

Light Transmitting Plummet

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Plummetts have always been controversial items often found along coastal and river areas thus the feeling that they were associated with fishing. Many considered them to be fishing weights. However if this were the case, most examples would be too heavy for use in normal forms of hook and line fishing. Secondly, there would be a preponderance of these objects found in the extremely abundant underwater sites. Yet, examination of collections obtain from southern underwater sites include few plummetts. Since use of coastal areas and rivers served as the “highways”, association of plummetts found in these areas might be just based on higher populations living along the major “highways”.

However, the fishing concept is well supported by shell plummet-like items described by Agustin M Llagostera (1989) and Walker (1984) which were used as fishing gear from Chile.

These plummet shape items were made from shell with single and double ended attachment grooves (Figure 1). Cushing in the late 1800’s shows knob-like artifacts from Key Marco, Florida used as obvious fishing weights but are considerably cruder. Hoff (2007) further discusses the pros and cons of possible uses of plummetts. However, based on the utilization of exotic materials and the wide variance of shapes, we support the concept that each had a special significance to an individual and may have been associated with seasonal fishing ceremonies. We also feel that they were probably made by the owner, not usually traded, and the various shapes may indicate specific clan or family relationships.

Plummet pendants are made from a wide variety of stone, shell and perhaps bone or wood. Many were made from exotic materials traded from distant places. There distinctly seems to be an effort to not make one plummet appear exactly like another. Individualism is certainly apparent as shown by the numerous shell examples shown in Hoff (2007).

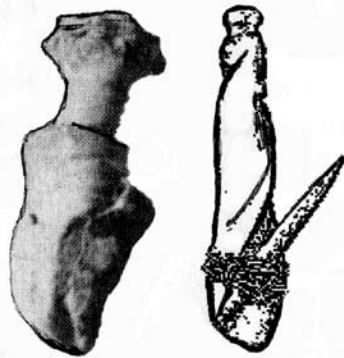


Figure 1 - Shell fishing weights from Key Marco, Florida (left) and Chile.

Rocks and crystals that transmit light have been admired by many cultures over time. Natural and sometimes altered quartz crystals are found with burials or at sites throughout the world including Native American sites. One can easily imagine the fascination and awe to observe a glowing stone pendant when pointed towards the sun. Certainly it must have been held in high esteem by the original owner and admired by others.

In our collection are four crystal-like stone (Figure 2) plummet pendants which still glow when held towards a bright light. Two (0211FL and 0213FL) are made from large pieces of calcite crystals which may have come from Florida. They were found in the area of Ozello, Citrus County, Florida. These were not exactly coastal finds but located about three to four miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. Surfaces of these calcite plummet pendants are eroded to a grain-like appearance that looks somewhat like wood (Figure 2). Artifact 0211FL measures 7.5 x 3.0 cm and weighs 70g (about 7.5 oz). Artifact 0213FL measures 6.5 x 2.5 cm wide and weighs 40g (about 1.5 oz).

Calcite comes in various colors from white to reddish brown and is relatively soft and easier to carve and shape like soapstone. However, quartz crystal stones are harder, denser and not a easy to work with. To get a better perspective on what a newly finished calcite crystal plummet looks like the authors made two using natural sandstone and straight edge coral flake knives to shape and grind. General shaping was accomplished by considerable scraping followed by a lot of grinding on sandstone. Polishing was accomplished by mixing fine grain sand and water combined with considerable rubbing. Final polish was accomplished using stiff material like leather or like a rug. Figure 3 shows the raw material and the final calcite crystal plummetts.

Figure 4 is a strange shaped plummet (0830 FL) that is 6.0 x 2.5 cm wide and weighs 35g (about 1.25oz), that was found at a shell midden island mound in St. Petersburg. Pinellas County, Florida. It has an overall appearance of a old perfume stopper with the tapered neck while the other end looks like a duck head. The surface is eroded from exposure to saltwater causing small pits, ware patterns and a white patina. It is made from an unknown material but we speculate it may be fossil agate coral, natural glass formed by lightning hitting sandy soil, quartz crystal or a piece of old Spanish glass. Three examples of possible raw material are shown in Figure 4. Based on the weight it could be may be made of old glass or quartz crystal.

Figure 5 shows a quartzite stone plummet (0823FL) found on a island near Cedar Key, Levy County, Florida.

It is made from quartzite pebbles that are found in sand and fossil deposits in Florida. Included is a natural raw quartzite pebble (0833FL) found at a large mound site in Valusia County, Florida. The quartzite crystal plummet (0823FL) is 5.4 cm x 2.8 cm wide and weighs 60g (about 2 oz.) weight. Quartzite stone is harder and denser than calcite but glows when held up to a light source. Dark coloration on the plummet is due to fire exposure.

Another example of a quartzite pebble plummet (not in our collection), is round, bulbous-like and found 35 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico in Dade City area, Pasco County, Florida.

References:

Hoff, Frank & Nancy 2007, Shell Artifacts, Emphasis on Southeastern Collections. Pasttime Artifacts, Dade City, Florida, ISBN 0-9662960-5-2

Liagostera, Agustin M 1989. Caza y Pesca Maritima in Jorge L. Hidalgo et al., editors, Culturas de Chile Prehistoria Desde Sus Origenes Hasta los Albores de la Conquista. Editorial Andres Bello, Santiago de Chile.

Walker, Karen Jo 1989 Artifacts of a Fishy Nature: Southwest Florida's Prehistoric Marine Fishing Technology. Presented paper Southeastern Archaeological Conference.



Figure 2 - Calcite crystal plummets (0211 & 0213FL) found in Ozello, Florida. In all figures lights were placed behind the object, photographed and the background was filled in.



Figure 3 - Plummets made by the authors from two varieties of calcite crystals. Imagine the impact the real light transmitting plummets shown in Figure 2 had on the feelings and emotions of Native Americans.

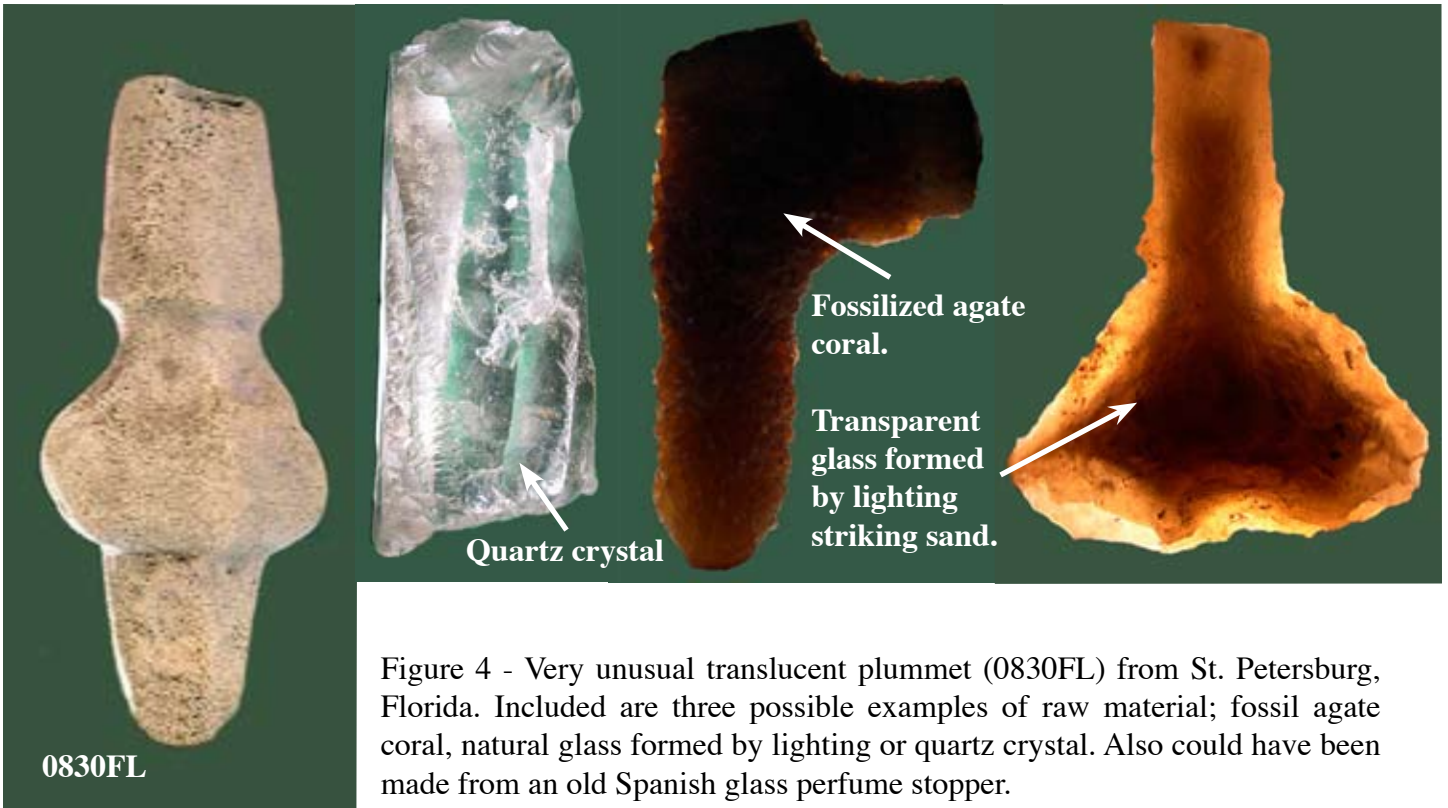


Figure 4 - Very unusual translucent plummet (0830FL) from St. Petersburg, Florida. Included are three possible examples of raw material; fossil agate coral, natural glass formed by lightning or quartz crystal. Also could have been made from an old Spanish glass perfume stopper.

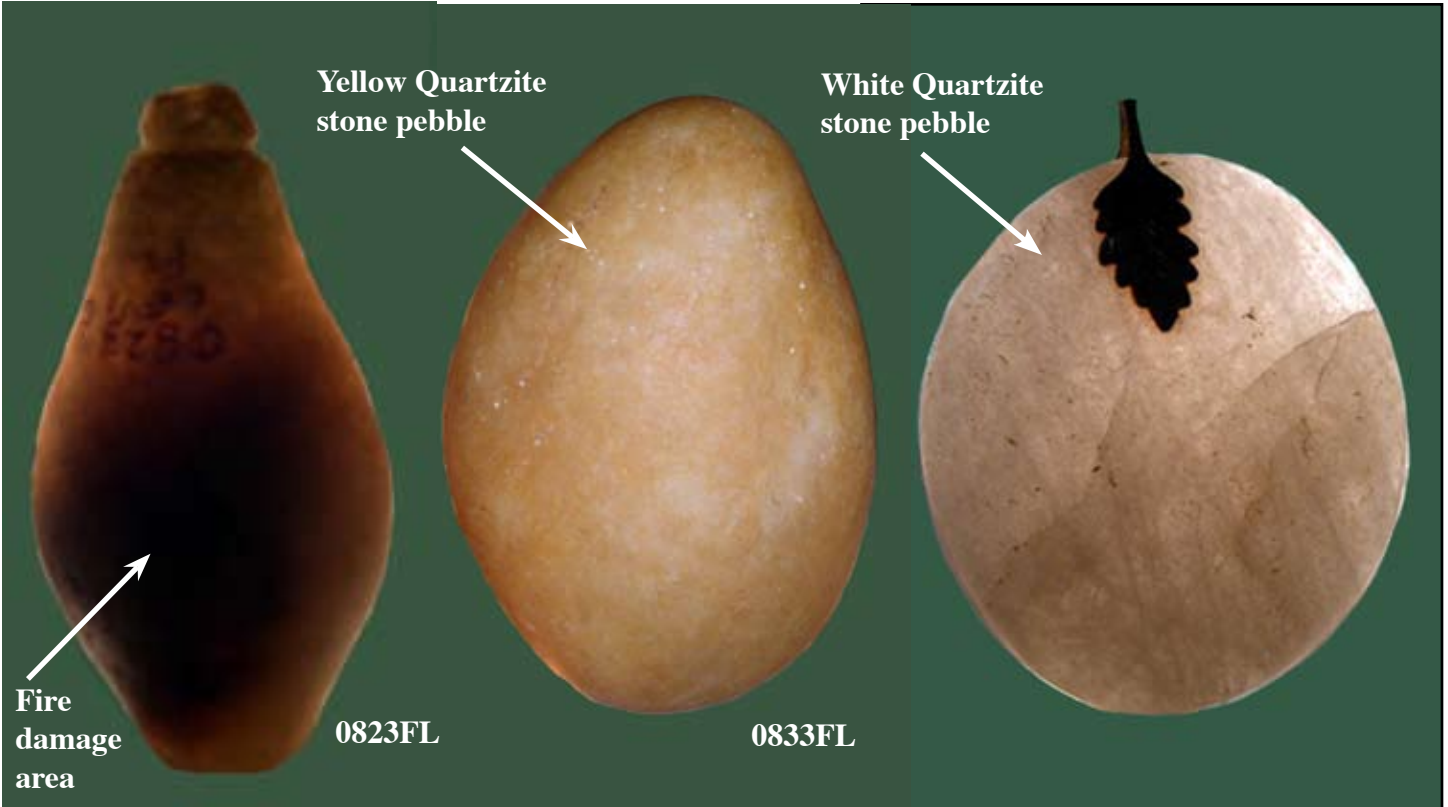


Figure 5 - Yellow quartzite rock plummet (0823FL) from Cedar Key, Florida and a natural yellow quartzite pebble (0833FL) found at Tick Island site, Valusia County, Florida. Also included in a piece of jewelry made from a white quartzite pebble found at phosphate mine in Florida. This piece was lightly polished but the shape was not altered.