. In the later final report by Strong, Schenck and Steward⁵ is a further treatment of the Columbia Valley carved art style represented by bone and stone carvings, and petroglyphs.⁶ The style bears two main elements, one naturalistic, the other geometric. These authors state:⁷

It seems probable, therefore, that the naturalistic element in the stone sculpture and bone carving of our region [Dalles-Deschutes] was derived in relatively recent pre-Caucasian times from the northwest coast via the lower Columbia River. . . . In general it would seem that geometric decoration . . . points up rather than down the Columbia as the source of diffusion into our region. It would therefore appear that the elaborate art characteristic of the later pre-Caucasian period in the Dalles-Deschutes region shows a unique local blending of realistic style from down river with a geometric art from up stream. In this blending of plateau and coast styles, the latter appears to have been the strongest. . . .

To those familiar with the distinctive Northwest Coast art style, a casual glance at the design on the mortar presented here will suggest close kinship. Closer inspection, however, will show that the style is similar but not by any means identical. I list below several design elements which show resemblance clearly to either the art of the North Coast proper or the local and specialized Columbia Valley style which is in part ancestral to that of the Northwest Coast.

These design elements require some discussion. The typical Northwest Coast eye is realistic with a round eyeball between two outer curves representing the upper and lower eyelids. The simple eye consisting of two concentric oval lines occurs rarely here, but is the only type of eye in the Columbia River art. Suggestion of its northern parentage may be gained from the pear-shaped eye in Panel C⁸ which can be interpreted as a transitional form. Most of the other design elements are closely similar to Columbia Valley forms, and only vaguely reminiscent of these from the southern British Columbia coast. What I have called "syntax" is important for in this feature the resemblance is decidedly with the typical Northwest Coast art style. The naturalistic element is clearly derived from the coast area to the north, as earlier authors have pointed out.⁹ The geometric element in the mortar design is less apparent than in the carved bone figures shown by Steward.

It seems clear that the mortar design is done in the specialized Columbia Valley style, and that between the naturalistic art of the Northwest Coast and the geometric art of the Plateau the resemblance is most close to the former, since the geometric elements are minimized. Presumably this decorated mortar dates from a time when the coast influence was dominant over that of the plateau.

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⁴ J. Steward, *A New Type of Carving from the Columbia Valley* (AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, No. 29, 1927), pp. 255-261. ⁵ Strong, Schenck, and Steward, 1930, *op. cit.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57, 134-136, 142-143. ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁸ Other specimens illustrated by Strong, Schenck, Steward, 1930: Fig. 22 *a, h*, Pl. 9 *b, c, f*.

⁹ Steward, 1927; Strong, Schenck, Steward, 1930.