

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF CULTURE CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN MULTIETHNIC COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

California is ideally suited to the study of the emergence, growth, and consequences of multiethnic colonial communities. Research on how native peoples responded to Spanish, Mexican, Russian, and Anglo-American exploration and colonialism can provide important insights into the roots of contemporary pluralistic Californian populations. An ongoing study of the Russian colony of Fort Ross is examining the cultural landscapes of diverse ethnic groups in a long-term temporal framework. This study questions the growing practice of splitting "prehistoric" and "historical" archaeology into separate subfields, shifts the emphasis from artifact analyses to the study of spatial contexts, and employs ethnohistorical and ethnographic data as end sequences of long-term developments in native societies.

INTRODUCTION

An important focus of social theory and studies of cultural change in anthropology today is understanding how indigenous peoples responded to European contact and colonialism, and how the outcomes of these encounters contributed to the pluralistic populations of contemporary America (Biersack 1991; Deagan 1990; Ohnuki-Tierney 1990; Sahlins 1992; Simmons 1988; Wolf 1982). Archaeologists in California are ideally situated to make important contributions to the study of long-term change by examining how coastal hunter-gatherers responded to Spanish, Mexican, Russian, and Anglo-American exploration and settlement (e.g., Hardesty 1993). The state is blessed with a wealth of ethnohistorical sources that date to as early as the sixteenth century, and one of the largest bodies of ethnographic data collected in North America. Recent developments in chronology construction have greatly improved the

dating of archaeological deposits. As little as ten years ago, many sites -- especially lithic scatters recorded in surface surveys -- were difficult to date. With recent chronological advances, especially obsidian hydration research, archaeological deposits in many regions of California can now be dated along an ordinal scale that spans prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic times. The rich archival data base and more refined chronologies provide an ideal combination for examining long-term developments in the hunter-gatherer societies of California.

THE FORT ROSS ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

Since 1988, a collaborative team of scholars has been working with the California Department of Parks and Recreation in the archaeological investigation of the Fort Ross State Historic Park

along the Sonoma County coastline in northern California. The historic Ross community provides an ideal case study to evaluate native responses to a pluralistic mercantile Russian colony. Fort Ross was administered from 1812 to 1841 by the Russian-American Company, a mercantile monopoly that represented Russia's interests in the lucrative North Pacific fur trade. It served as a staging area for sea otter and fur seal hunts in northern California, and as an agricultural base for raising crops and livestock. Similar to other fur companies, the Russian-American Company recruited peoples from across Europe, North America, and the Pacific Rim as part of its multiethnic work force. Ethnic Russians made up a relatively small portion of the Fort Ross community. The majority consisted of native Alaskan workers in which Koniag Eskimos dominated, followed by a handful of Chugach Eskimos, Aleuts, as well as Tanaina and Tlingit Indians from the Alaskan mainland. Other workers included Creoles (people of mixed Russian/native ancestry), Yakuts from Siberia, native Hawaiians, and at least one African-American. Kashaya Pomo and Coast Miwok people from nearby tribelets were also recruited as general-purpose laborers and as mates in the formation of inter-ethnic households (cf. Lightfoot et al. 1991:11-26).

We are addressing the degree to which inter-ethnic interactions in a pluralistic mercantile colony served as sources of cultural change. Did the close interaction and cohabitation of ethnic groups from many different homelands stimulate the cultural exchange of architectural styles, material goods, foods, technologies, and ceremonial practices? Were new cultural forms generated by combining or modifying innovations from European, Creole, Siberian, Aleut, Eskimo, and Indian peoples? What role did Creoles and native Alaskans, who lived, worked, and socialized closely with Kashaya Pomo and Coast Miwok families, serve as cultural mediators between the Russian administrators and local Indian laborers at Fort Ross?

A RECONSIDERATION OF THREE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICES

Research on native responses to early multiethnic colonies, such as Fort Ross, provides critical insights into the roots of contemporary pluralistic Californian populations. However, the study of the emergence, growth, and consequences of pluralistic colonial communities requires that we reconsider three common practices of American archaeology. These include: 1) how we study long-term change; 2) how we measure cultural change in the archaeological record; and 3) how we employ ethnohistorical and ethnographic data in archaeological research.

(1) *The Study of Long-Term Change.* The study of native and European encounters requires that we undertake studies of long-term cultural change grounded in both prehistory and history. We believe that the common practice of segregating North American archaeology into "prehistoric" and "historical" subfields is counterproductive for this kind of research (e.g., Kirch 1992:26). Prehistorians typically study Native American material culture that is viewed as "pristine" or "unspoiled" by European contact, while post-contact times are the domain of historical archaeologists. Acculturation studies are usually undertaken by historical archaeologists who do not systematically connect the research directly back to the prehistoric past. However, a strong grounding in prehistory is essential to define the cultural practices of native peoples prior to European contact and colonialism. It is only through a systematic, diachronic analysis of prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic contexts that we can evaluate the full magnitude of the cultural transformations involved. These include, among others, changes that may have taken place prior to face-to-face contact with Europeans as a consequence of the regional exchange of European trade goods (Trigger 1981:11-13); the encroachment of foreign weeds, insects, and animals (Crosby 1986:145-216); and the rapid assault of highly lethal diseases introduced into North America by early European explorers (Dobyns

1983; Dunnell 1991).

(2) Measures of Cultural Change. Deagan (1988:9) notes that research on native acculturation has yet to be fully realized in historical archaeology. She argues that archaeologists have yet to develop "principles of interpretation that allow us to recognize 'acculturation' in the archaeological record, other than a vague idea that the presence of European items on a non-European site (and vice-versa) reflects 'acculturation.'" A significant constraint in analyzing materials solely from post-contact deposits is that it limits one's ability to measure change in relation to pre-contact contexts. A common approach is to calculate artifact ratios of native/European materials from post-contact deposits in Indian residences associated with missions, forts, and trade posts. The greater the presence and quantity of European introduced materials or innovations, it is assumed the greater the degree of overall native acculturation.

However, acculturation research by cultural anthropologists indicates that the adoption of specific technological traits (metal tools, glass objects) in and of themselves is not a good measure of overall transformations in native cultural practices (e.g., Linton 1940:485). Furthermore, artifact ratios of native and European materials alone may be poor measures of cultural change that results from the close interactions of different native ethnic groups in complex, pluralistic social environments. For example, native Alaskan workers stationed at Fort Ross may have presented their own interpretation of "Russian" culture to local native peoples, exposing them to a diverse range of native beliefs and lifeways from across the North Pacific, and possibly encouraging the maintenance and modification of local cultural practices, especially those elements held in common with other Pacific peoples.

An alternative approach is to shift the unit of analysis from artifacts *per se* to the broader spatial contexts of archaeological remains in a long-term diachronic framework. How people organized space, both within and outside struc-

tures and across the residential community, provides one means of analyzing the material manifestations of cultural practices in archaeological contexts. The underlying organizational structure of households, neighborhoods, and villages may be represented in a variety of archaeological spatial associations, including the spatial layout of house features; the patterned distribution of trash deposits inside and outside house features; the kinds of materials associated in different trash deposits; the way in which house locations were maintained, abandoned, and reused; and the spatial relationship of house features and public architecture in villages.

The study of culture contact in a multiethnic colonial environment requires a comparative approach for understanding how different ethnic groups constructed their cultural landscapes. We are currently developing a diachronic sequence of household and community spatial organizations for prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic native Californian sites in the greater Fort Ross region. This approach demands not only intensive regional survey to locate and date sites, but also broad-scale, areal excavations of selected archaeological deposits to reveal the organization of features, artifacts, and ecofacts across space. We are also undertaking back-ground research on how the other ethnic groups at Fort Ross -- the Russians, Siberians, and native Alaskans -- organized, constructed, and maintained space in their traditional homelands and at Fort Ross. Detailed archaeological investigations of the different ethnic neighborhoods at Fort Ross are ongoing, including the broad-scale excavations of SON-1897/H and SON-1898/H. These two sites, as discussed in the following papers, comprise the Native Alaskan Neighborhood where native Alaskan workers and their families lived and worked, and where resided the interethnic households of native Alaskan men and native Californian women.

(3) The Use of Ethnohistorical and Ethnographic Sources. North American archaeologists have long employed ethnohistorical and ethnographic data of known ethnic groups as "simple" an-

alogues for reconstructing the archaeological remains of the ancestors of those groups. As Wylie (1988) notes, this rather unsophisticated use of simple analogy tends to stress similarities between source and subject, and to be conspicuously ahistorical in its approach. Ethnohistorical and ethnographic observations of people over several centuries are often collapsed into a single account of the "traditional" lifeways of a group, which is then projected back into prehistory.

Rather than viewing ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources as simple analogues for reconstructing the past, they should be viewed as revealing of the time they were recorded, and as the end sequences of long-term developments in native societies (cf. Kirch and Green 1987). Historic observations of native peoples represent additional lines of evidence for evaluating cultural change, and not a mirror of the prehistoric past. Information derived from archaeology, ethnohistory, ethnography, and native texts may be employed in the study of cultural change by comparing and contrasting these independently constituted lines of evidence in a diachronic framework. This approach allows you to "tack" back and forth between the source and subject in a temporal framework that identifies both similarities and anomalies. Wylie (1988) argues that this more sophisticated analogical approach may identify similar social processes taking place across time, as well as significant differences that characterize the past and present.

We are employing this approach to identify concordances and anomalies through which different perspectives on European and native encounters can be evaluated critically over time. We are examining four different historical perspectives. The first perspective is derived from our intensive surface survey and ongoing excavations of archaeological remains in the Fort Ross State Historic Park, the results of which are providing us with micro- and macro-scale spatial information on the cultural landscapes of the Fort Ross region in prehistoric, protohistoric, and historical times. The second perspective is that of the literate, affluent, male Europeans who partici-

pated in colonization of Fort Ross. Accounts of administrators, sailors, and merchants provide important insights on the Europeans' view of the native workers. The third perspective is from ethnographers, such as Powers, Barrett, Gifford, Stewart, and others, who undertook investigations of coastal Pomo peoples' lifeways beginning in the 1870s. The fourth perspective is from the vantage of the local Kashaya Pomo. Robert Oswalt (1964) recorded word-for-word native accounts that contain historical stories of the Kashaya Pomos' encounters and experiences with Russian, Mexican, and Anglo-American settlers. In addition, collaboration with tribal scholars, such as Otis Parrish, is providing us with powerful insights into the past as constructed by the Kashaya Pomo.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, by rethinking several common practices of American archaeology, we hope to accomplish the following four goals at Fort Ross. One is to identify the source, magnitude, and rate of cultural change in prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic Native Californian sites. That is, how did the spatial organization of Native Californian sites in the Fort Ross region change over time, and can these changes in historic contexts be attributed to social relations with other ethnic groups? The second goal is to identify the cultural practices of different ethnic groups in the historic Fort Ross community. That is, can Russian, Siberian, Alaskan, and Californian households and neighborhoods be defined by the architectural elements, the spatial layout of internal and external space around house structures, and the association of artifacts and ecofacts in archaeological deposits? A third goal is to identify archaeological spatial contexts in the Fort Ross community that have little or no concordance with our idealized spatial models of different ethnic groups. These anomalies are of special interest because they may represent cultural practices of inter-ethnic households, cultural transformations of emerging pluralistic societies, and/or explicit Russian colonial policies that structured the organization

of the cultural landscape. The final goal is to compare and contrast these archaeological interpretations with other historical accounts generated from the perspectives of Russian administrators, later ethnographers, and Kashaya Pomo peoples.

The papers in this symposium addressed the above research goals, as well as cultural resource management issues and the integration of archaeological research and public interpretation at the Fort Ross State Historic Park. The first four papers by Ann Schiff, Lewis Somers, Thomas Wake, and Peter Mills concerned the excavation strategy, remote sensing survey, and preliminary analyses of archaeological materials from the Native Alaskan Neighborhood at Fort Ross. Glenn Farris then examined the research potential for studying the *sloboda* or Russian Village at Fort Ross. Antoinette Martinez followed with a discussion of Kashaya Pomo ethnohistory and archaeology, while Otis Parrish evaluated how Kashaya Pomo history relates to the ongoing archaeological investigation at Fort Ross. In the eighth paper, Breck Parkman addressed important issues concerning the management, protection, and preservation of the archaeological resources in the state park. In the final paper, Dan Murley described how our ongoing archaeological research is being integrated into the public interpretation program at the Fort Ross State Historic Park.

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