

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL ARCHAEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine historical trends in the development of Santa Barbara Channel archaeology, with an emphasis on the last 30 years. Since 1960, 4 developments have been particularly significant in shaping the way archaeology is done in the Santa Barbara Channel today: (1) the dramatic increase in the amount of archaeology being done; (2) the fundamental shift in archaeology from an essentially academic discipline to one dominated by commercial enterprise; (3) the development of new techniques for analyzing archaeological remains, techniques that have expanded the range of questions we can address; and (4) the increasingly active role that Native Americans have played in archaeology. These trends reflect broader patterns in California and American archaeology, but they have followed a somewhat unique trajectory in the Santa Barbara area. Regarding where Santa Barbara Channel archaeology may be headed in the 1990s and beyond, I suggest that paradigms now being developed may lead to a "new synthesis" that will incorporate the best approaches of 20th century archaeologists into a revitalized record of California's cultural past.

INTRODUCTION

California's Santa Barbara Channel area, encompassing the northern Channel Islands and the mainland coast from Point Conception to Point Dume (Figure 1), has played a pivotal role in the definition of south and central coast prehistory. At the time of European contact, the Santa Barbara Channel was the demographic and political center of the maritime Chumash. The Chumash were one of the most populous and complex tribes in a state renowned for hunter-gatherer societies of unusually high population density and remarkable social, political, and economic complexity. Because of the wealth of artifacts and data they contain, archaeological sites of the area have attracted the attention of relic-hunters, antiquarians, and archaeologists for over 100 years. This long history of research has generated a vast

literature (see Anderson 1980) on the archaeology and ethnography of the Chumash and their predecessors. The archaeological record of the Santa Barbara Channel clearly illustrates the vibrant and dynamic nature of the prehistoric cultures of the area, where many cultural developments now known to be representative of a much broader area were first defined.

Given these facts, it seems appropriate to look at the history of archaeology in the Santa Barbara Channel to examine the context of current research in the area. Until recently, I had never seriously considered the broader implications of the history of archaeology in the Santa Barbara Channel, in California, or anywhere else. In writing this paper, however, I found that there is value in periodically looking behind us -- if only to see where we have been. After all, a better

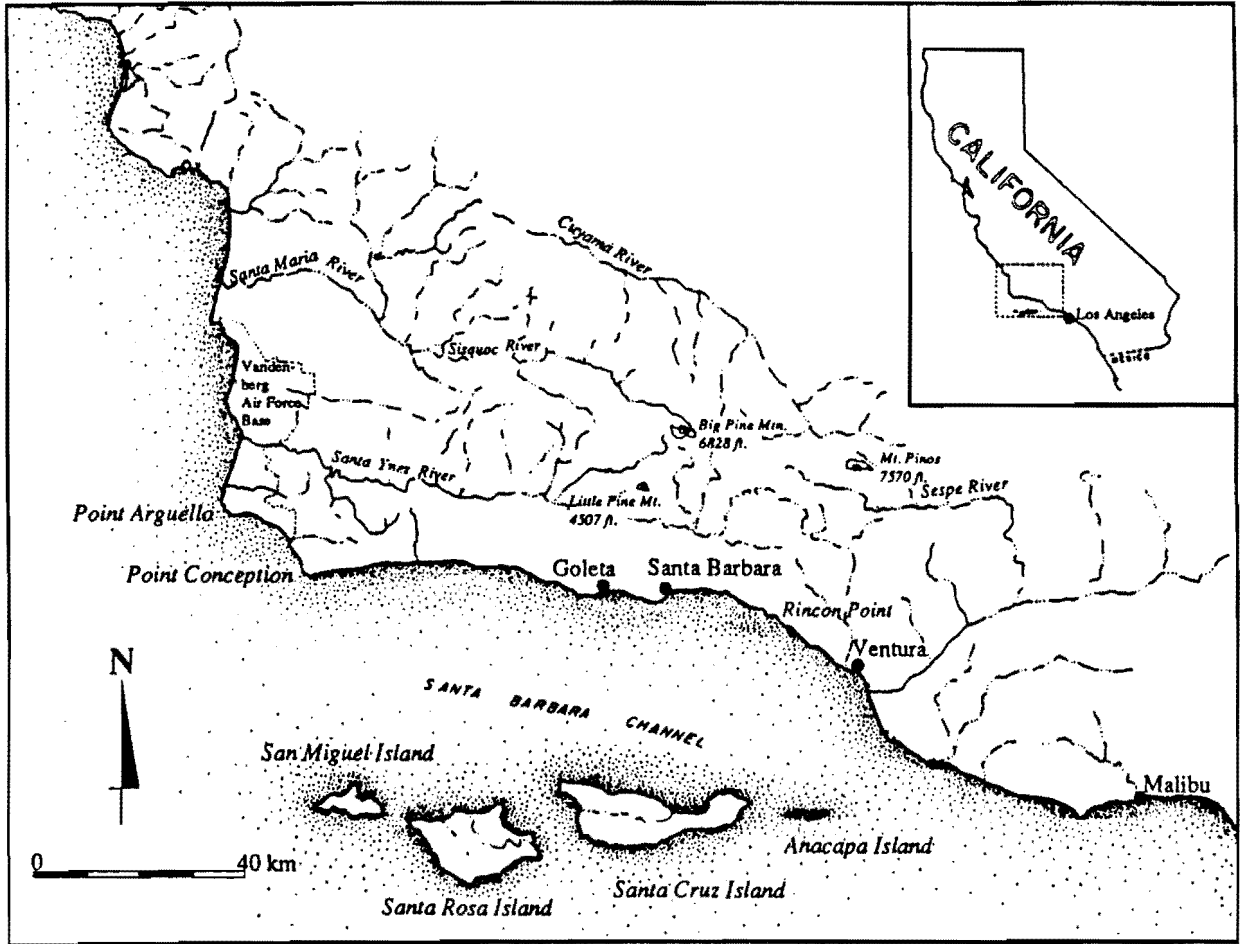


Figure 1. Santa Barbara Channel region.

idea of where we have been can give us a clearer picture of where we are, how we got here, and hopefully where we are going. On the other hand, my new appreciation for the history of California archaeology may simply reflect my own gradual evolution from a "young turk" into an "old hand."

To really understand the current status of archaeology in the Santa Barbara Channel area, we would have to examine broader developments in western science, anthropology, and archaeology over the last 100 years or more. Since this task is beyond the scope of both my paper and my expertise, I focus on the development of Santa Barbara Channel archaeology between 1960 and the present. Nonetheless, a brief overview of the archaeology of the area will help place these later developments in a broader historical perspective.

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL ARCHAEOLOGY

Relatively systematic archaeological work began in the Santa Barbara Channel area by at least 1875, when Paul Schumacher of the U.S. Coast Survey explored a number of major village sites, reportedly collecting 15 tons of artifacts in just a few week's work (Chartkoff and Chartkoff 1984:347). In the intervening 117 years, investigations in the Santa Barbara area have been instrumental in identifying cultural patterns and defining regional chronologies for the southern and central California coast. As might be expected, the goals and methods of archaeologists have changed dramatically during more than 100 years of research. Over the past 40 years alone, new developments in archaeological method and theory have revolutionized our discipline. Unfortunately, many of the sophisticated questions we can now ask with the insights gained from our new data and techniques cannot always be answered with collections recovered by early researchers.

The Antiquarians: 1875 to 1925

Little more than 100 years after the Spanish settlement of Alta California, antiquarians and curio-seekers from around

the world descended on California's coastal middens in search of relics for public and private collections. In the Santa Barbara Channel, the earliest crude attempts at archaeological research were conducted by men like Schumacher (1875), Stephen Bowers (1878, 1883), Frederic Putnam (Putnam et al. 1879), and Leon de Cessac (1882).

With the goal of collecting skeletal remains and display-quality artifacts, these antiquarians plundered cemetery plots up and down the Santa Barbara coast. They generally focused on large late prehistoric sites, whose cemeteries contained a wealth of finely made artifacts. By modern standards, nearly all of their excavations were unsystematic and poorly documented. Thus, much of the archaeological research of this period was more destructive than constructive. Numerous important sites were damaged, while only minor contributions to the prehistory of the California coast were made. In their defense, however, the antiquarians had no knowledge of the time depth of Pacific coast prehistory or the dramatic cultural changes that would be identified by later archaeologists.

The Culture Historians: 1925 to 1955

Reflecting broader trends in the development of American anthropology, Santa Barbara Channel archaeologists of this period excavated sites with a new interest in defining cultural stages through stratigraphic excavations and intersite comparisons (e.g., Rogers 1929; Olson 1930; Orr 1943). The primary emphasis was on building a "culture history" or developmental sequence for the area. During this era, burials and formal artifact types remained the main objects of study, but structures and refuse areas were systematically explored for the first time. Unlike the collections of the antiquarians, however, many of the artifacts and burials collected during this period continue to be valuable sources of data for modern researchers interested in the prehistory of the California coast.

During this period, Santa Barbara Channel archaeologists laid the foundations of a culture history that profoundly influenced our view of California coastal prehistory. David Banks Rogers of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History explored dozens

of Santa Barbara Channel village sites during the 1920s and 1930s, and produced the first and best synthesis of Santa Barbara Channel prehistory ever written (Rogers 1929). The names of his cultural stages have been changed by later investigators (see Wallace 1955; Harrison 1964; Warren 1968), but to this day much of the work in the Santa Barbara area is oriented towards refining Rogers' chronology and fleshing out the adaptations of his archaeological cultures.

Scientific Archaeology: 1955 to Present

Between 1955 and the present, many theoretical, methodological, and technological advances in American archaeology were made. These advances grew out of the explicit recognition by American archaeologists that archaeology should be a more rigorous and scientific discipline, with the formulation and testing of hypotheses, better quantitative methods, etc. In California, the start of this period is marked by the publication of William Wallace's (1955) classic summary of cultural stages on the southern California coast, a work followed by increasingly specific syntheses (e.g., Meighan 1959; Harrison 1964; Warren 1968; Moratto 1984; King 1990) as additional data became available. During this period, Santa Barbara Channel archaeologists focused increasingly on understanding the ecological and evolutionary contexts of cultural changes.

More than any other single event, archaeology was revolutionized by W.F. Libby's development of radiocarbon (^{14}C) dating in the late 1940s. For the first time, ^{14}C dating allowed the relatively accurate placement of prehistoric sites into an absolute chronological framework. This reduced the reliance of archaeologists on formal artifact typologies, allowing more emphasis to be placed on interdisciplinary and ecological aspects of the archaeological record. Thus, the focus of many California archaeologists (i.e., Landberg 1965; Warren 1968; Leonard 1971) shifted gradually from artifacts to "ecofacts" (shell, bone, etc.), a change that paralleled the development of ecological perspectives in American anthropology.

It was not until the mid-1950s that ^{14}C dating began to have a major influence on

the archaeology of coastal California by unequivocally demonstrating the antiquity of coastal settlement in the region (Heizer 1958). One of the pioneers in the use of radiocarbon dating on the California coast was Phil Orr, who succeeded Rogers at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History in 1938. During the 1950s and 1960s, Orr used ^{14}C dating to build a 10,000 year chronology of human settlement on Santa Rosa Island (Orr 1952, 1962, 1968). Orr and his contemporaries first established the great antiquity of coastal adaptations in California and provided important new data on the lifeways of the coastal peoples of the Santa Barbara Channel.

The last 20 years have seen the implementation of new federal, state, and local laws that protect important archaeological sites threatened by development or other forms of destruction (erosion, vandalism, etc.). With some of the strictest environmental laws in the nation, California has seen particularly explosive growth in the amount of archaeology being done. This growth poses serious challenges for an archaeological community that finds it increasingly difficult to absorb and synthesize the rapidly accumulating data. Generally known as Cultural Resource Management (CRM), research mandated by such legislation makes up an increasing proportion of the archaeology done in the Santa Barbara area and around the nation. As rampant development has overtaken much of the southern California coast, a vast reservoir of valuable data has been generated, much of which remains to be adequately synthesized.

HOW MUCH HAS SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL ARCHAEOLOGY REALLY CHANGED?

From a long historical perspective, Santa Barbara Channel archaeology obviously has changed a great deal since the 1870s. Much of this change accompanied advances in general scientific paradigms, however, and the accumulation of more and better data. In this sense, the advances in Santa Barbara Channel archaeology over the decades reflect broader developments in anthropology and western science. Since the 1870s, ar-

chaeology has evolved from a salvage operation for the material remnants of "vanishing cultures" to a relatively sophisticated and interdisciplinary discipline that scientifically examines the patterns, contexts, and causes of changes in past human societies. The development of the "new archaeology," which descended on American archaeology with tremendous fanfare in the 1960s, has been credited with many of the theoretical and methodological advances in archaeology as a scientific discipline. Many of these advances had roots in the earlier works of the 1940s (e.g., Taylor 1948), however, and in quantitative analytical techniques pioneered by Albert Spaulding (1953) and others.

Has Santa Barbara Channel archaeology changed significantly over the last 30 years? Undeniably, we have made major advances since the 1950s and early 1960s, when archaeologists like Phil Orr and Clarence Ruth still excavated using methods little changed from those of D.B. Rogers in the 1920s. In some ways, however, the changes are less dramatic than we might think. For decades, for instance, archaeologists focused too much on excavating large, rich sites. It would be nice to think that this had changed with the emphasis in recent years on more representative sampling and understanding settlement patterns. Unfortunately, the idea that big, artifact-rich sites are the only ones that deserve detailed study still clouds the thinking of many California archaeologists, even though we know little about less conspicuous site types (see Glassow 1985). More evidence that things have not changed so much is the fact that techniques many of us think of as relatively recent developments (1/8" screening, soil flotation, and column sampling) were used by William Harrison in Santa Barbara sites in the 1950s. Many of us still do not systematically use such techniques. Finally, the ecological midden studies pioneered in Santa Barbara Channel sites in the early 1960s by archaeologists like Freddie Curtis and Roberta Greenwood (and still used today), had historical precedents in quantitative midden studies by earlier California archaeologists (e.g., Gifford 1916; Cook and Treganza 1950). Some of us now have fancy new gadgets like laser transits and Global Positioning Systems, and we water-screen more

systematically to recover more and better data, but we still survey by foot, dig square holes in arbitrary levels, and sort thousands of shells and bones by hand.

In some ways, much of the revolutionary promise of the New Archaeology may not have been fully realized, a point I will return to in a later section. Nonetheless, Santa Barbara Channel archaeology has changed. From my perspective, some of the most influential changes are not the theoretical developments of the 1960s and 1970s, but the more pedestrian aspects of doing archaeology that generally have more widespread effects on those working as archaeologists. These include: (1) the explosive growth in the amount and costs of the archaeology being done; (2) a fundamental shift from archaeology as an academic pursuit to a commercial enterprise; (3) the development of a host of new analytical techniques; and (4) the increasing participation of Native Americans in CRM-related issues.

The Growth of Commercial Archaeology

From the 1920s to the early 1960s, the number of professional archaeologists who lived and worked in the Santa Barbara area full-time could be counted on one hand. In almost every case, these people were affiliated with non-profit academic institutions like the University of California or the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Today, there are dozens of archaeologists doing archaeology in Santa Barbara County full-time. The vast majority of these work in CRM-related jobs with government agencies or consulting firms. Santa Barbara archaeologists are fortunate to live in a county that has one of the strictest interpretations of CEQA and excellent guidelines that govern CRM-related research. We have worked hard over the years to make it that way.

The growth of Santa Barbara Channel archaeology generally has been beneficial, but it has disturbing aspects as well. One of these is the increasing cost of doing archaeology. Not so many years ago, we could excavate and analyze a cubic meter of shell midden in a typical Santa Barbara coastal site for about \$1,000. Today, the same amount of midden may cost \$10,000 or more to excavate and analyze. In part, costs have

risen because of inflation and the growing acceptance of archaeology as a fundamental part of the environmental planning process. It is also due, however, to the growing expectations that archaeology is a business that should generate profits. Today, more and more archaeology is done by large, "full-service" environmental or engineering firms with very high overhead rates. At times, decisions about how to do archaeology are made by non-archaeologists who do not understand the expense and ethics involved in doing it right. We all know of cases where the profit motive took precedence over good science or protecting the resource. In general, the public is getting less archaeology for their money, a trend that has disturbing implications. During the best of times there are limits to what the public and private sectors will pay for archaeological research. Unless we do a better job of sharing our results with the public, we may be seen as a luxury society cannot afford during economic hard times like those that threaten California today.

The increase in the number of archaeologists working in the area has caused an explosion in the amount of basic archaeological data being produced. Yet, despite what must be the highest per capita ratio of archaeologists in the nation and a sharp rise in the number of theses and dissertations produced on California topics, California archaeologists have generally been lax about publishing their research in major archaeological journals (Conkey 1992). Between 1970 and 1984, this criticism was equally true of Santa Barbara Channel archaeologists. I believe our relative quiescence during this period was largely due to a preoccupation with CRM: We were overwhelmed with the difficult job of building the infrastructure necessary to allow CRM projects to contribute consistently to research topics in California archaeology.

In recent years, California and Santa Barbara Channel archaeologists have made remarkable progress in reversing the decline in our substantive contributions to American archaeology. In 1984, 2 important syntheses of California prehistory were published (Chartkoff and Chartkoff 1984; Moratto 1984). In the subsequent 8 years, data

from Santa Barbara County sites contributed to 9 papers published in American Antiquity (Arnold 1992; Bamforth 1986, 1991; Erlandson 1984, 1988; Glassow and Wilcoxon 1988; Johnson 1989; Jones 1991; Walker and Erlandson 1986). Significantly, CRM projects contributed data to at least 7 of those papers. Today, we are in the midst of a significant revitalization, one to which CRM data is making major contributions. This suggests that our battles to institutionalize and regulate the research done under the auspices of Cultural Resource Management are paying significant dividends.

The Laboratory Revolution

Over the past 40 years, one of the most fundamental revolutions in archaeology has taken place in the laboratories of chemists, physicists, molecular biologists, palynologists, and other scientists. Computers and software have fundamentally changed our profession, but it is new analytical techniques developed in other sciences that have extended the range of our interpretations. Geochemical "sourcing" of obsidian artifacts, high power microwear analyses of chipped stone tools, pollen washes of ground stone tools, blood and other residue analyses, trace element and isotopic studies, accelerator ¹⁴C dating, and other technological wizardry have provided us with the ability to see things in the archaeological record that could not have been dreamed of in 1960. I can only hope that the technological developments of the next 30 years will be equally dramatic.

Unfortunately, archaeologists tend to borrow many new techniques uncritically, enthusiastically applying them to our data long before the bugs are worked out. Just a few examples of this include amino acid racemization dating, the use of obsidian hydration as an absolute dating method, and analysis of shellfish seasonality via growth-ring studies. Even a "tried-and-true" technique like radiocarbon dating has undergone over 40 years of experimental refinement and continues to have trouble with problematical materials or samples. We should resist the temptation to uncritically "jump on the bandwagon" of new technologies applied to archaeological problems. Although preliminary data on new techniques are often

encouraging, only time and careful experimentation can tell if some of our most promising techniques can truly produce the results that are claimed for them. Like medical doctors afraid to be sued, we sometimes follow a kind of "cookbook" approach to analysis, running whole batteries of tests on assemblages just because it is possible to do so. Such approaches often waste precious dollars that might better be spent interpreting proven data more effectively. There is no substitute for carefully using those types of analyses that provide the data needed to answer well-formulated research questions.

Native Americans and Archaeologists

For me, one of the most important developments of the last 30 years is the increasingly active role Native Americans have played in CRM. As far as I know, Native Californians were first regularly used as crew members and monitors in Santa Barbara County. Native American involvement in Santa Barbara Channel archaeology began in the early 1970s, when members of the Quabajai Chumash Indian Association, the Brotherhood of the Tomol, and the Santa Ynez Indian Reservation organized to protest the development of Hammond's Meadow in Montecito, the location of the historic village of Shalwaj (SBA-19) and other sites. In 1977, Chumash tribal members were included in a large archaeological project associated with a controversial proposal to build a Liquefied Natural Gas plant on sacred lands near Point Conception (King and Craig 1978). This proposed development galvanized the local Native American community, leading to an occupation of the Point Conception area led by the Chumash and a heightened awareness of the importance of heritage-related preservation issues.

Over the years, the involvement of Chumash tribal members in CRM projects in the Santa Barbara area has expanded. Because of their activism and 15 years of CRM experience, many Native Americans of the Santa Barbara area now have a sophisticated knowledge of archaeological methods, historic preservation law, and the consultation and compliance processes. As their knowledge has increased, so has their influence. Over the years, the Chumash people have been a powerful force for pre-

serving archaeological sites and the conduct of quality archaeology in the Santa Barbara area.

Nobody has a more fundamental right to be involved in the control of the past than the Native peoples whose past we study. Native American perspectives sometimes conflict with the scientific paradigms we have learned as members of a dominant, relatively affluent, and historically repressive white majority. In our dealings with Native Americans, we have much to live down. Many tribal members will never forget the stories they have heard or read about grave-digging "anthros" like Ales Hrdlicka, who sometimes robbed Indian graves even before the flesh of the interred had fully decayed.

Despite such historical differences, we share much in common with living Native Americans. Many of us have dedicated our lives to studying and preserving the past of Native Californian cultures. Most of us are deeply interested in Native American history and have a fundamental respect for the diversity and accomplishments of Native societies. Most of us are compassionate in our views of the multiple tragedies that overtook America's native peoples as a result of European diseases, violence, dispossession, and government neglect. Given our fascination and respect for past Native American societies, it is strange that many of us have resisted the reforms that are overtaking us now. Trained in the cross-cultural approaches of anthropology, we should be particularly sensitive to the concerns of indigenous peoples and the needs of dispossessed minorities trying to revitalize their cultures.

All too often, however, educated white anthropologists have tried to dictate how the past should be studied, interpreted, and preserved. Many of us have wasted years trying to fight the legitimate concerns of Native Californians. Some of us have interfered in tribal politics in futile attempts to protect our own interests. I often hear colleagues attack the integrity, character, and heritage of Native Americans who are outstanding people and strong advocates for protecting archaeological sites -- even EuroAmerican sites. Countless times, I have heard archaeologists accuse Native

Americans of being interested primarily in the money and the power that come from CRM. In recent years, however, when I have called for volunteers to help restore and protect a looted cemetery or site, concerned Native Americans always outnumber archaeologists by a substantial margin. All too often, it seems to be we archaeologists who are obsessed with the power and profits associated with historic preservation.

Recent legislative decisions show that the tide of public opinion and political power are going against archaeology as it has been practiced in California and America in the past. Instead of fighting the inevitable, I wish today's reactionaries had spent the last 15 years in constructive dialog with Native peoples. If all of us had, emotional issues like repatriation and reburial might not weigh so heavily on our profession today. Native Americans should not just be working with us when we dig, they should be taking part in our surveys, working in our labs, and participating in project planning. Separately, we can both be advocates for preservation and scientific archaeology. Working and speaking together, however, our voices are much more likely to be heard.

NEW PARADIGMS FOR THE 1990S

Today, the label "New Archaeology" is a bit out of fashion, largely supplanted by a more current jargon: "Processual archaeology". I dislike labels that are unintelligible to the public, but using the more current label allows me to dodge the question of whether we are entering a period of "newer" or "new and improved" archaeology. Whatever we call the archaeology of the 1990s, there is no doubt that the cumulative changes of the past 30 years reshaped archaeology as it is practiced in the Santa Barbara Channel, California, and America.

During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there were fundamental advances in our knowledge, our methods, and our theories. These advances gave us powerful new paradigms for understanding past human cultures. The fact that the roots of some of these developments were in the 1940s and 1950s does not detract from our later ac-

complishments. As a profession, we made major strides in the study of hunter-gatherers in the past 3 decades. Much of our progress resulted from the development of ecological and evolutionary perspectives in anthropology (see Hardesty 1980; Dunnell 1980), with major contributions made by studies of modern hunter-gatherers, analyses of site formation processes (Schiffner 1987), the development of cultural ecological models (Jochim 1981), and the accumulation of new archaeological data. Many of our best and most cherished paradigms continue to be highly relevant to current archaeological problems. Others, however, seem to have reached a point of near senescence. Today, important new paradigms are being developed that will revolutionize the way we think about past societies. As with the older roots of the new archaeology, the development of these new paradigms also should not detract from the accomplishments of the past 30 years.

Just about the time I finally figured out what a processual archaeologist was -- and realized I was one of them -- it seemed that "post-processual" archaeology came along. Not wanting to be perceived as an intellectual dinosaur before I turned 40, I have watched the development of post-processual archaeology with some interest. A remarkable discovery I have made is that Ian Hodder's post-processual writings are just as incomprehensible to me as the Lewis Binford articles I was forced to read early in my college career. I have also found many early post-processual interpretive case studies to be fundamentally weak. The more recent contributions are becoming increasingly sophisticated, however, and these new paradigms have made some real advances. If, as Albert Spaulding (1986:307) pointed out, it took 15 years for the work of W.W. Taylor (1948) and his predecessors to crystallize into a coherent "new archaeology," certainly we should give these new pioneers equal time to reach their full potential.

Among the "new" paradigms I find appealing is the return of the individual to prehistory. Many of us (myself included) had reached a point where we marched "populations" (not people) inexorably around the proverbial landscape like automatons

reacting mechanically to external forces like population pressure or environmental change. Into this somewhat sterile approach, I welcome back human aspirations and active individuals, although these may be hard to identify in a somewhat homogenized shell midden. I welcome, too, recent attempts to "engender" archaeology (e.g., Gero and Conkey 1991; Walde and Willows 1991; Claassen 1992) and the application of feminist perspectives to problems old and new. Much of the work of the past 120 years is hopelessly androcentric and must be corrected before we can truly move forward.

I welcome these new perspectives, particularly if they do not throw the processual baby out with the post-processual bath water. Ultimately, the best innovations from the 1920s to the 1990s may be combined into a kind of "new synthesis" in archaeology -- a label I like much better than processualism, post-processualism, or the contradictory "post-modernism." Such a "new synthesis" has the potential to combine the best of many distinct paradigms and techniques in archaeology into a vital and very human story of our collective past. I would like to see California archaeologists play a leading role in producing such a synthesis.

CONCLUSIONS

I am not always optimistic about the directions in which California archaeology is going. After an apprenticeship working on Spanish Mission Period sites under Julia Costello, I cut my teeth in CRM working on small survey and excavation projects with people like Steven Craig, Michael Macko, Pandora Snethkamp, and Larry Wilcoxon. In some ways, those were the good old days: budgets were small, projects and paperwork were less complex, regulations were few, and we policed our own. We got paid for much of what we did -- though not very well by today's standards -- and worked for nothing whenever we had to. Today, the situation has changed somewhat, and not always for the better.

The new emphasis on money and profits has caused a decline in the spirit of volunteerism among archaeologists -- a trend I

find especially disheartening. Most of us became archaeologists because we loved the excitement of the field work and the intellectual stimulation of discovering the past. Archaeology should be more than a job, it should be a passion. Once money, stability, or security become the primary objectives, archaeology becomes just a job, and the whole profession suffers.

Despite some of the troubling patterns I have discussed in this paper, I see much room for optimism. As archaeologists, we have weathered a difficult period of transition. Archaeology has been institutionalized in the environmental protection process, despite the attempted retrenchments of the Reagan years. Furthermore, we have not just institutionalized the methods of the 1970s, we have steadily extended the scope of our work, the range of information we routinely collect and analyze, and the sophistication of our interpretations.

Ultimately, however, we are losing our sites at an alarming rate to development, erosion, and looting. We have accomplished much over the last 30 years, but we have much more to do. With mutual respect and true collaboration between the archaeological and Native American communities, we can be a powerful force for the preservation of archaeological sites, increased funding for archaeology, and the more effective use of that funding. To succeed, however, we desperately need to better interpret the past for the public, to revive the spirit of community and volunteerism among archaeologists, and to combine the talents and resources of agency, contract, and academic archaeologists in cooperative regional research studies.

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