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#### **Authors**

Desautels, Nancy A.

Koerper, Henry C.

Couch, Jeffrey S.

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## A Birdstone and Phallic Pestle Cache from CA-ORA-365

**NANCYA. DESAUTELS**, Scientific Resource Surveys, Inc., Costa Mesa, CA 92627

**HENRY C. KOERPER**, Anthropology Department, Cypress College, Cypress, CA 90630

**JEFFREY S. COUCH**, Department of Anthropology, California State University, Long Beach, CA 90840

*This study describes a ceremonial cache containing miniature pestle-like artifacts, a "spike" fragment, an obsidian biface, and a steatite birdstone recovered at Huntington Beach Mesa, Orange County. The phallic naturalism of one "pestle" suggests that more stylized specimens likewise denoted phallic symbols. The direct association of small "pestles" with birdstones, in this and other caches, supports the proposition that birdstones communicated fertility/fecundity symbolism.*

**KROEBER** (1925:630) recognized "a certain decorative or symbolic likeness" between artifacts called birdstones (a.k.a. hook stones or pelican stones) "that makes their unity of class certain." He further observed that these items were "so variant in structural features as to dispel any possibility of each type having possessed a common utilitarian purpose." Kroeber offered no thoughts on the symbolism of such "religious" carvings.

These unusual sculptures are often viewed as representing avifauna (e.g., Heizer n.d.; Cameron 1988); de Cessac's (1951:2) Indian consultants did refer to them as "pajaritos," or "little birds." Others reject (e.g., Barnett 1944:42; Lee 1993) or are cautious about (e.g., Hoover 1974:34) bird interpretations.

Observing that the naturalism conveyed in certain stylizations of the genre appear to evoke phallic and/or vulvar imagery, Koerper and Labbé (1987, 1989) hypothesized that birdstones were "dimorphic sexual symbols," likely communicating a fertility/fecundity theme. Koerper and Labbé (1987:113-115) recounted an ethnographic description (Yates 1889:305; see also

Abbott 1879:215, Fig. 96) of a fertility/fecundity laden ritual that employed birdstones. They also noted the occurrence of birdstones in caches containing other kinds of representations that conveyed genital imagery (Koerper and Labbé 1989:49).

A grouping of magico-religious items from CA-ORA-104, the Corona del Mar site (Fig. 1), included a large birdstone, a "perforated steatite discoidal," and two "ceremonial wands" (Winterbourne 1967:21). The wands, or "spikes," belong to a category of artifacts regarded as phallic (Lee 1981:50). In Pacific Palisades (Fig. 1), a village site contained two mixed lots of "pelican stones" and spikes. One cache was reported as "encased in a 'ball' of exceptionally dark soil" (Wallace 1987:47). Together the two groupings contained 22 birdstones and 29 spikes, each spike with a bulbous head (Wallace 1987). Twelve of the spikes had encircling grooves directly below the knob, presumably a device to visually enhance a priapic look. Spikes and birdstones found together are also reported for a settlement in Redondo Beach (Fig. 1) (Van Valkenburgh 1931). The discovery of a ritual cache at CA-ORA-365, the Borchard site, Huntington Beach (Fig. 1), adds to the list of artifact groupings in which a birdstone or birdstones have been arranged together with artifacts reflecting genital imagery.

### CA-ORA-365

ORA-365, the Borchard site, is a multi-component midden located on a terraced promontory at the western edge of Huntington Beach Mesa (Fig. 2). Its upper terrace sits 28 plus m. above modern sea level, and the lower terrace begins at roughly the 22 meter contour.

Historic disturbances have compromised the stratigraphic integrity of significant portions of the site (Whitney-Desautels 1994). The Borchard house, one of the earliest residences in Huntington Beach, was probably located on the upper terrace. The first oil well in Huntington Beach was located on the property, and old aerial photographs reveal that oil wells, industrial structures, pipelines, and roads have impacted at least half of the prehistoric activity areas. Two large borrow areas accounted for additional damage.

Three zones of intact subsurface deposits were located during a 1991 auger test program (Whitney-

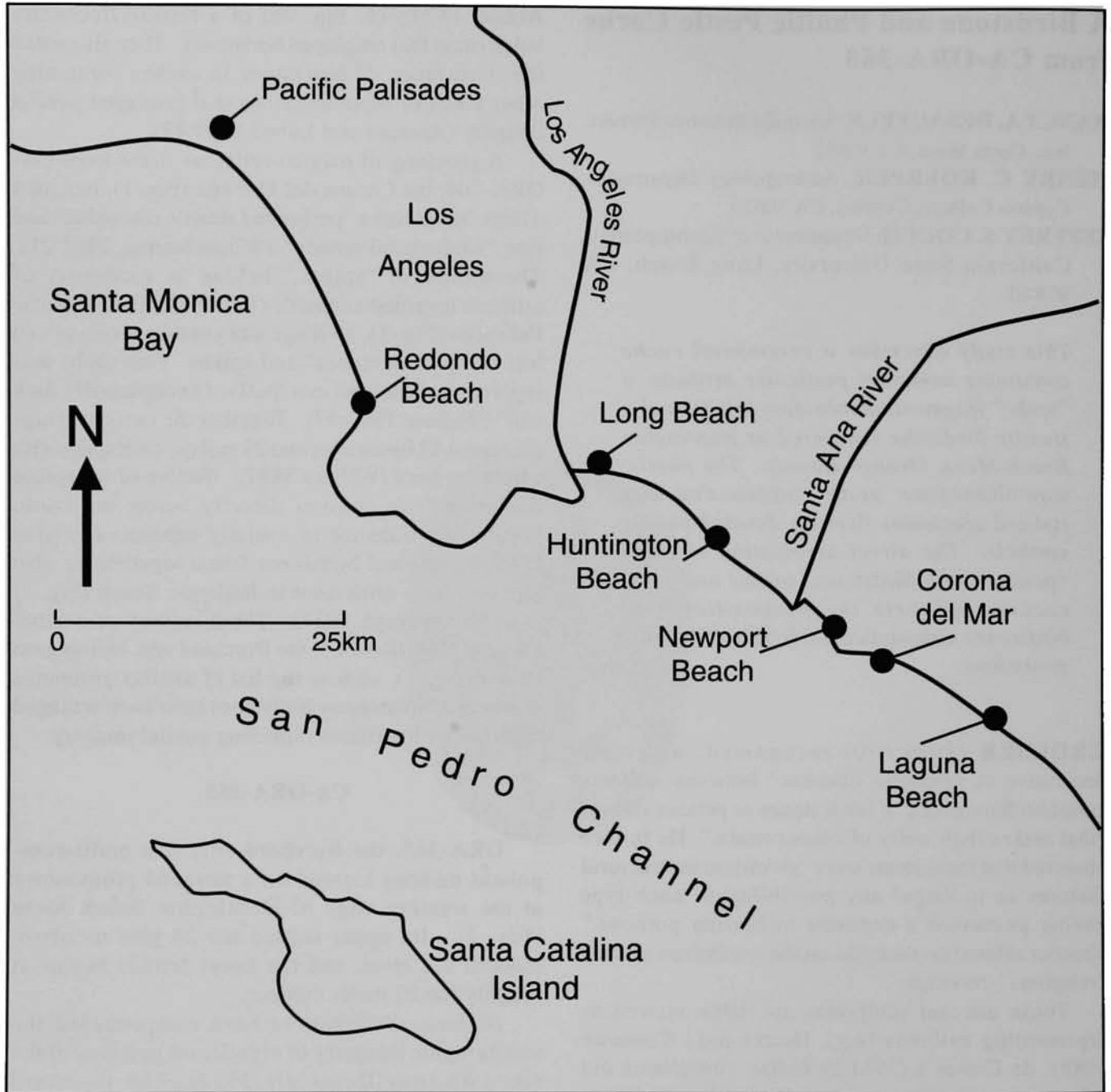


Figure 1. General location map.

Desautels 1994). Of these, the southern zone contained the most concentrated prehistoric cultural materials. For instance, shovel-excavated units at ORA-365 South produced seven features, one of which was a cairn of approximately 6000 rocks covering two poorly preserved burials, an infant and an adult. On August 11, 1992, a grading

monitor patrolling ORA-365 South discovered an eighth feature, consisting of a steatite birdstone, one incomplete and five complete miniature "pestles," a knob from a "spike," and an obsidian biface. This ritual cache lay approximately 70 cm. below ground surface in what appears to have been backfill material from a geological test cut (Trench

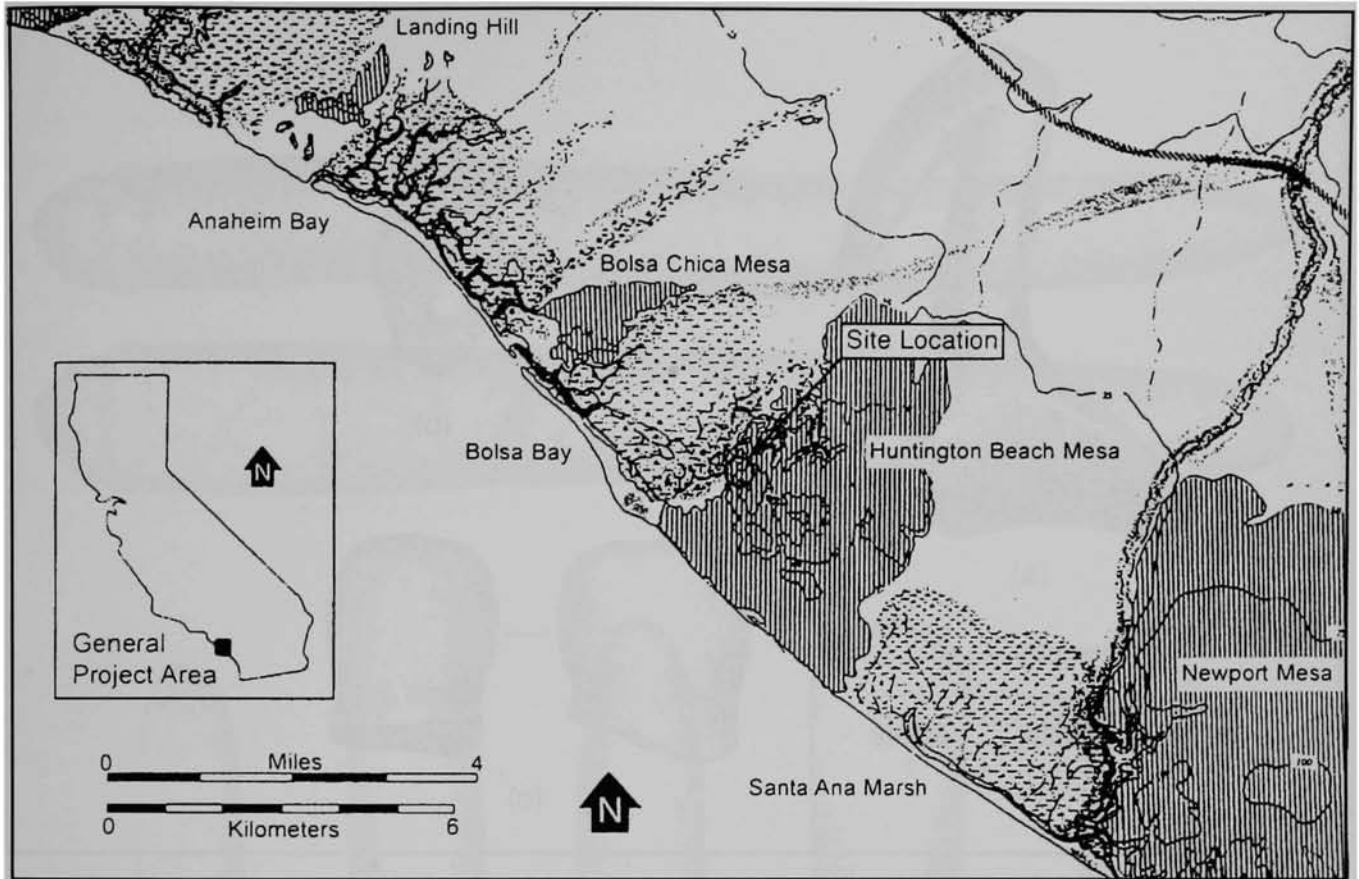


Figure 2. Site location of CA-Ora-365. From reduced historic USGS topographic quadrangles (1896).

5). The intact group had been encased in a clay ball of sterile soil. The cache was spatially separate from the other site deposits, suggesting perhaps a planned isolation.

### THE CACHE

The birdstone (Fig. 3a) in Cache 8 is designated as 365-F8#7. It was manufactured of high quality steatite mined on Santa Catalina Island. This determination is based on a macroscopic analysis of color and density and a Mohs hardness test that provided a match to identical steatite known to have had a Santa Catalina Island provenance. The artifact was ground, and then its surfaces were polished with fine abrasives. The object is complete, and it weighs 69.0 g. Its length is 59.8 mm., and it is 51.1 mm. wide. Its thickness is 31.9 mm. The obsidian biface (365-F8#8; Fig. 3b) was XRF sourced to the West Sugarloaf flow in the Coso volcanic field (Hughes

1995). It weighs 3.7 g. and measures 37.6 mm. in length, 18.0 mm. in width, and 5.7 mm. in thickness. Its hydration reading is  $6.6\mu$  (Origer 1995). It was manufactured by both percussion and pressure flaking.

Five of the phallic "pestles," or phallic stones, are complete; one is a large fragment, but a seventh phallic artifact, of a type sometimes referred to as a "spike," is represented only by its knob (Fig. 3c). This fragment is designated as specimen 365-F8#9. It weighs 19.1 g. and its length, width, and thickness are 28.1 mm., 25.5 mm., and 22.7 mm., respectively. The material is siltstone. The knob, likely representing a glans penis, was not pecked into shape, but rather was formed by grinding. This siltstone knob had become separated from the remainder of the artifact in a clean break just below the groove. There was an attempt to repair the artifact since the surface of the break is liberally coated with asphaltum.

The five complete phallic "pestles" (phallic stones) lack the knob element, but two are grooved in

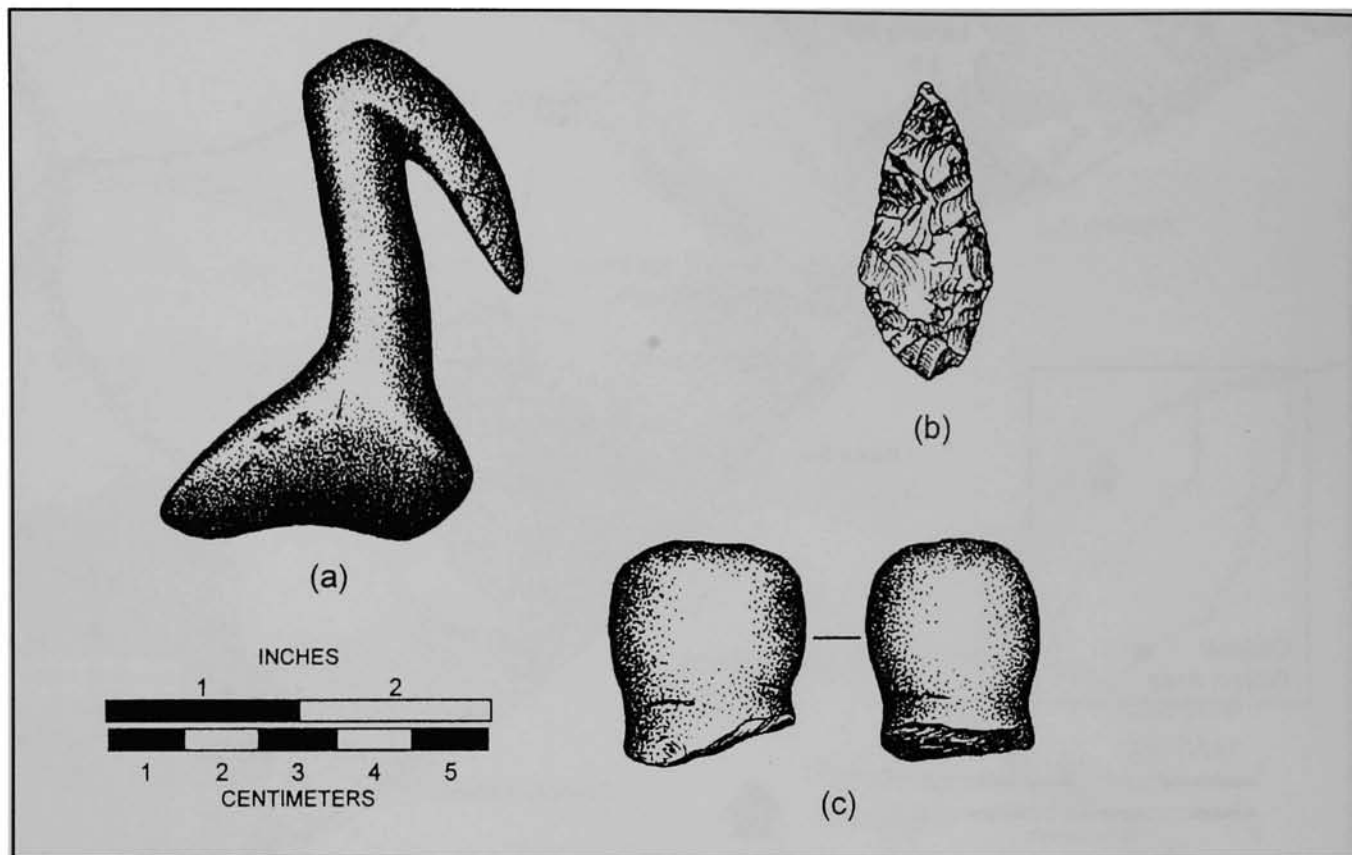


Figure 3. Feature 8: (a) Birdstone F8 #7; (b) obsidian biface F8 #8; and (c) "spike" fragment F8 #9.

such a way as to make phallic symbolism quite obvious. Specimen 365-F8#1 (Fig.4a) shows a very graphic phallic end. There are two grooves approximately 1 cm. from one another. The very end of the stone was not pecked. Its opposite end is pointed. There is discoloration (not use wear) 5 cm. or 6 cm. from that point, suggesting perhaps that this end may have been inserted into a wooden shaft. This speculation is inspired by the fact that a stone atlatl bunt, also from ORA-365, exhibits much the same kind of discoloration on its stem, which would have been inserted into a wood foreshaft (Koerper et al. 2005).

Specimen 365-F8#1 was fashioned of glaucophane schist by pecking and grinding. This lithic material occurs in the San Onofre Breccia and is available in the San Joaquin Hills and area drainages. The artifact has only a slight bend to its 334 mm. length. Three other specimens are made of glaucophane schist, including the one previously described as a large fragment, and they

are straight. This straightness reflects the natural bedding of glaucophane schist deposits as well as the ease of shaping the material. Specimen 365-F8#1 weighs 790 g. Its width is 39.2 mm., and its thickness is 34.4 mm.

The glaucophane schist fragment (365-F8#4; Fig. 4b) is 114.2 mm. long, 31.5 mm. wide, and 27.6 mm. thick. It weighs 153.9 g. Manufacture involved pecking and grinding. The extant end is rounded.

Specimen 365-F8#5 (Fig. 4c), also of glaucophane schist, has grooving that enhances priapic imagery. The grooving is minimal, possibly because any more pecking might have risked damage to the artifact, since the location of this effort was, naturally, at the end of the stone. This phallic end is ovoid, the opposite end pointed. The artifact weighs 421.9 g. Its length, width, and thickness are, respectively, 215.0 mm., 39.8 mm., and 28.4 mm. Manufacture was accomplished by both pecking and grinding.

The last of the glaucophane schist phallic "pestles" (365-F8#6) is pointed at both ends (Fig.

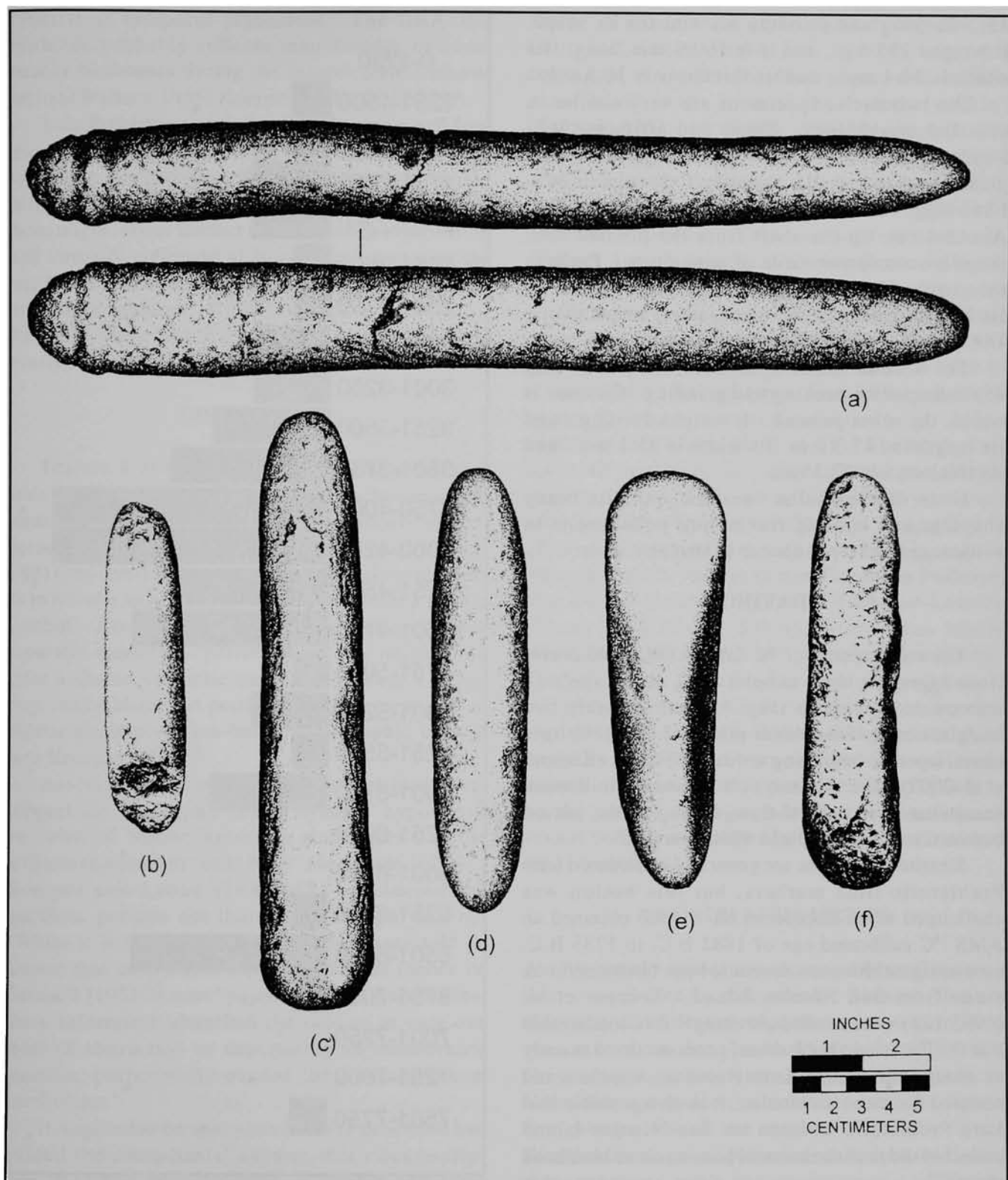


Figure 4. Feature 8 phallic "pestles": (a) F8 #1; (b) F8 #4; (c) F8 #5; (d) F8 #6; (e) F8 #2; F8 #3.

4d). Pecking and grinding account for its shape. It weighs 283.8 g., and it is 160.9 mm. long. Its width is 34.4 mm., and its thickness is 30.5 mm.

The two dacite specimens are very similar in size and morphology. These two artifacts (365-F8#2; 365-F8#3) exhibit the least pecking and grinding of the phallic "pestles." Specimen 365-F8#2 (Fig. 4e) has an ovoid end and a pointed end. About 4 cm. up the shaft from the pointed end, there are small remnants of asphaltum. Perhaps this artifact had been hafted. It weighs 317.7 g. Its length, width, and thickness are, respectively, 148.4 mm., 41.6 mm., and 33.6 mm.

The second dacite specimen (365-F8#3; Fig. 4f) is shaped by pecking and grinding. One end is ovoid, the other pointed. It weighs 266.2 g., and its length is 147.3 mm. Its width is 35.1 mm., and its thickness is 32.3 mm.

None of the phallic "pestles" exhibits heavy shaping, and nothing resembling polishing is in evidence; further, use wear is absent.

#### DATING

The vast majority of  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates at ORA-365 derive from aggregate shell samples. All of the site's 57 uncorrected  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates (Fig. 5), with possibly two marginal exceptions, occur prior to Late Prehistoric times, a period beginning around 1350 B.P. (Koerper et al. 2002). The  $^{14}\text{C}$  assays cover over six millennia, somewhat over half of them falling in the period between roughly 3250 and 4750 years B.P.

Steatite birdstones are generally considered Late Prehistoric time markers, but this notion was challenged when Koerper et al. (1995) obtained an AMS  $^{14}\text{C}$  calibrated age of 1882 B.C. to 1733 B.C. (at one sigma) for a sea-mammal bone birdstone/hook stone from San Nicolas Island. Koerper et al. (1995:124) were cautious, writing: "It is conceivable that the [birdstone/hook stone] genre occurred as early as around the Middle/Late Holocene interface and endured for three millennia....It is also possible that Late Prehistoric artisans on San Nicolas Island collected old marine mammal bone to carve bird/hook stones."

A substantial hydration rind ( $6.6\ \mu$ ) for the Coso obsidian biface (see Koerper et al. 1986; Ericson et al. 1989) seems consistent with a pre-late Late

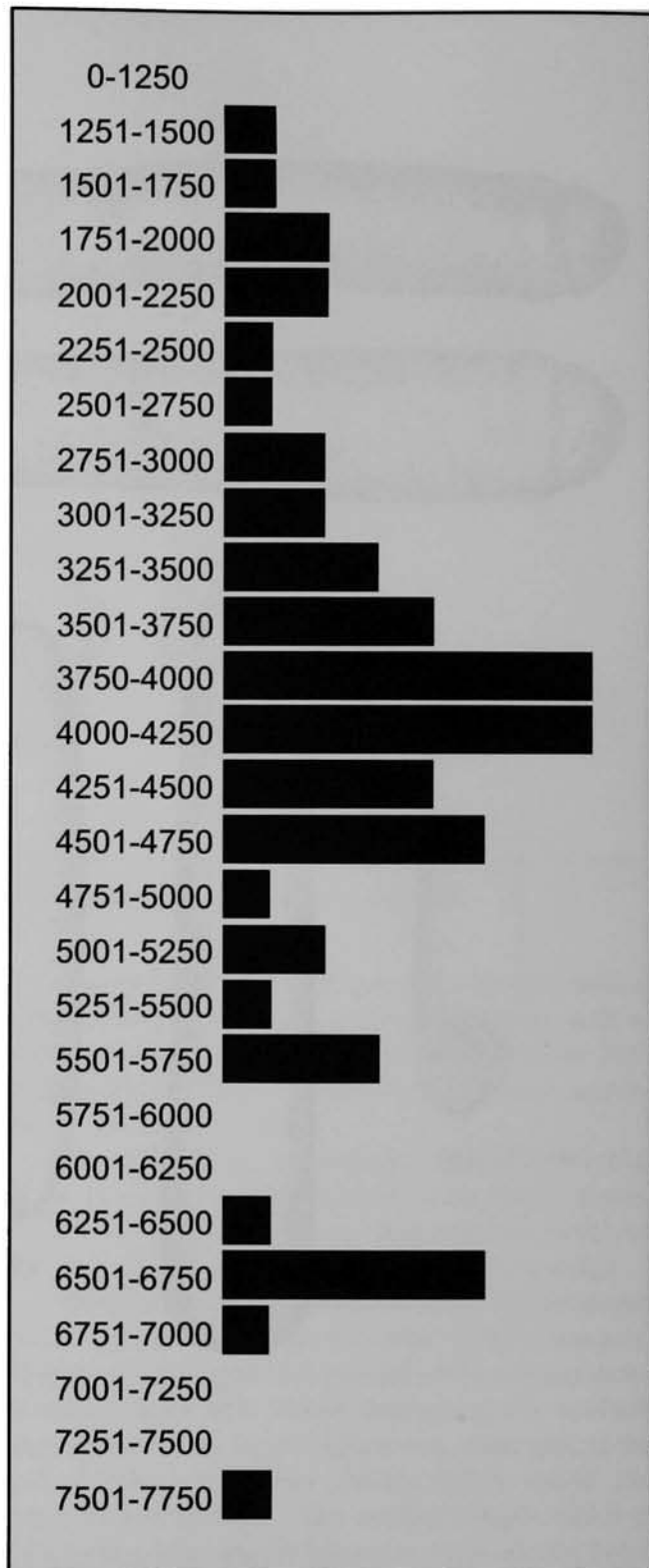


Figure 5. Frequency distribution of CA-Ora-365 uncorrected  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates by 250 year increments.

Prehistoric temporal placement. The ORA-365 evidence probably reflects manufacture of some steatite birdstones during the Intermediate Cultures period (Wallace 1955; Koerper et al. 2002:67-69).

Late Prehistoric period projectile points and four glass trade beads were found at ORA-365, attesting to site use beyond what the radiometric data would indicate. The dearth of Late Prehistoric <sup>14</sup>C shellfish dates might reflect the fact that molluscan exploitation had virtually collapsed at Bolsa Bay by at least the late Late Holocene. The enigma of steatite birdstone time range endures. We believe that assignment of the artifact type just to the Late Prehistoric period is overly restrictive.

### DISCUSSION

Feature 8 at CA-ORA-365, the Borchard Site, adds to the examples of ceremonial caches in which birdstone and pestle/spike/phallic shaped artifacts co-occur. Feature 8 is also notable for a "pestle" (365-F8#1) rendered with enough anatomical correctness as to remove any doubt of an intent to create a phallic symbol. Because only moderate stylistic variation separates miniature "pestles" from one another, we infer a shared symbolic meaning. Indeed, a strong case can be made that pestles, whether ceremonial or utilitarian, imply a sex-based iconographic content (see Koerper 2001).

Associations of phallic pestles and birdstones support the "dimorphic sexual symbol" hypothesis, but what of Native American statements that the artifacts represented "little birds" (de Cessac 1951:2)? Koerper and Labbé (1987:113) considered the question, perhaps not thoroughly enough, writing: "While it is documented that local Indians told de Cessac that such forms represented birds (hence de Cessac's [1951:2] term "pajaritos"), it is possible that these informants identified the objects at only one level of abstraction or anticipating an ethnocentric reaction, purposefully evaded the issue of sexual symbolism."

It might also be speculated that if prudence had guided the consultants' answer, this circumscription possibly was couched in double entendre. "Pajarito," after all, was then (and remains still), a slang term for a small child's penis (Cobos 1983:124). Parenthetically, in French "oiseau" or

"bird," is a common vulgar referent for penis. In Latin and Italian, "bird" and "sparrow" are also colloquial terms for the male organ, and in German "bird" is the root of the F-verb "vögeln" (Schneir 1952:112; Johns 1982:70), literally "to bird." Several English language examples, most of which are epithetical (e.g., pecker, cock, dick/dickey, and possibly "wazoo" as a corruption of the French "oiseau"), draw the same sorts of associations, including one often conveyed in folk gesture (i.e., the "digitus impudicus"). In European folklore, babies are delivered by storks, and not some short necked, short beaked fowl. Plastic and graphic representations of the phallus as bird in Roman Imperial culture commonly served apotropaic and related functions (e.g., Johns 1982:70, 150; Thorn 1990:16,58). The bird-phallus motif continued into the Medieval period, appearing, for instance, on amulet jewelry to ward off infertility (Thorn 1990:22, 62). A conflation of avian wings and feet with the penis appears in more recent art, such as that of Eugène le Poitevin, Von Daniel Griener, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (Thorn 1990:26, 61, 85) and Martin van Maele (Hill and Wallace 1992:84). Since such avian imagery is firmly embedded in Western tradition, it is curious that local scholars are only now becoming aware of the possibility that the intent of "pajaritos" may have been to amuse as well as to inform. We suspect that some amount of prudery on the part of ethnographers has obscured much sexual content in Native California narratives and other traditions.

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