

## *Counterfeiters and Shell Currency Manipulators Among California Indians*

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One of the features of native life in California which persisted well into the time after the native societies had been practically destroyed by the successive occupations by Spain and the United States was the manufacture and use of shell bead money. Perhaps Indians continued to preserve these old customs because they were largely deprived of the opportunities for gainful employment, and through being largely excluded from the new economic system, they continued to value their old currency because it was still valuable. Hudson (1897) tells us that older native individuals in the latter half of the nineteenth century in central California bought shell beads made by the Pomo for American cash and saved it for their funerals. Stephen Powers (1877:336) in the early 1870s noted the continued interest by older people in acquiring shell bead money, and wrote, "This money has a certain religious value in their mind, as being alone worthy to be offered up on the funeral pyre of departed friends or famous chiefs of their tribe." The extraordinary amount of shell beads and ornaments collected by one man can be seen in the list provided by Powers (1877:337-338) for a Maidu man, Captain Tom, at Auburn. Thus, the persistence, and perhaps even the amplification, of shell bead making in the late 1800s can be attributed to the effort by the survivors of the decimated Native Californians who had experienced the pre-contact way of life and who were excluded from entering socially and economically the new culture to make one last affirmation of their "nativeness" by being buried and sent into the afterlife in the

true Indian fashion. Powers (1872:535) observes that marriage payment among the Karok in the early 1870s was still being demanded in dentalium "shell-money," but that since this commodity was scarce "the honorable estate of matrimony has fallen sadly into desuetude" because "the old Indians prefer that in exchange for their daughters." Here may be another instance of the maintenance of traditional practices among older Native Californians in terms of the aboriginal currency standards.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Pomo apparently became the chief manufacturers and purveyors for central California tribes of clam shell disc beads and tubular magnesite beads. Access to Bodega Bay where the clam shells were collected by the Pomo was probably possible only after the Coast Miwok, who owned this area, were reduced in numbers by contact with the Russians and missionization. Kniffen (1939) reports that Pomo clamshell gathering expeditions to Bodega Bay were made only in historic times. With the introduction of the pump drill by the agency of a "Spaniard" in the 1870s and the foot-powered grindstone, the Pomo were able to produce huge quantities of shell beads which found a ready market among surviving Indian groups in the Sacramento Valley and probably beyond to the east in the Sierra Nevadas (Hudson 1897, 1900). So, to some appreciable extent, the Pomo preeminence as shell bead suppliers in Central California appears to have come about through change in the aboriginal situation resulting from the presence of Anglo-Europeans.

The Russians who had established a fort at Ross on the Mendocino County Coast in 1812 are said to have manufactured counterfeit disc beads of dull-lustered glass for distribution to the resident Pomo, according to Hudson (1897:108) who writes:

Counterfeits [of Pomo beads] appeared as early as 1816 when the Russian explorer

Kuskoff ordered made and sent to him a certain pattern of glass beads to trade with the wild tribes in New Albion. A number of these beads were exhumed from a very old grave not long ago, and prove to be good imitations, both in form and color, but quite lacking in luster. It is recorded that the wild tribes soon detected the cheat and cast them out with abhorrence. Tradition confirms the record with added details of how three Russian traders of *charlil kol* (devil's beads) were taken unawares and their heads burnt with their beads.

I do not know of any other record of Russian counterfeit disc beads, but presume that Hudson's account has some basis in actual history.

Beckham (1969:107, 157) provides us with the information that George Gibbs, one-time Indian Agent in Oregon, interpreter for Redick McKee on his 1851 treaty-making expedition to northwestern California, and goldminer on the Klamath River in 1852, forwarded in 1852 to his brother, Frank, then living in Shanghai, a few dentalium shells from Puget Sound, with the following instructions: "I have thought that your Chinese could imitate it in porcelain with exactness, and if so, a very profitable operation could be made, not only by selling it to miners and traders here in Oregon, but in purchasing directly from Indians skins and [gold] dust." Here, as in the case of the Pomo, local native shell currency could be converted to real money. Nothing seems to have come of Gibbs' scheme to manufacture counterfeit dentalia. Beckham (1969:157) records, however, that Gibbs bought dentalium shells from the Indians on Puget Sound "which he packaged and shipped to his old friend Duperu at Humboldt Bay," no doubt for the purpose of buying from the Indians "skins and dust" which were readily convertible to real cash.

The original source of the dentalium shells which served as currency among the Indians of northwestern California was Quatsino

Sound on Vancouver Island. The Pillings (1970:101, 112-113) provide a review of native reports of the routes along which these valuable shells travelled south in aboriginal times. They present data (1970:101-103) on the importation of dentalia by white traders in the last quarter of the nineteenth century for distribution to Indians as well as information on the importing of other items of value to the native peoples (obsidian, red-headed woodpecker scalps, and a white deerskin) from outside the northwestern California area.

The extensive trade in abalone shells taken by Spanish and American fur traders from Monterey to the Northwest Coast is another example of the influence of Caucasians in distributing desirable mollusc shells (Heizer 1940). From Monterey abalone shells were said to have been taken by trappers and traders eastward "into the Sierra Nevada, and even the rocky mountains" by beaver trappers and mountain traders and exchanged with the Indians "for furs, horses, buffalo robes, and other valuables, at high prices" (Taylor 1857).

From the early 1800s on there seem to have been some fairly substantial changes in the amount, kind, and distribution of shell beads or shell money in California Indian societies. It seems possible that much of what we read about "aboriginal" uses and values of shell beads recorded by ethnographers in the first half of the twentieth century may not, in fact, be an accurate record of ancient practices but rather ones which had been developed in response to new and different conditions of availability resulting from the presence of whites.

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## *The Beads of Humaliwo*

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The site of *Humaliwo* (4-LAn-264) is located near the coastal town of Malibu, California. Radiocarbon dates from the site indicate it was first seasonally occupied approximately 800-1000 B.C. Historically the area was occupied by Santa Monica Mountain Chumash, who acted as middlemen in complex island/inland trading spheres. Baptisms from *Humaliwo* are recorded at Mission San Buenaventura from 1785 to 1816. Thus the site could contain information about cultural systems spanning almost 3000 years.

This is a preliminary analysis of shell, stone, and glass beads from *Humaliwo*. It is based on a small sample of beads recovered during summer excavations of 1971 and 1972 by the UCLA Archaeological Survey.

Any discussion of beads should begin with a few explicit statements about the basis of its units. The artifact categories discussed below represent the correlation, within specific limits, of three variables or attributes.<sup>1</sup> The three variables are form, material, and dimensions. When the form "saucer" and the material "wall of the *Olivella* shell" and the dimensions "7.0 mm. in overall diameter, 1.3 mm. in thickness, and 2.0 mm. in hole diameter" are found together, the artifact is classed within the category "early Middle Period *Olivella* saucer."<sup>2</sup> In this paper the dimensions will be written as bead diameter/bead thickness/hole diameter, all in millimeters. It is not within the scope of the present paper to discuss the rationale for the three variables except to say that they are common to all beads, easily measured, and temporally significant. The reader may wish to examine other bead classifications and discussions of the types or categories used and is referred to papers by Beardsley (1954), Bennyhoff and

