

## YESTERDAY AND TODAY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH INTO THE CUPEÑO OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

JOHN SIMMONS

*This paper briefly covers the history of anthropological research into the Cupeño of southern California and describes how previous research sets the stage for current attempts to understand the cultural prehistory of the group. Recent archaeological excavations conducted by San Diego State University at Lost Valley (Wiatava) provide us with an opportunity to reconstruct a significant portion of Cupeño culture-history and occupation of the mountain region. Since its inception, the Cupeño Archaeological Research Project (CARP) has recovered a wide variety of artifacts features and small scale architecture. Radiocarbon dates indicate the area was occupied as early as AD 1000 and continued well into the proto-historic period.*

The Cupeño are one of the smallest culture groups to have occupied the San Diego region during the late prehistoric period. Anthropologically, they have been are one of the most neglected. Impeding a thorough understanding of Cupeño culture is the apparent lack of anthropological research addressing the prehistory of the Cupeño, in addition to the variety of explanations that have been given to explain their relationship with other groups in the region. Four major groups have been shown to have occupied the San Diego region prior to the arrival of the Spanish in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Respectively, they are the Cupeño, Luiseño, Cahuilla and the Diegueño (Ipai-Tipai). Of the four groups, the Cahuilla, the Diegueño and the Luiseño have received the most attention from anthropologists and archaeologists alike.

The goal of this paper is to briefly review the history of anthropological research and debate surrounding the Cupeño. This is followed by a discussion of current efforts to understand the prehistory and culture of the Cupeño through archaeological excavations performed as part of the Cupeño Archaeological Research Project (CARP). CARP is conducted through San Diego State University and headed by Larry L. Leach of the Department of Anthropology. In addition to studying the prehistoric culture of the Cupeño, CARP also provides opportunities for graduate student research and training in archaeological field techniques at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Examples of this research include a study of cultural landscape by Fleming (1998), ethnobotanical research by Gauhn (in progress) and my own research concerning material culture patterning and ethnic identity (in progress).

### THE CUPEÑO AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

The Cupeño once occupied a narrow strip of land that began at the headwaters of the Agua Caliente Creek in the northeastern San Diego County and continued in a southwesterly direction to present day Warner Springs. Geographically, the northern coastal portion of the region was occupied by the Ipai while the linguistically affiliated Tipai occupied the southern coastal region and extended east into the western Arizona desert. Both the Ipai and the Tipai are considered the result of an east to west migration of Yuman speakers more commonly associated with the southwestern culture-region. The north central and northeastern portions of the region were home to various Takic speaking groups and consisted of the Cupeño, the Luiseño and the Cahuilla which form the basis of a major migration of Uto-aztec speaking groups into southern California.

Despite the common occurrence of certain cultural traits—i.e., patrilineality, ceramic technology and participation in the religious system known as ‘Chingichngish’—the Cupeño consider themselves a distinct group. One of the overall goals of CARP is to provide a foundation for understanding the prehistoric culture system of the Cupeño.

### PREVIOUS ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The Cupeño were first encountered during a Spanish expedition to Warner Hot Springs under the leadership of Fray Juan Mariner in 1795 (Hill 1927:1). The Cahuilla designation of Kupa to refer to the Kuupiaxchem, which means “people who slept here,” is said to refer to the village located at the hot springs

and surrounding territory has been widely accepted by ethnologists (Hill 1927:1). More recently, the acceptance of the anglicized "Cupeño" has been adopted into the anthropological literature, and thus far has been seen as acceptable among the present day descendants of the people of *Kupa*. A second major village site to the east of *Kupa*, referred to as *Wilakal* has also been designated as Cupeño in origin. Both *Kupa* and *Wilakal* likely served as winter base camps in contrast with summer camps located in the surrounding mountainous areas.

Test excavations carried out by APEC Inc. at Warner Hot Springs (*Kupa*) in conjunction with the development of the currently existing resort identified a rich material culture of the type expected to be associated with later period bedrock milling culture (APEC 1981). Additional test excavations at the nearby site of Puerta La Cruz by Chris White (1983) determined the area to have been occupied by cultures most closely associated with the San Luis Rey complex as defined by Meighan (1954). Although the precise cultural affiliation of the prehistoric occupants of Puerta La Cruz has been described as problematic, statistical and typological evidence suggests that it was occupied by one or more of the linguistically and culturally related Shoshone groups (White 1983:104).

Overlap in the archaeological literature and ethnographic description provide a link between the San Luis Rey Complex and the various Shoshone groups (Luiseño, Cupeño and Cahuilla). Furthermore, the SLR may be distinguished from the Cuyamaca Complex as defined by True (1970); the CC being commonly associated with various Yuman speaking groups to the south. The difficulty in attaching a precise cultural affiliation to particular sites in the region may stem from the compressing of various cultural groups into smaller areas during white settlement (True 1970:56). Such a phenomenon would have likely resulted in rapid diffusion of cultural traits and intermarriage between Yuman and Shoshone groups.

Ethnographic research related to the Cupeño began as early as 1918 with J.P. Harrington and continued through the work of A. L. Kroeber in 1925 and William Duncan Strong in 1929. William Bright and Jane Hill (1967) conducted linguistic studies and an oral history and language study was completed by Jane Hill and Rosinda Nolasquez (1973). While ethnographic descriptions are in general agreement, linguistic analysis has led to some debate regarding the precise relationship of the Cupeño to their linguistically related neighbors the Cahuilla and the Luiseño. Based on mythical, ceremonial and language

customs, Kroeber (1925) felt that the Cupeño represented a southern detachment from a previously undifferentiated Cahuilla-Luiseño entity, who must have existed in isolation for quite some time to allow the development of a unique dialect. Bright on the other hand proposes that the Cupeño are linguistically closer to the Cahuilla and that Cupeño and Cahuilla form a sub branch of a proto-Cupan language (1976:177). Bean suggested that the Cupeño represent one of several patri-sibs of a larger grouping. The existence of patri-sibs has been documented ethnographically by Bean for the Cahuilla (1960). If so, this would explain the apparent linguistic similarity between the Cupeño and the Cahuilla (Bright 1976:164). Finally, Bean and Smith (1978) provide a general explanation of the Cupeño in the *Handbook of North American Indians*.

#### CUPEÑO ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROGRAM

In 1997, a series of excavations were undertaken at site CA-SDI 2508 located in the northeastern portion of Lost Valley (*Wiatava*). Results revealed a variety of artifact types and faunal evidence gave clues to the duration of seasonal occupation (see Fleming 1998). Excavations and survey work continued in 1998 and 1999 at surrounding sites (CA-SDI 2506,2507, VS766C) and revealed a multitude of artifact types in addition to various features in the form of small-scale architecture, hearths, post molds and bedrock milling stations.

A charcoal sample (Beta-141955) found in association with architectural remains yielded a two sigma factor date of 960±100 BP (Cal AD 885 to 1270). This date is in general accordance with the time given for the establishment of Shoshonean speakers in southern California at about A.D. 1000 (Kroeber 1923:578-9). It suggests that we are looking at material associated with early settlement of southern California by Takic speakers, a phenomena that Kroeber has described as the "Shoshone wedge" (1925:578-580).

Additional dates, based on a combination of radiocarbon and obsidian-hydration techniques (e.g. Beta-141954) have aided us in determining the temporal nature of occupation of the region. Combined, these dates suggest that Lost Valley was repeatedly occupied beginning around AD 1000 and extending well into the 1500s. Surface scatters of lithic and ceramic material in conjunction with historic material further suggest that the Cupeño continued to use the valley beyond the period of contact.

## DISCUSSION

Preliminary assessment of the data leading up to and including the most recent excavations performed at Lost Valley suggest that we are dealing with a long period of continued occupation of Lost Valley. The spatial distribution and density of artifactual material further suggest the existence of a fairly large mountain village, in which a variety of activities took place. These activities include the processing of food items, tool manufacturing, and the carrying out of various types of ritual commonly linked to notions of the life cycle and various religious beliefs. Evidence of trade among surrounding groups is also suggested through the presence of non-local pottery and stone types.

As we move toward the end of our fourth season in the field, excavations are expected to continue for several more years based on the density of occupation and a rich archaeological assemblage. Further analysis of materials recovered from Lost Valley will shed greater light on the conditions of existence within the confines of Lost Valley and enhance our understanding of Cupeño culture-history.

## CONCLUSION

To date, anthropological studies on the Cupeño of southern California have been not only sparse but sporadic as well. What has been done is primarily ethnographic; virtually no archaeological research has been completed prior to current research efforts at Lost Valley. One of the primary goals of this research is to reconstruct the cultural history of the Cupeño who once occupied the region extending between *Kupa* (Warner Springs) and *Wiatava* (Lost Valley). A corollary of the current research is the hope to establish a more precise cultural demarcation between the various groups that together form the Shoshone occupation of the southern California culture region in addition to providing information on mountain adaptations in southern California. To do this we must rely primarily on the archaeological record since the effects of relocation and acculturation have had drastically altered the traditional system of indigenous culture.

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