

A Glycymeris Bracelet from CA-ORA-58

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Introduction

Prehistoric Orange County peoples acquired an array of exotic commodities from varied directions and distances (Koerper and Whitney-Desautels 1999:87, Table 1). The Late Prehistoric period exchange inventory included Hohokam *Glycymeris gigantea* bracelets transported seaward by Lower Colorado River entrepreneurs (Koerper 1996). Portage was probably accomplished by Mohave Indians engaged in a larger exchange, textiles for Pacific Coast shells and shell beads (see Koerper and Hedges 1996), but perhaps goods transported by other Patayan traders arrived, directly or indirectly, into Orange County (see Johnston 1980)

This article documents an additional Plain heavy band type *Glycymeris* bracelet (Fig. 1) found locally, one more example of an indirect connection between the Arizona Hohokam and the Tongva (Gabrielino) and/or Acagchemem (Juaneño) (see Koerper, Newman, and Langenwaller 1996:113; Koerper, Schroth et al. 1996:271-274). Surface collected from CA-ORA-58 (Fig. 2), the Banning-Norris site (a.k.a. Fairview site, etc.), the ornament holds implications for the issue of the Late Prehistoric economic/political role of this major village located on Newport Mesa adjacent to the Santa Ana River (see Koerper, Earle et al. 1996).

The Artifact

The *Glycymeris* bracelet of Figure 1 was found by Herrold Plante in the late 1960s (possibly 1968) at the north end of ORA-58, a small distance east of where a number of other prestige/trade artifacts, distinctive ceramic figurines, had been collected by Mr. Plante and Ken Fritz in the mid-1960s (Koerper and Hedges 1996). When first examined by the senior author, the bracelet was in the Plante collection, but it presently resides in a different private collection.

The 25.5 gram specimen is complete. Maximum diameter measures 72.3 mm, and the maximum diameter of the wrist hole is 50.7 mm. Greatest width along the ring of the bracelet is 18.7 mm, and maximum height of the piece is 15.4 mm. If actually worn on an arm, it could only accommodate the hand and wrist of a small person.

Glycymeris shell employed in the manufacture of ornaments was frequently old material, scavenged perhaps from cultural shell deposits or off Pleistocene or Holocene beaches in the Gulf of California (Haury 1950:39; see also Gifford 1946:216; Berry 1956:81-84). A *Glycymeris* shell bracelet fragment found at CA-ORA-225 and previously reported in the *Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly* (Koerper 1996) was crafted from fossil shell, its calcium carbonate intact, not replaced, but bearing clear evidence of breccia matrix. The present specimen lacks any

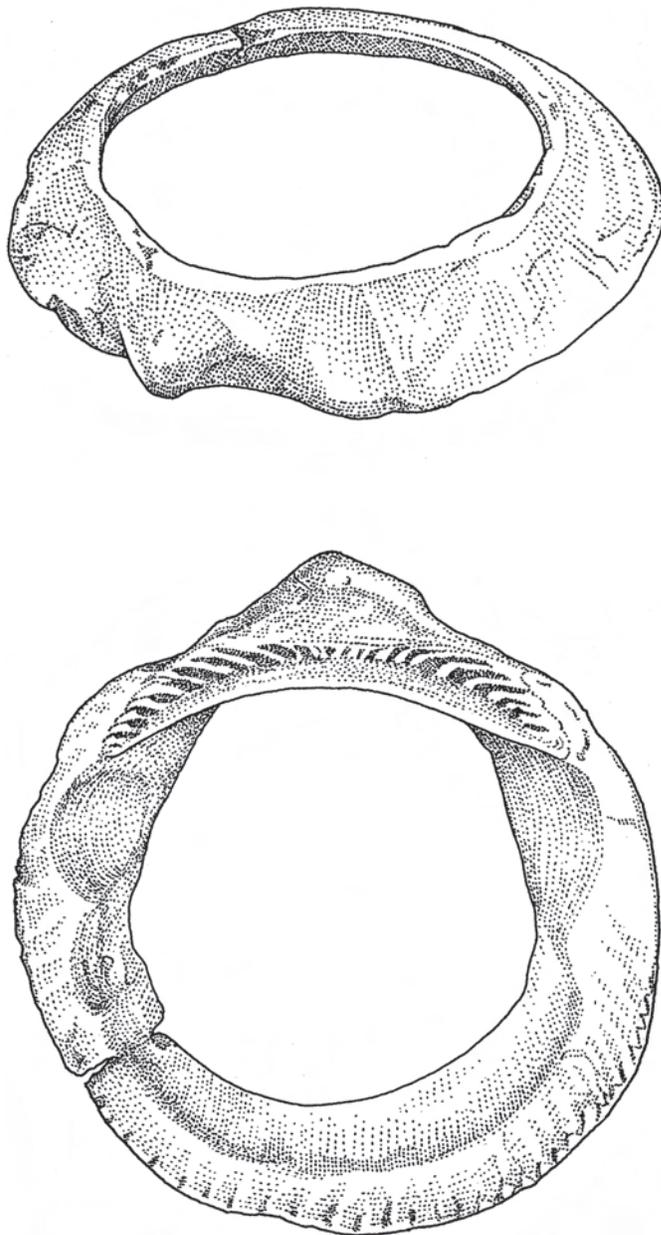


Fig. 1. Glycymeris gigantea bracelet from CA-ORA-58. Side view and bottom view. Shown slightly larger than actual size.



Fig 2. Location of CA-ORA-58, the Banning-Norris site. Note Santa Ana River waters exiting to Newport Bay. After 1945 USGS copy of 1901 edition based on 1894 survey by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey.

cemented accretion, and consequently there is no suggestion of the shell having been procured from a fossil deposit. Yet, the marine worm damage along some surfaces gives the appearance of old shell that may have lain on a beach deposit for an unknown period after the demise of the mollusc.

Woodward (1936:120-121) has reconstructed the steps by which *Glycymeris* bracelets were crafted. Artisans removed the interiors of such shells probably by marking off the upper shell surface with

deep, regular, short scratches, in which the workman sawed away with his flakes, keeping an even, straight groove.... Apparently, when a workman had deepened all of the grooves, he simply tapped the center with his hammerstone and it fell out....

With the center removed,

the ragged edges of the crude bracelet were ground down, and the bracelet was smoothed with finer-grained stones (Woodward 1936:120-121).

On the upper margin of the ORA-58 wrist opening, where the upper half of the valve has been excised, there is a flat ground surface. This flat surface recalls an identical design for the opening seen on the specimen from ORA-225 (Koerper 1996:84, Fig. 2).

The lower margin of the wrist opening of ORA-58 bracelet, that is, the natural contour of the bottom of the valve, lacks ground modification. The area at and near the umbo is ground, but large grinding facets are clearly visible, rendering an imperfect if not unfinished look to the ornament. Grinding of other outer surfaces was likewise seemingly incomplete, but speculatively, there may have been an artisan's reluctance to efface the aforementioned worm damage, some of it

deep, lest the result be a bracelet too thin and thus too fragile for the rigors of long distance transport.

Discussion

The most probable route for portage of the ORA-58 bracelet, once it was obtained by Lower Colorado River entrepreneurs, was across the Mohave Trail, then up and down a route at one side or the other of Cajon Pass leading into the San Bernardino Valley, and thence along the Santa Ana River drainage to Newport Mesa (Koerper 1996:99). The circumstances of its transfer to coastal Orange County were most likely embedded in the most thoroughly documented of all Southwest to California kinds of commerce, textile exchanges for Pacific Coast shells and shell beads, plied by Mohave middlemen (see Koerper and Hedges 1996:213-214; Koerper 1996:91-100), a pattern of economic behavior that fits Renfrew's (1972:470-471) "directional commercial trade" model. It is suggested that exotic valuables (prestige goods), such as Hohokam bracelets found at the coast, were

exchanged through reciprocity between interior traders and their Gabrielino/Juaneño trade partners/protectors as a social ritual preliminary to the more overtly economic activities of a larger directional commercial market exchange (Koerper and Hedges 1996:215-216).

Other such prestige goods might include anthropomorphic ceramic figurines (Koerper and Hedges 1996), Sonoran projectile points (e.g., Koerper, Schroth et al. 1996:271-274), and possibly certain kinds of U-shaped lunate crescents (Koerper, Newman, and Langenwalter 1996:113).

Since the maximum frequency of Plain heavy band *Glycymeris* bracelets falls to the latter half of the Hohokam Classic period, more likely the Civano (A.D. 1300-1450) than the Soho phase (A.D. 1100-

1300) (Jernigan 1978), we favor a late Late Prehistoric period arrival of the artifact to ORA-58. Such types do occur, however, in Sacaton times (A.D. 900-1100) (Sedentary period) as well as the Santa Cruz phase (A.D. 700-900) (Colonial period).

The Banning-Norris site is remarkable for its comparatively unusual Late Prehistoric artifacts (e.g., Koerper, Earle et al. 1996), including the aforementioned ceramic prestige items and several remarkable carved steatite objects, most likely from Santa Catalina Island (an ossuary bowl, a pectoral, a toloache bowl, a spectacular incised tablet, and an unusual dimorphic sexual symbol). Now, another rarity attaching to the special character of ORA-58 is documented, lending support to the hypothesis that this village was within a politically vested center for major cultural activities and at a trade cross-roads (see Earle and O'Neil 1994; Koerper, Earle et al. 1996; Koerper and Hedges 1996:216-217). Ethnohistoric records indicate that ORA-58 was probably within the territorial orbit of the historically known rancheria named Genga. Koerper, Earle et al. (1996) review archaeological data that bolster the argument that the Banning-Norris site and/or nearby large sites (CA-ORA-76, Adams Fairview site; CA-ORA-163, Griset site; and CA-ORA-506, possibly an extension of ORA-58) constitute the Genga documented in San Gabriel and San Juan Capistrano Mission records. The Genga maintained marriage ties with villages in southern Los Angeles County, inland along the Santa Ana River drainage, and south to the San Juan Capistrano area. Newport Bay was likely within the political orbit of Genga (Koerper, Earle et al. 1996)

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