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## A Bear-shaped Crescentic from Northern San Diego County, California

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THE diversity of functions proposed for chipped stone crescentics is mirrored by the variety of their shapes. Some crescentics are simply of lunate design (e.g., Tadlock 1966), while others (often called "eccentric crescentics") incorporate notches, "spurs," "legs," and tangs onto an underlying crescent form (Rogers 1966; Jertberg 1978, 1986). Malcolm Rogers (1929) believed that crescentics of San Dieguito age served as hunting amulets. Other suggested functions include lateral bird bunts, surgical instruments, skinning or slicing tools, ornaments, specialized scrapers, waterfowl points capable of glancing off water, and tools for peeling and stripping (Davis and Panlaqui 1978:61). Crescentics are generally thought to be of early Holocene age (Wallace 1955; Tadlock 1966; Warren 1968).

Certain crescentic specimens suggest animal effigies (Nelson 1936:206), a view supported by the recent recovery of an artifact (Fig. 1) that appears to represent a bear.

The object was found at the Allan O. Kelly site (CA-SDI-9649; Fig. 2) and extends the known range of morphological variation

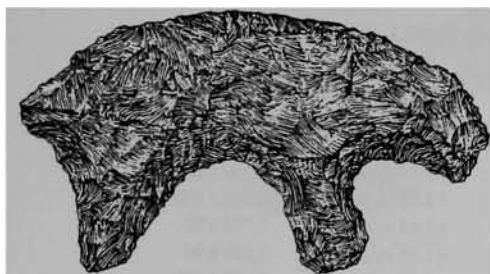


Fig. 1. Bear-shaped eccentric crescentic from the Allan O. Kelly site (CA-SDI-9649), shown actual size.

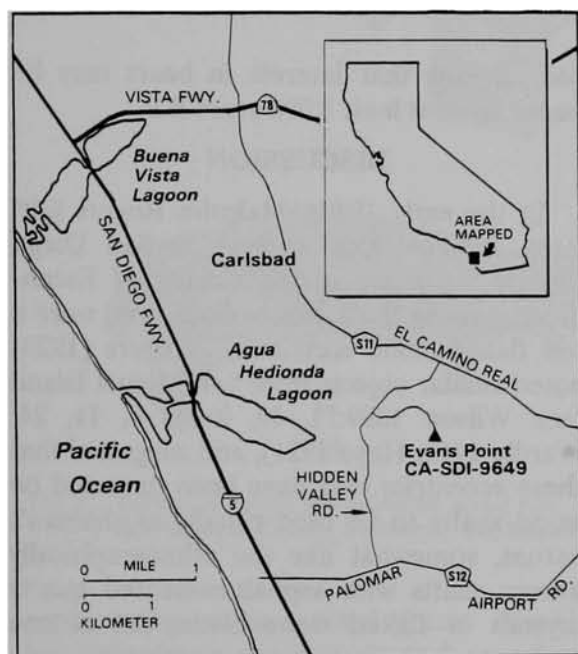


Fig. 2. Location of the Allan O. Kelly site (CA-SDI-9649).

of crescentic forms. It was discovered just above sterile soil of Unit Q, at a depth of about 55 cm., in San Dieguito III-early La Jollan transition period midden (Koerper 1986), dating to the seventh millennium B.P. (Table 1). The object, of meta-volcanic rock, measures 62 x 35 x 8 mm., weighs 15.5 g., and shows no evidence of use-wear.

While most persons who have seen the object acknowledge its bear-like appearance,

some have questioned whether the "tail" is the result of a reworking of a broken end. A second, somewhat crude, effigy figure from the same site (Koerper 1986) has a similar "tail" (Fig. 3a). It seems unlikely that both objects broke and were similarly reworked.

Eccentrics with forms suggesting possible animal motifs are rare. The asymmetry of several such eccentrics (Fig. 3) appears purposeful rather than the result of reworking. The specimen illustrated in Figure 3e is remarkably bear-like, and along with the eccentric of Figure 3d, was described as an "animal-shaped flint" in 1901 by Jones (1956:233; see Plate 122f). Parenthetically, two stone eccentrics from Sonoma County have been noted as possible bear effigies (Origer and Fredrickson 1980:21; Moratto 1984:516, Fig. 10.14).

That bears could have been objects of special attention is not surprising. Cross-culturally, of all the non-primate animals, the bear is perceived as the most human-like (cf. Hallowell 1926:148-149; Shepard and Sanders 1985:xi). The earliest evidence for religion is found in Mousterian contexts (e.g., Peyrony 1934; Blanc 1961; Klein 1969; Solecki 1972), and appears to include special treatment of the cave bear and brown bear whose remains suggest a strong spiritual link between Neanderthal people and beast, if not actual bear cultism (e.g., Constable 1973; Howell 1973). By Upper Paleolithic times, ritual focus on the bear seems widespread in western Eurasia with depictions of bears appearing in cave art as well as on pieces on antler, bone, and ivory (Leroi-Gourhan 1967; Marshack 1972).

Bear ritualism flourished in the early Holocene of Eurasia, as in the Old European Tradition (9,000-5,000 B.P.) of the Balkans. Later, bear ritualism was reflected in the beliefs of the Greeks (Carpenter 1946; Burkert 1985:149-152). Bear cultism was also

Table 1  
RADIOCARBON DATES FOR CA-SDI-9649 SHELL SAMPLES

Laboratory Number	Provenience	<sup>14</sup> C Age Years B.P.	C13/C12	Adjusted Age <sup>a</sup> <sup>14</sup> C Years B.P.
Beta-6954 <sup>b</sup>		7,520 ± 90	+0.35 o/oo	7,940 ± 90
Beta-13437	Unit N, 0-10 cm.	6,850 ± 120	+1.18 o/oo	7,280 ± 120
Beta-13438	Unit Q, 10-20 cm.	7,200 ± 100	+1.89 o/oo	7,640 ± 100
Beta-13439	Unit N, 20-30 cm.	7,270 ± 90	+1.64 o/oo	7,710 ± 90
Beta-13440	Unit Q, 30-40 cm.	7,090 ± 90	+1.35 o/oo	7,520 ± 90
Beta-13441	Unit N, 40-50 cm.	6,970 ± 100	+1.77 o/oo	7,410 ± 100
Beta-13442	Unit Q, 50 cm.-sterile	7,260 ± 90	+2.11 o/oo	7,710 ± 90

<sup>a</sup> Adjusted ages do not reflect correction for reservoir effect.

<sup>b</sup> Sample submitted by Van Horn (Ultrasystems, Inc. 1983).

present in China, Korea, Japan, and North-east Asia. Among the later Paleosasiatic and modern tribes, bear ceremonialism is well documented (Kitagawa 1961).

In North America, bear ceremonialism was broadly distributed (Driver and Massey 1957: 254, Map 63) with definite regional variation suggesting considerable antiquity. It may have been part of the cultural baggage of some of the earliest migrants to North America. The ethnographic record for California makes clear the special place of the bear in myth and ritual (Kroeber 1925; Heizer 1978; Hudson and Blackburn 1985).

Archaeological evidence of bear ritualism includes bear paw symbols in rock art (Heizer and Baumhoff 1962; Heizer and Clewlow 1973; Grant 1967; Gortner 1984; Lee 1984) and plastic art (Koerper and Cramer n.d.), bear figures in the rock art of the southern Sierra Nevada and Chumash areas (Grant 1967; Lee 1984), rock art figures that may represent bear hides, bear burials (Heizer and Hewes 1940), artifacts of bear teeth and bone (Moratto 1984), and chipped obsidian bifaces or "Stockton Curves," that Central Miwok consultants identified as imitation claws used in the grizzly bear dance (Barrett and Gifford 1933:213). A bear dancer participated in the Kuksu ritual. The recovery of a "bear" eccentric from the Allan O. Kelly

site suggests that interest in bears may be traced from at least 8,000 years B.P.

## DISCUSSION

In the early 1920s, Malcolm Rogers initiated archaeological surveys in San Diego County beginning in the vicinity of Escondido. Among the artifacts discovered were a few flaked stone eccentrics. Rogers (1929) noted similar objects from San Miguel Island (see Wilson 1899:Pl. 40, items 8, 11, 24; Wardle 1913; Heye 1921), and suggested that these eccentrics may have been mounted on wood shafts to be used ritually as shaman's batons, somewhat like the ethnographically known shafts with asphalt-cemented quartz crystals or flaked stone blades set at one end.

Rogers extended his surveys to the desert areas of eastern California, and on playa shorelines found crescentics of a less eccentric form than those of San Diego County (Rogers 1939). Eccentric objects were also found on the shorelines of Lake Mohave (Campbell et al. 1937). Parallels between the objects from the desert area and from San Diego County sites were noted. The crescentics ranged in form from plain lunate to more eccentric types. Rogers (1939:36) reaffirmed his earlier ideas that the objects were hunting amulets or fetishes, perhaps

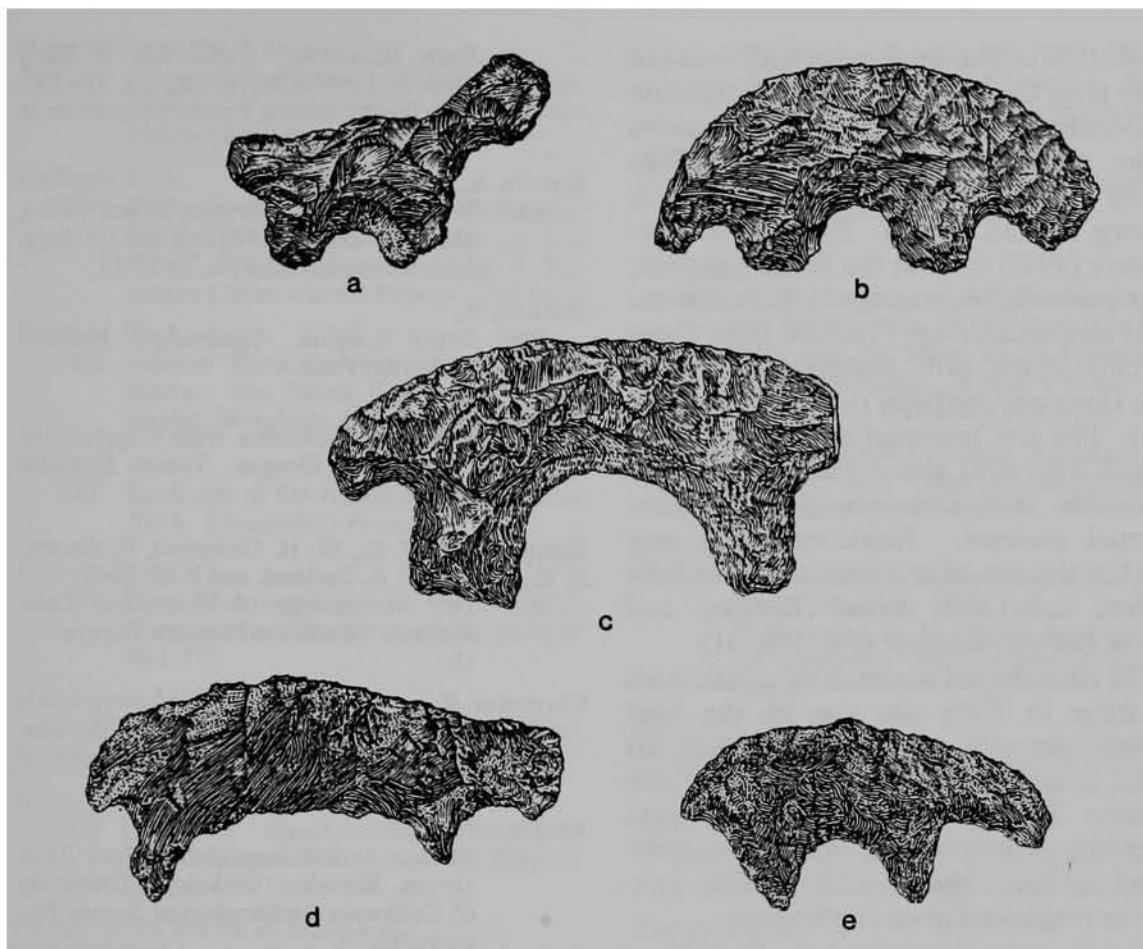


Fig. 3. Eccentrics shown approximately actual size. a, CA-SDI-9649; b, Hughes Site (CA-LAN-59); c, Pork Jerkey Site, Imperial County, California; d-e, Santa Rosa Island (drawings from photograph).

representing some animal forms (double-headed animals, quadrupeds, or deer antlers). Given the archaeological and ethnological evidence for widespread reverence for bears, the discovery of an eccentric resembling a bear and lacking use-wear supports the view that at least some of the eccentrics may be animal forms of nonutilitarian or magico-religious function.

Archaeological work in the far west of North America has shown that flaked stone crescentics have wide distribution. These objects are not common, but there are notes on some 300. The distribution includes central Washington (Warren 1968), the Lind

Coulee site in southeastern Washington (Daugherty 1956), southeastern Oregon (Cressman 1936; Butler 1970), Nevada (Tadlock 1966), Idaho (Bowers and Savage 1962), Danger Cave in western Utah (Jennings 1957), California, Baja California, and western Arizona. Over half of these objects are of the plain forms, with the others falling to the eccentric category. Of the simpler lunate forms in California, the majority are from east of the coastal mountains at the western margin of the Great Basin. The largest collections of crescents are from Long Valley Lake, eastern Nevada (Tadlock 1966) and Coyote Flat, southeastern Oregon



(Butler 1970). The more eccentric forms are mostly from California, and their distribution is generally from Sonoma and Lake counties in the north to the western San Diego County area (Gallegos 1986:106, Fig. 6; Jertberg 1986:38, Fig. 1). Since M. R. Harrington's (1948) work at the Borax Lake site, it has generally been accepted that crescents are of considerable age (Tadlock 1966; Clewlow 1968; Butler 1970; Meighan and Haynes 1970; Davis and Panlaqui 1978; Jertberg 1978, 1986). Phil Orr (personal communication in Tadlock 1966:670) stated that curation was responsible for crescents in later-than-expected contexts. Heirloom pieces may exist but the use of crescents seems to have survived into later times (Koerper and Drover 1983:20; Koerper et al. 1986:41).

The bear-shaped eccentric crescentic from the Allan O. Kelly site may be the most realistic example of representational art known from the early Holocene of North America. Perhaps other early western North American eccentrics also should be interpreted as "art objects" with possible symbolic or magico-religious implications.

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