

More on Small Phallic Talismans from the Cogged Stone Site

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Abstract

This article first describes three fossil casts/concretions from the Cogged Stone site, Huntington Beach, whose cultural roles almost certainly revolved on each specimen's mimicry of the human glans penis; two are manuports, but another merits artifact status, if only for a single crafted design element. A small phallic talisman, but one fully fashioned on all surfaces, is also described along with two waterworn manuports that had perhaps projected phallic imagery for their Native collectors/owners. The general subject matter begged questions of the origins and development of sex-based iconicity/symbology in hominid history, thus precipitating a discussion that appears under the heading, "Fossil Manuports and Semiotics: Food for Thought."

Introduction

A recent *Quarterly* article (Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2010) described eight unusual small objects from the Cogged Stone site (CA-ORA-83) at Bolsa Chica Mesa (Figure 1). With varying degrees of persuasion, each of these specimens projects human glans penis imagery. All are likely to have functioned as phallic talismans within the symbolic/emotional and behavioral landscapes of Native magico-religious practices, communicating fertility/fecundity/increase and/or apotropaic themes.

Descriptions of the eight phallic talismans (Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2010) extended awareness of the stylistic range for those objects that had represented the male anatomy in prehistoric coastal southern California. The present study of additional ORA-83 objects further extends understanding of the range of

shapes for male sex-based symbols. These contributions are an outgrowth of the Bolsa Chica Archaeological Project (BCAP) under the management of Scientific Resource Surveys, Inc. (SRS).

Of the eight previously documented specimens, two began their cultural lives as fossil casts/concretions of the same kind. One of these subsequently received slight modification while the other was left unaltered (see Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2010:Figures 1f and 1g, respectively). Another example of the same kind of fossil cast, unavailable for our earlier study, is herein described (Figure 2a); it had been slightly altered, presumably to better effect glans imagery.

Two other fossil casts (Figures 2b and 2c), both different from those noted above and different from one another, were recently discovered among the many boxes of materials then being prepared for a March 13, 2010, reburial under Tongva and Juaneño purview. They too receive descriptive treatment here since we were convinced that these unworked manuports had been collected by prehistoric Indians for their likenesses to the glans penis.

Additionally, this addendum to the previous glans penis effigy article (Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2010) serves as a venue of convenience for recording three small objects that are not fossil casts yet are relevant to the general subject. One is a crafted effigy that had likely stood for the male organ (Figure 3). The

other two are “pocket rocks,” each lacking detectable modifications (Figures 4b and 4c) but recommended for mention in this study mainly for their general shape—elongate with rounded terminations; it is arguable whether their finders/owners regarded either one as more than, say, a pretty curiosity or souvenir.

This article further offers some intriguing/challenging ideas revolving on the observation that fossils were scavenged by early hominids and transported to living sites as far back as 700 plus millennia ago. In this, we shall focus on a particularly interesting fossil cast discovered at an Acheulian site; it is a near perfect mimic of the distal part of the male anatomy.

Descriptions

Three Fossil Concretions

Specimen #156573 (Figure 2a), a surface find by relic collector Herrold Plante, is a whitish tan fossil cast. It is uncertain how this concretion had formed. Two very similar specimens (see Koerper and Desautels-Wiley

2010:Figures 1f, 1g) were shown to Mary Stechison, an invertebrate paleontologist with the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, who suggested that possibly the shell of some mollusc had provided a nucleus around which the concretions began to develop. She also offered the possibility that the concretions preserved the shape of what had been home to some species of invertebrate. Hardness of specimen #156573 is just under 3 (Mohs scale). It is 49.4 mm long, and maximum diameter is 30.2 mm. A diameter measurement taken transversely at the same arc yields a value of 27.0 mm. The cross section is more or less round. The specimen weighs 59.1 g. One end of the artifact has been abraded to produce a groove (Figure 2a), which is probably a design element intended to convey the look of a urethral opening or less likely a *frenulum*.

Specimen #117296 (Figure 2b) was recovered from the 0-10 cm level of Unit Zulu 170. The object is a light tan fossil cast/concretion. The sedimentary layers are quite obvious on the object’s lateral surfaces. There is a very slight depression at the apex which looks natural rather than crafted. At the opposite end,

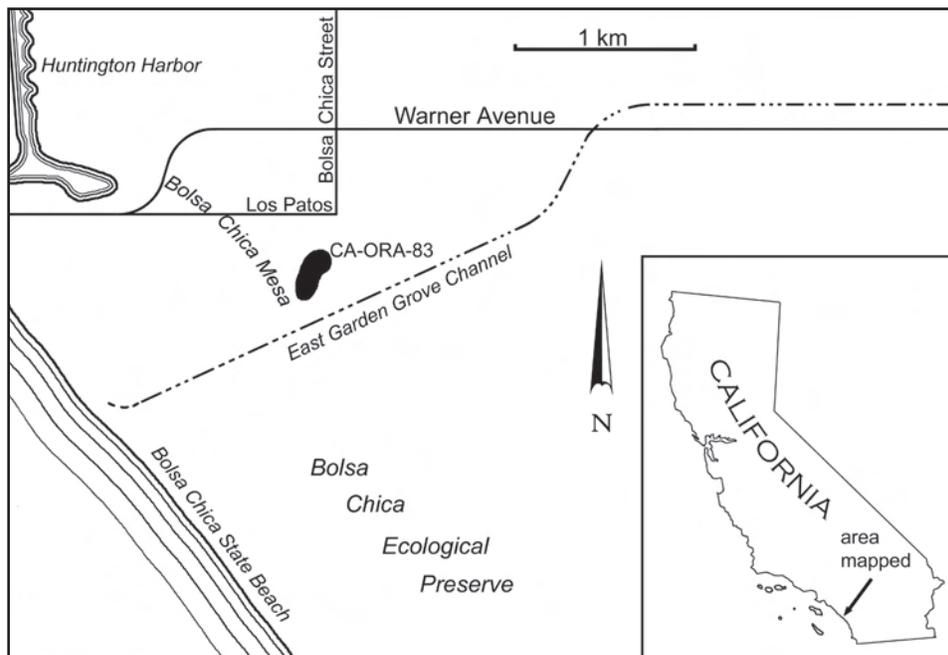


Figure 1. Location of the Cogged Stone site (CA-ORA-83).

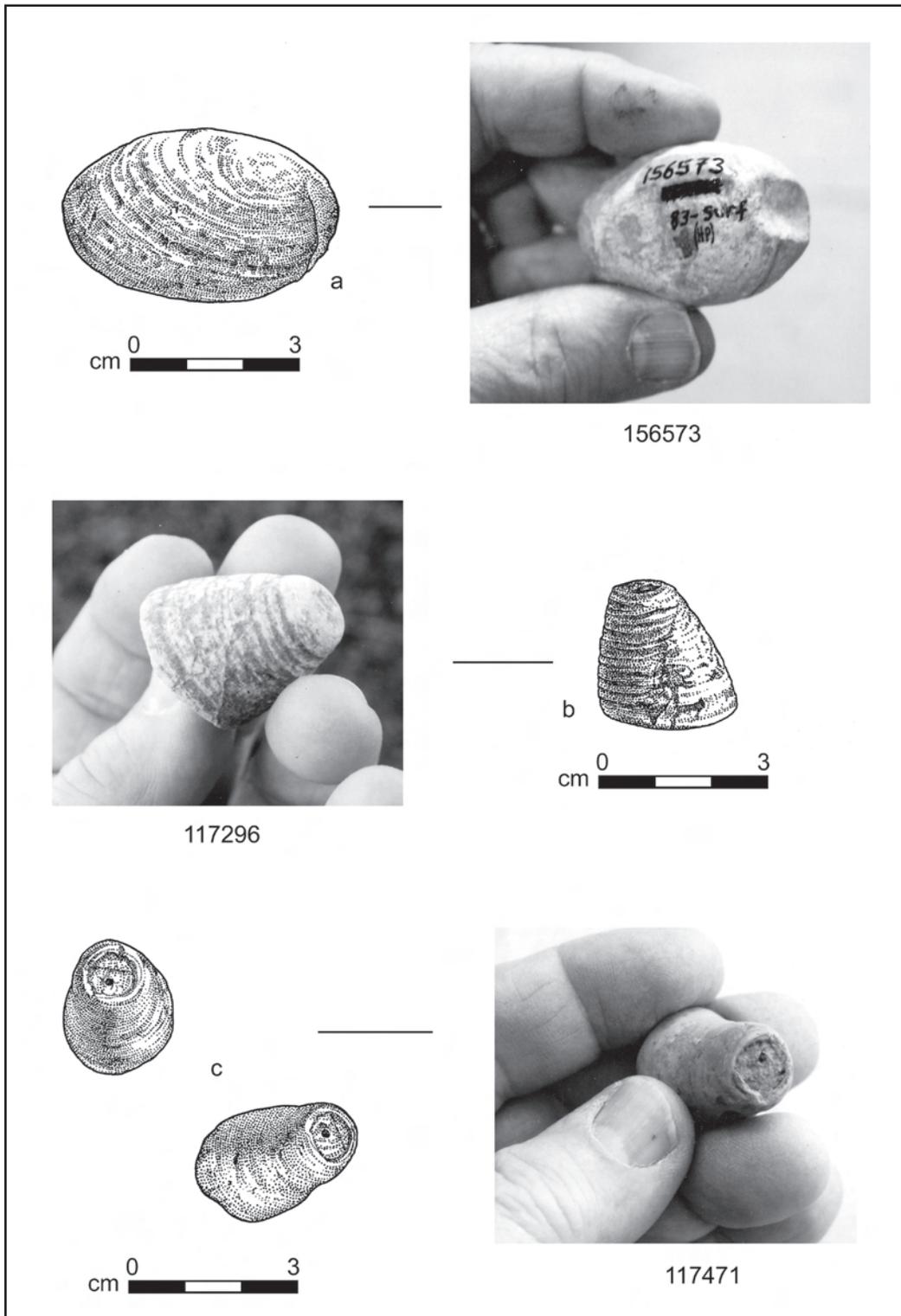


Figure 2. Fossil sandstone concretions resembling the glans penis. (a) modified (an artifact); (b, c) unmodified (manuports).

the edges are slightly rounded, but we suspect this too is natural. When set upright on a flat surface, height is 26.7 mm. Maximum and minimum diameters at the base are 26.1 mm and 25.6 mm; thus, the cross section is round. It weighs 20.7 g.

Specimen #117471 (Figure 2c) is an unmodified, light brownish tan fossil cast/concretion with a remarkable resemblance to a flaccid glans penis that is nearly enveloped by a foreskin (Figure 2c). A natural hole at the end recalls the urethral opening. It was found in windrow dirt (the result of controlled grading) near a small concentration of human bone (BC 94). This find occurred in the area of Unit Zulu 55. The object's material has the look of siltstone more so than sandstone. The object's length measures 26.6 mm, and maximum width is 23.5 mm. It weighs 9.7 g.

Three Additional Objects

A grading monitor recovered specimen #117354 (Figure 3) from what had once been Old Bolsa Chica Road. It is a miniature effigy that had probably represented the phallus. It had been crafted of a very hard, greyish siltstone. Its ground surfaces are smooth to the touch, yet numerous shallow striations are visible to the naked eye. A somewhat round groove on the rounded tip at the expansive end was accomplished by chipping action involving a pointed tool rather than by any grinding action. The groove, which effects the look of a urethral opening, is a maximum 6.7 mm deep. The artifact is 31.2 mm long, 9.7 mm wide, and 6.1 mm thick. It weighs 2.7 g.

Two small waterworn pebbles are included here (Figures 4a and 4b). Justification for doing so considers the following: (1) the upper soils at ORA-83 are largely Aeolian, and so there is a high probability that "pocket rocks" found there are manuports; (2) the shapes of these objects, elongates rounded at the ends, are very generally phallic-like, and phallic symbology has been a salient feature of regional iconography at various times; (3) similar sorts of objects are observed

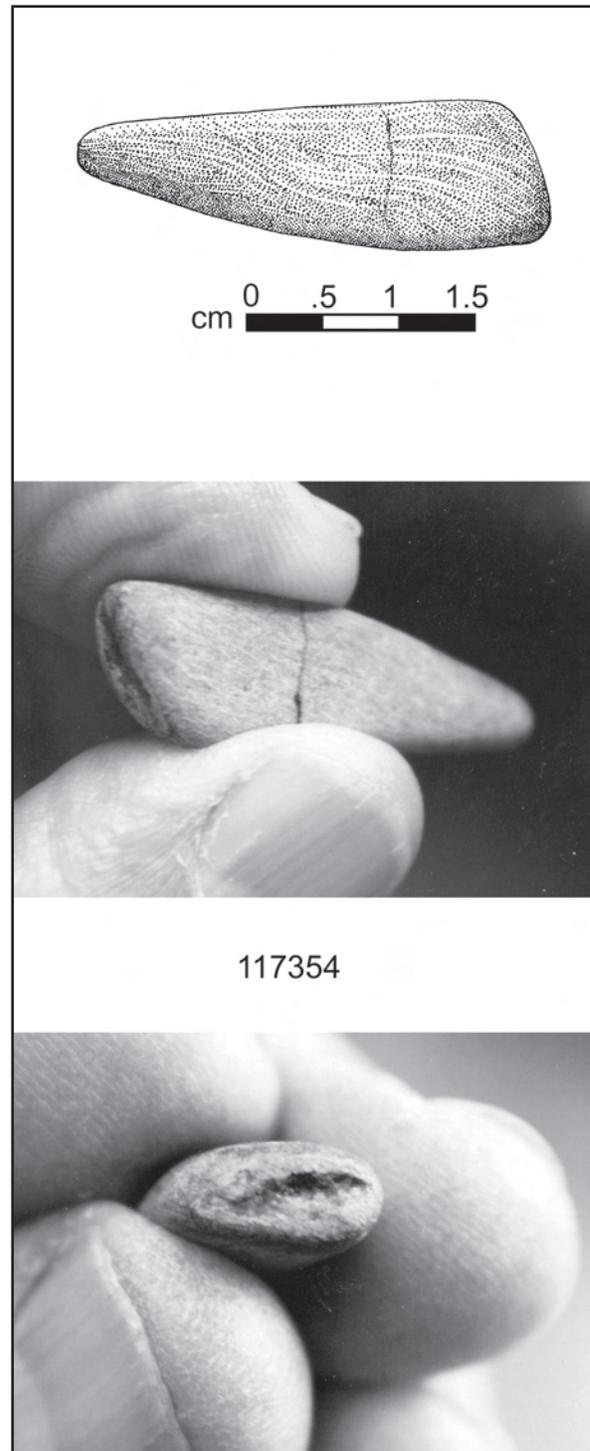


Figure 3. Siltstone effigy probably fashioned to represent a phallus.

at other Orange County sites (Figures 4c-e) suggesting a pattern of selection by prehistoric peoples.

Specimen #55328 (Figure 4a) was recovered from Unit Ukulele 21 at the 20-30 cm level. It is 40.9 mm long with a maximum width of 11.4 mm. Cross section is roundish. It weighs 8.3 g.

Specimen #55342 (Figure 4b) was discovered at the 70-80 cm level of Unit CB11. Its length measures 42.3 mm. Maximum width is 16.5 mm, and a measurement taken transversely yields 12.1 mm; cross section is generally ovoid to roundish. It weighs 13.0 g.

Fossil Manuports and Semiotics: Food for Thought

...the development of humanity is based on cultural and cognitive factors, not on

genetically determined abilities to improve access to resources [Bednarik 2004:33].

Within the broader study of semiotics, there are researchers focused on the origins and development of symbolizing, a capacity necessary to the establishment of consciousness and self-awareness, phenomena above all others defining our humanness. At the forefront of such effort is paleoart expert Robert Bednarik, an autodidact, yet the most published archaeologist ever.

Our interest in Bednarik’s scholarship was piqued particularly when we became aware of his reportage of a certain Middle Pleistocene manuport discovered at Erfoud Site A-84-2 in Morocco, North Africa (Bednarik 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2008:Figure 2). The object is a cuttlefish fossil cast (Figure 5), its morphology clearly evoking the look of a glans penis with a pulled back prepuce at the

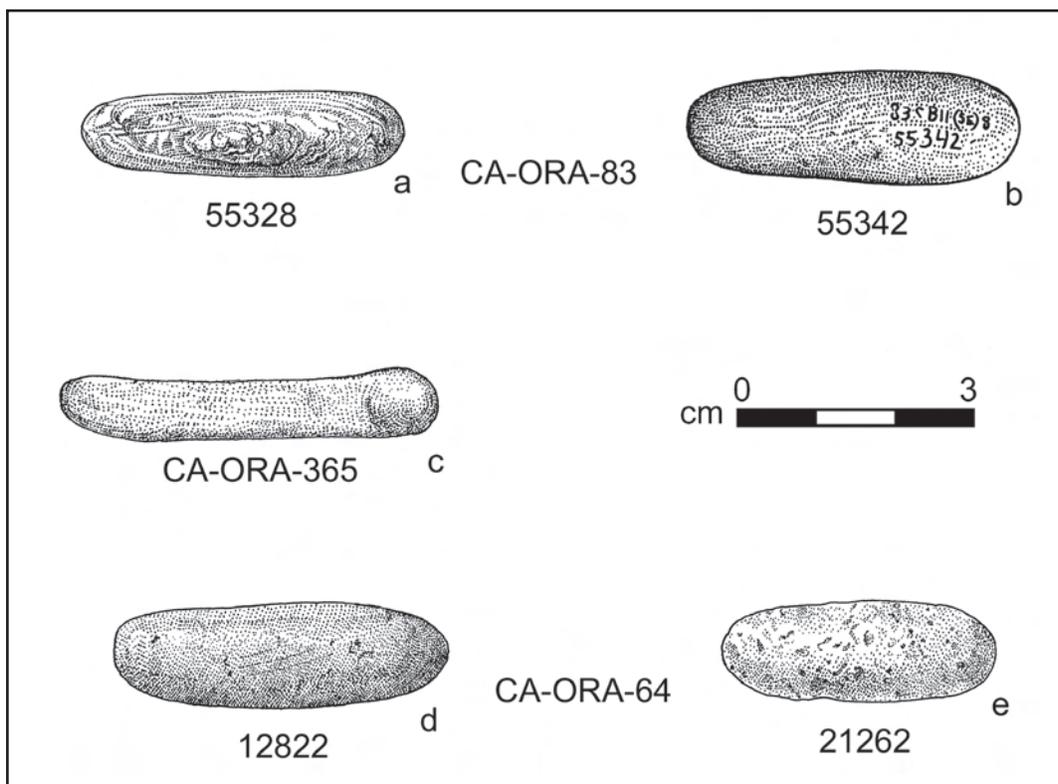


Figure 4. Small waterworn pebbles perhaps collected to serve as phallic charms/talismans. (a, b) the Cogged Stone site; (c) the Borchard site, Huntington Beach; (d, e) the Irvine site, Newport Bay area.

distal end of a penile shaft. Bednarik (2002a) explained that this Acheulian manuport was unmodified, its natural shape having offered visual clues to prompt a mental bridge between referrer and referent. He did not presume the referent to have been the live animal, but rather saw a cuttlefish fossil *qua phallus* for not just the shape but also for the correct size (Bednarik 2003a:97).

Our earlier studied considerations of fossil casts with glans penis imagery (Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2010) prompted varied questions, but ones we did not broach in print. For instance, when and how had sex-based symbology first embedded in human cognition? What were the events in hominid mental development that would account for an evolutionary scenario initiating with proto-iconicity and eventuating in the capacity for sophisticated, culturally negotiated symboling? As our curiosity multiplied, we delved further into Bednarik's and others' scholarship relating to hominid cognitive development. Below, we share ideas selected from our readings and musings, anticipating that many *Quarterly* readers might similarly enjoy this kind of food for thought.

Bednarik's research is directed toward modeling an aetiological train of events that begins with the

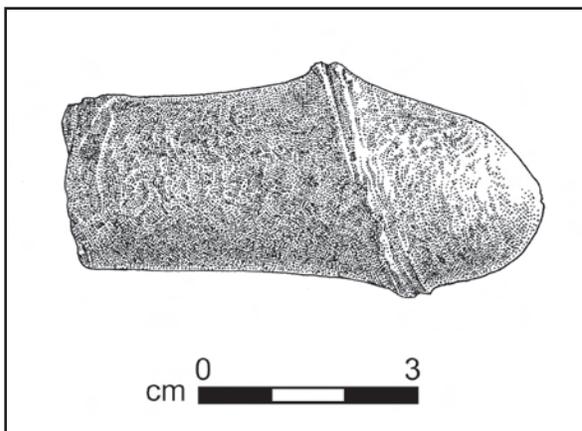


Figure 5. Fossil cast of a cuttlefish showing striking resemblance to the distal end of a penis. Acheulian culture manuport; Morocco. After Bednarik (2008:Figure 2).

hominid ability to create “arbitrary relationships between referrer and referent, the key factor in symboling” (Bednarik 2006:7). His hypothesis proposes that the origins of these events occurred as far back as the Lower Paleolithic. In this, he and like-minded gradualists challenge orthodox, discontinuist models regarding hominid cognitive evolution (e.g., Bednarik 1995, 2003b:411-412, 2004). The gradualists see deep time roots for self-referential consciousness, anthropocentric world view, and the ability to construct conceptual models of reality, while generally the discontinuists assign such cleverness mainly to anatomically modern man (e.g., Bednarik 2004).

Bednarik has noted certain manuports from hominid sites that he believes indicate the kind of simple iconicity that stands at the beginnings of what eventually leads to complex symbolic thought:

...numerous Acheulian finds of ochre or haematite include striated pebbles, and such pigments were apparently widely used in the Old World. We can safely infer colour discrimination and colour preference from this evidence. There is also adequate proof that hominids of the Lower Paleolithic possessed the capacity of differentiating between commonly occurring and unusual exotic objects. They collected quartz crystals...and they are credited with collecting fossil remains and unusually shaped pebbles at many sites...[Bednarik 1994:174].

“Iconicity” is a crucial “subjective definitional tool” (Bednarik 1994:170; cf., Tangri 1989). It is

...the property of a marking or shape that provides visual information recognized by most contemporary humans as resembling the form of an object. A marking or object (referrer) is considered iconic when most modern people tend to see it as resembling a different object (referent) [Bednarik 2006:3].

Bednarik explains further:

However, iconic resemblance of a referent is not self-evident, its detection requires an appropriate perceptual mechanism. Visual ambiguity, from which this facility probably developed (Bednarik 2003), is a property widely experienced by species throughout the animal kingdom, but it is thought that only hominids developed a cultural use of this feature. The experience of perceiving, for an instant, a snake on a forest path when in fact there is only an exposed tree root is an example of visual ambiguity, which seems to prompt an alert-reaction caused by a neuronal template. Such visual misidentification, my theory predicts, could in an organism capable of “conscious” reflection lead to perceiving a connection between referent and referrer (or the signified and the signifier). In this theory, the actual production of iconographic forms becomes the cultural and intentional creation of features prompting visual responses to a signifier; *it induces visual ambiguity intentionally*. This definition of art is crucial in effectively understanding the nature and origins of iconographic art, but it is also crucial in understanding hominid cognition and symboling [Bednarik 2008:85, emphasis in original].

The earliest manifestations of symboling probably occurred through iconicity involving natural objects, such as, for instance, a fossil cast, whose shape offered sufficient visual clues to prompt the mental bridge to be made between referent and referrer (Bednarik 2006:3). Once the bridge is made, the object might be recommended to manuport status, and it was within Lower Paleolithic culture that fossils (Bednarik 1990a, 1992, 1998, 2002, 2003b, 2006:3, 2008:Figure 2; Goren-Inbar et al. 1991; Feliks 1998), as well as crystals (Pei 1931:120; Black et

al. 1933; Bednarik 1988, 1990a, 2003a:Figure 11, 2003b, 2004:Figure 5; d’Errico et al. 1989; Beaumont and Morris 1990; Goren-Inbar et al. 1991), and also pigment minerals (e.g., Marshack 1981; Bednarik 1990b, 1992, 1994; Beaumont and Morris 1990; Beaumont 1992; Knight et al. 1995; see also Barham 1998, 2002), all began to be collected (Bednarik 2006:7). It is emphasized that “some natural forms can resemble other objects so closely that they can be symbolic for them” (Bednarik 2006:5), and with fossil casts, Bednarik (2006:3) argues, the case is strong if the referent is the live organism. In such cases, there is grist for a selective process, for some individuals would have been genetically better primed for the establishment of neural pathways allowing comprehension that things can stand for other things and that objects might be grouped together “on the basis of taxonomic criteria”—cognitive milestones in the human evolution of consciousness (Bednarik 2006:3-5).

A subsequent crucial development in the evolution of symboling (e.g., Bednarik 2006:3, 5) would have been anthropic modification in order to more boldly state the iconic quality of, say, a fossil cast, a behavior that persists even today. When accomplished, such manuports have thus transitioned to artifact status.

In Bednarik’s schema, there arrives a point in the history of iconicity when complex, culturally negotiated symboling occurs. The capacity for such is a certainty for early anatomically modern man, highly sentient and in possession of relatively sophisticated verbal skills (see e.g., Otte 1996, 2000; Mellars 1999). Had Archaic *Homo sapiens* previously developed this capacity? The consensus of gradualists is clearly for the affirmative (e.g., see Bednarik 1990; d’Errico et al. 1998; Otte 2000; also see Mellars 1999).

More specific to our interests, when were hominids sentient enough to transition sex-based imageries

toward symbolologies of fertility, fecundity, increase, and related life-force themes? When and how would those themes have then become juxtaposed with their oppositions, that is, death imageries/symbolologies, thus setting up tensions whose resolutions might then turn on conceptual phenomena such as resurrection, ever-lasting life, and reincarnation? Also, with regard to life-force stuff, we wondered whether the referent for red pigment minerals in Acheulian hominid cognition might have been blood. What was the referent for crystals–water?

Not just the prehistoric inhabitants of ORA-83, but other Holocene peoples of simple societies across much of the globe, have carried on behaviors witnessed for *Homo ergaster/erectus*, that is, the collection and transport of fossils, crystals, unusual pebbles, and pigment materials to camps/settlements. The conceptual journey attaching to the history of man's acquisition of such natural objects extends back no less than seven or eight hundred millennia, and we imagine that when mere simple iconicity had underlain those quests, morphology and/or color of the collectibles would have provided the primary stimuli. However, with anatomically modern man, if not with Archaic *Homo sapiens*, the efforts to acquire and sometimes modify these and certain other kinds of manuports followed more from mindsets that had embraced evolved worlds of magic, religious faith, philosophy, and aesthetics.

Summary

This article continues the purpose of a previous effort (Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2010) which was to characterize and discuss small ORA-83 talismans bearing palpable likeness to the human glans penis. Three of the eight showcased specimens (see Koerper and Desautels-Wiley 2010:Figures 1f, g, h) fell to the fossil cast/concretion category. Here, three previously unreported, small fossil casts, similarly glans-like (Figure 2) and also from the Cogged Stone

site, have been described and likewise interpreted as emic phallic symbols. In addition, our present study has reported on a unique, diminutive, carefully fashioned but conventionalized representation of a phallus (Figure 3) found at ORA-83 as well as two small waterworn pebbles recovered from the site (Figures 4a and 4b) that had perhaps been collected for their somewhat phallic-like appearances.

Given that most of the specimens were surface finds and given that much of the site consisted of mixed strata, we can not confidently assign radiocarbon determinations to any of these objects. Site conditions reflected bioturbation, prehistoric cultural disturbances, historic farming, and impacts from petroleum extraction followed by WWII military construction.

The proffered food for thought initiated significantly from our reading about a certain fossil cuttlefish manuport (Figure 5) collected by a *Homo ergaster/erectus* forager in northwestern Africa several hundred thousand years ago. Since we had previously wondered about the history of sex-based imagery/symbology that might have attached to certain manuports/artifacts, we were immediately struck by the fact that the Moroccan cuttlefish fossil cast bears a striking resemblance to the male regenerative organ. It seemed almost inconceivable that the male anatomy had not been the referent in this case. Our subsequent discussion regarding the aetiology of sex-based symbolizing was a digression that we hope the reader at least tolerated, but, better yet, enjoyed.

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