

**POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY AND COLONIALISM IN MISSION VALLEY, SAN DIEGO:
SPANISH-KUMEYAAY INTERACTIONS AT COSOY AND THE PRESIDIO**

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The Spanish colonization of Alta California was initiated in Mission Valley, San Diego during the latter half of the seventeenth century. This paper examines how the Spanish colonial project was influenced by the relatively large Kumeyaay settlement of Cosoy. This paper provides an example of how the location of Cosoy likely influenced the construction of the Presidio and how the dialectic processes between these two areas are materialized in the archeological record. It is proposed that the location of contemporary Old Town is an unlikely candidate for prehistoric Cosoy due to a combination of geographical and sociopolitical factors. Alternatively, this paper proposes that Cosoy was either located at CA-SDI-4675 or was a larger, sprawling settlement with multiple loci, including SDI-4675. The paper is based on excavations of SDI-4675 that took place in 2007.

European colonialism had profound impacts on aboriginal settlements and settlement patterns in the Californias. Presidios and missions throughout California in particular became powerful symbols of the Spanish colonial project. Part of the Spanish plan of colonization throughout the New World included utilizing landscapes that were embedded in native societies as places of power. Thus, upon their arrival in San Diego, the Spanish crowned the Kumeyaay landscape with a stone cross and sanctified it through imported Catholic rituals. “This ritual of appropriation substituted Spanish authority and power for the Kumeyaay’s” (Luksic and Kendzierski 1999:4). The San Diego Presidio location was the first piece of land that the Spanish absorbed during their conquest of Alta California (Figure 1). Presidio Hill cast a long shadow over the settlement of Cosoy, a Kumeyaay village that has presented itself to archaeologists as a shifting and unidentifiable paradox. That it was the first settlement that the Spanish encountered and named is verifiable through the letters of the conquistadors (Ezell and Ezell 1987), but where it was and how much it influenced the social and political geography of the two groups is an unresolved matter.

In this bay the general with his men went ashore. After they had gone more than three leagues along it, a number of Indians appeared with bows and arrows, and although signs of peace were made to them, they did not venture to approach, excepting a very old woman who appeared to be more than one hundred and fifty years old and who approached weeping. The general cajoled her and gave her some beads and something to eat. Seeing this kind of treatment, the Indians came peaceably and took us to their rancherias where they were gathering their crops and where they had made their *paresos* of seeds like flax. They had pots in which they cooked their food, and the women were dressed in skins of animals. The general would not enter their rancherias; and, it being already late, he returned to the frigate, many Indians accompanying him to the beach [Farris 2006: 3].

According to Michel Foucault (1977), wherever one locates resistance one also locates power. Societies do not passively accept domination. The Spanish did not step off their ships, construct the Presidio, and quietly raise the Spanish flag over Mission Valley. The San Diego Presidio and the Kumeyaay village of Cosoy more likely grew and shifted through a dialectic process that was part of a network of relations reaching as far east as the Iberian Peninsula.



Figure 1. Mission Valley, San Diego, including the locations of the Presidio and SDI-467.

Ezell and Ezell (1987) determined that the Charles H. Brown, Sr. site was contemporaneous with the San Diego Presidio due to the presence of majolica ceramics. The excavations that the author carried out in the winter of 2007 through the spring of 2008 also exposed sherds of majolica ceramics as well as glass trade beads from the European continent. Ezell and Ezell also claimed that the Charles H. Brown, Sr. site was the prehistoric and protohistoric Kumeyaay village of Cosoy. As their main line of evidence, they argued that the Spanish would *not* have built the Presidio adjacent to a major indigenous village, but rather at a significant distance from it. Though power and domination were explicit strategies in the Spanish colonial project, they were careful not to make themselves too vulnerable to little-known groups, nor were they ignorant of the fact that some distance—social and geographical—was necessary to implement their politico-religious agenda.

Power and inequality are necessary and inevitable ingredients in any colonial project. From the moment the Spanish first set foot in Alta California, they wanted to articulate the message that their position was well understood—symbolically, militarily, politically, and economically. From erecting the Presidio atop a precipice in Mission Valley to dazzling the Kumeyaay with glass beads and European majolica ceramics, the Spanish sought to subjugate the Kumeyaay through any and every available means. More explicitly, they literally exposed their ability to dominate the Kumeyaay through the physical and symbolic use of arms and weaponry:

They are never without their bows and arrows, which are the only arms they use. In the beginning, when we had just recently arrived and they believed that our guns were simple sticks, they wanted to exaggerate the strength of their arrows, which were armed with very sharp flints. But Don Pedro Fages, *disposed on all to occasions*

to win praise and show himself superior to all of them, ordered that a piece of leather that might serve as a target be placed at a convenient distance. He had them discharge their arrows and upon their seeing the mild effect that they had on the leather, he then ordered the most dexterous soldiers to shoot at the same target. Upon hearing the noise and seeing the destruction so close at hand, the Indians changed their expressions and some of the more timid ones left, giving very clear signs of *their surprise and fear* [Costanso, quoted in Engstrand 1975:10-11].

The Spanish sought to dazzle and intimidate the Kumeyaay. Their political machinations were simultaneously violent, coercive, symbolic, and absorbent. The power of lavishness was as crucial to their agenda as the power of gunpowder and cannon balls.

This paper aims to understand Spanish/Kumeyaay relations at the Presidio and Cosoy sites and their echoes in material culture and geographic configurations. The archaeological record, including data recently excavated by the author at the Charles H. Brown, Sr. site in Mission Valley, along with historical and archaeological discourse analysis, is used to understand power relations and the contestation of authority in the protohistoric period. The shifting hypotheses (and claims) concerning the location of Cosoy are critiqued due to their foundations in assumptions of what a settlement should look like and how its spatial configurations should be understood. For example, why should we assume that Cosoy was limited to the Charles H. Brown, Sr. site (Ezell and Ezell 1987), to present-day Old Town (Mason 1978), or to the Grijalva Rancho? I propose the alternative hypotheses that either SDI-4675 was part of a larger site containing multiple loci or that Cosoy was a large Kumeyaay settlement that produced a geographical response to colonization by bifurcating into two areas of social differentiation—a more “amicable” subset of Cosoy that hovered around the Presidio, and an area that operated under the Presidio cannons’ shadow (Ezell and Ezell 1987).

METHODOLOGY

An archaeological data recovery program was implemented at the Charles H. Brown, Sr. site (SDI-4675/SDM-W-1137) in the spring of 2007 and winter of 2008. This program consisted of the excavation of five archaeological test units in the impacted portions of the project area. All aspects of this operational phase were recorded by field technicians through field forms and digital photography. In addition, a water-screening operation was implemented in order to recover and record as much cultural material as possible. The following section will discuss each aspect of the operation in greater detail.

A surface walkover indicated that portions of this site had been impacted by prior development, especially its upper level. This has significance to this study in that the stratigraphy of the units was nonrepresentative of different time periods or phases. The surface walkover also indicated that future impacts to this site would be unavoidable; thus a data recovery program would be needed in order to comply with the City of San Diego’s Mitigation and Monitoring guidelines (MMC). The MMC guidelines recommend a 15 percent controlled excavation sample supplemented by a 100 percent data recovery effort. Based on these guidelines, an archaeological data recovery program was conducted at the Charles H. Brown, Sr. site prior to construction activities.

The excavation phase of the recovery operation consisted of five test units. Test units 1, 2, and 5 were excavated within a local business’s parking lot, whereas test units 3 and 4 were excavated on Hotel Circle North road, approximately 20 m south from the site’s southern boundary. The dimensions of test unit 2 were 1 x 1 m, whereas the dimensions of the rest of the test units were 0.5 x 1 m. The units’ placement took into consideration the locations of known utilities; such placement also attempted to avoid disturbed areas wherever possible. The excavation phase of the data recovery program was designed to document stratigraphic changes within the sampled areas, and also helped identify artifact concentrations and features for additional data recovery.

A 1 x 1 m unit and four 0.5 x 1 m test units were excavated within the impact area. The main purpose behind this operation was to provide a controlled sample of the site's cultural resources. These data recovery units were arbitrarily and judgmentally placed to maximize information recovery and to evaluate variability. Each of the units was excavated in 10 cm arbitrary levels, and provenience within each level was recorded. Unit datums were established in the highest corner of each unit. Because the original surface contour in the area had been modified by disturbance, contour levels did not reflect natural conditions. Whenever natural or cultural stratigraphy was identified during excavation, strata were documented and separated within the 10 cm arbitrary levels. Units were excavated until sterile soil was reached below the level of the deposit or 10 cm below the proposed impact area.

All excavated soils were water-screened through 1/8-in. mesh hardware cloth and sun-dried at a water-screening area located off-site in another part of San Diego. All artifacts retained in the screens were collected. If features were encountered while excavating the units, artifacts and feature components were to be measured with x-y-z coordinates to provide an accurate account of contextual data. Feature drawings would have been sketched, along with the stratigraphic profiles of each unit.

Unit level sheets summarizing results and observations were completed following the excavation of each 10 cm level. This information included the type of cultural material recovered, soil conditions, and any noted disturbance. Cultural material was separated into artifact and ecofact categories, bagged and labeled by 10 cm level, and taken to the laboratory for cleaning, analysis, and temporary curation.

In addition, a photographic record was created in order to document the progress of the data recovery program. The pictures in the catalogue included general overviews of the area, unit profiles, views of site excavation, and unusual stratigraphic changes. The photographs were taken in digital format, and a photographic log was created to document orientation and subject matter.

After the materials from the five excavated units were sorted and catalogued, the data were processed in Microsoft Excel, and comparisons were made between the units vis-à-vis the stratified distribution that they represented. Figure 2 examines the data excavated from the units and demonstrates a predominant prehistoric component. Due to poor context and preservation, it is not possible to gain relevant information from the vertical context of the artifacts.

Colonial documents and previous archaeological interpretations were also consulted to examine discussions of Cosoy at the time of contact. Ezell and Ezell (1987) proved to be of special importance in this task. Their discussion of Spanish-Kumeyaay interactions and Spanish colonial processes, buttressed by echoes in colonial letters and journals, demonstrates quite eloquently that the Spaniards would not have constructed the Presidio on a hill overlooking Cosoy. Sampson and Braaden's (2006) discussion of prehistoric Kumeyaay lithic technologies found in Old Town excavations also demonstrated the likelihood that the Kumeyaay maintained certain aspects of their food processing and quotidian technologies during their absorption into Spanish colonial society.

THE VILLAGE OF COSOY

If you visit Old Town San Diego today, you can observe numerous statues and plaques that declare your presence at the grounds of the prehistoric Kumeyaay village of Cosoy (see Figure 3). These claims, however, are far from substantiated by the archaeological record. In fact, since at least the 1980s, San Diego archaeologists have been arguing that Old Town is most likely not the location of the prehistoric village of Cosoy (for example, see Ezell and Ezell 1987).

The Spanish Presidio would not have been constructed adjacent to a major Native American settlement of the kind described in the Spaniards' own journals. If Cosoy was located in present-day Old Town, it would mean that the Presidio was literally built on a hill overlooking it. Ezell and Ezell claim that the Spanish "in 1769 would *not* have located their first settlement in Upper California in or adjacent to an already established settlement. To do so would have been against their long-standing

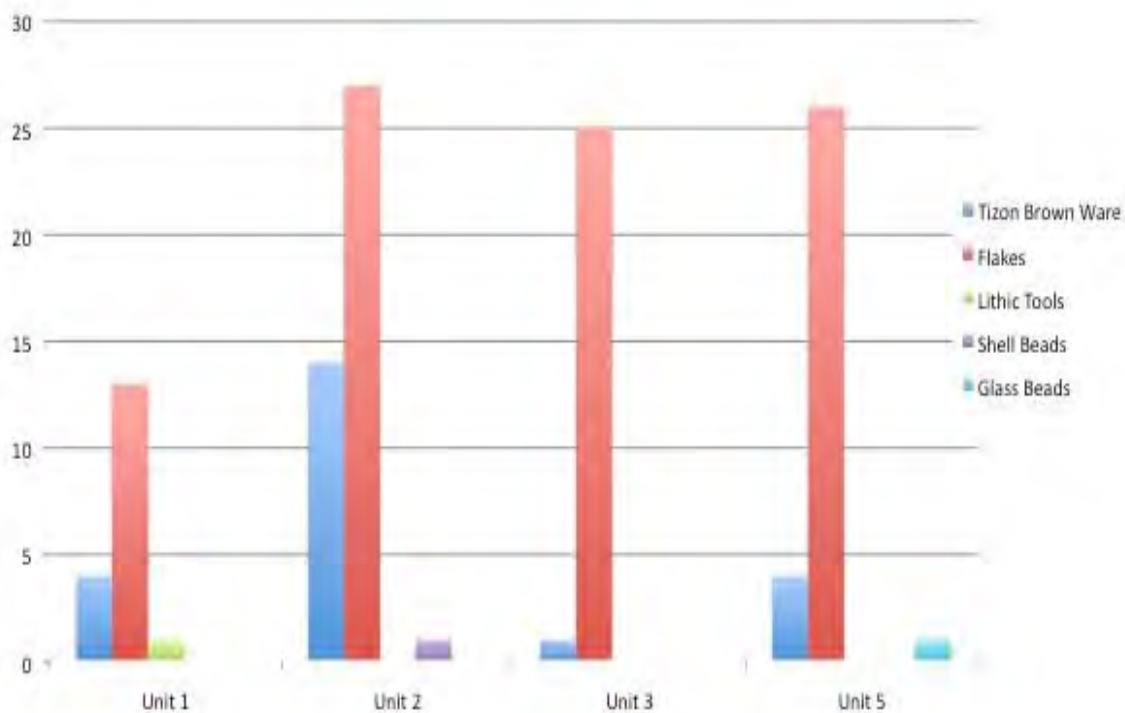


Figure 2. Artifacts by unit at SDI-4675.

policy of founding missions near, but not in or adjacent to, populations of the potential converts...” (Ezell and Ezell 1987:128). There is also strong evidence that the Presidio had numerous cannons garnishing its perimeter, one of them aimed directly at the location of SDI-4675 (Ezell and Ezell 1987). This evidence of explicit and symbolic intimidation is understandable, given the Kumeyaay uprising against the Spanish just four months after their colonial project was initiated (Shipek 1985).

This political-geographic separation and general ambivalence speaks to the suggestion that the Kumeyaay may have lived in two separate settlements—one being a less “amicable” village (possibly the prehistoric village of Cosoy) located at SDI-4675, and the other being a population brought into the vicinity of the Presidio. But an alternative hypothesis could be posed that the *entire area* could have been a large, sprawling village with various habitation loci and an epicenter somewhere in the vicinity of SDI-4675. The concept of circumscribed, self-contained villages may be a Western cultural construction that is inappropriate in the analysis of prehistoric Kumeyaay settlement patterns.

If the first or second hypothesis is correct—the first indicating separate populations in the protohistoric period, and the second suggesting that Cosoy was a sprawling village with multiple loci—then a general idea of the political geography of Spanish colonialism in Mission Valley can be explored. What we *can* see in the archaeological record is that SDI-4675 is an old site—at least 2,000 years old—and that the evidence from Old Town has yet to produce a date that comes anywhere close to those procured from SDI-4675. Extensive excavations for underground utilities in the Old Town area have also failed to find strong evidence for a prehistoric component.

It is also obvious that the Old Town area would not have been conducive to a large Kumeyaay settlement or dense habitation locus in prehistory due to its immediate exposure to the



Figure 3. Plaque at Old Town San Diego, reading "Here Lies the Indian Village of Cosoy".

floodplain. Contrarily, SDI-4675 is located on a relatively high, elevated area that would have overlooked the San Diego river and been impervious to even its highest swells. Seasonal camps on the flood plain would have been likely, and this may lend credence to the hypothesis that Cosoy was a sprawling village with multiple loci operating in continuous flux.

Furthermore, strong arguments have been made for the artifact assemblage at Old Town *not* reflecting a prehistoric assemblage. What have long been assumed as material evidence of a prehistoric occupation at Old Town are more likely protohistoric artifacts that the Kumeyaay continued to use while working as servants at Old Town. Michael Sampson and Jill Braaden have eloquently argued that prehistoric lithic technologies continued to be utilized at Old Town even during the protohistoric period (Sampson and Braaden 2006). The continued use of these prehistoric tools in a protohistoric context may have served the dual function of symbolically maintaining Kumeyaay culture and practically addressing everyday, material needs. I would argue that the continued use of these tools may have also served as a form of resistance in that it encapsulated a pre-Columbian way of life and food processing.

Evidence for a prehistoric occupation at SDI-4675 is much more substantial than that for a prehistoric occupation of the current Old Town area. The prehistoric lithic assemblages at Old Town, discussed above, were all excavated from contexts that were firmly embedded in an historical cultural matrix. At SDI-4675, however, radiocarbon dates of 1560 B.P. and 1690 B.P. provide a definite prehistoric context for the site, while majolica fragments also provide a protohistoric context for the site.

RESULTS

The analysis of materials from the five units excavated at SDI-4675 (see Figure 2) demonstrates that the majority of the artifacts recovered represent prehistoric lithic, ceramic, and shell-working technologies. The prehistory of these artifacts (and the site) is further buttressed by radiocarbon dates of 1560 B.P. and 1690 B.P. The ceramic assemblage represented in the units is characterized by a high quantity of Tizon Brown Ware sherds. There were, however, some majolica sherds that surfaced during trenching and the subsequent water screening of the trenched piles. Paul Ezell's excavation in the 1970s also produced several ceramic projectile points worked out of majolica.

Unit 5 produced one glass bead, indicative of trade or barter with the Spanish. More glass beads were found during the trenching phase of the project. One shell bead was excavated from Unit 2. The fact that these units were excavated on highly disturbed deposits (two of them having been affected by underground utilities projects in the past) also suggests that the vertical artifact distributions are blurred and that it is difficult to separate the prehistoric from the protohistoric matrices.

These results suggest that SDI-4675 continued to be occupied during the Spanish colonization of Alta California. Most obviously, this is evidenced by the presence of historical artifacts such as glass beads and majolica sherds. The presence of these artifacts, however, represents only one phase of site occupation—namely, the protohistoric phase. The radiocarbon dates, the thick shell lenses, and the past archaeological excavations demonstrate that this site was occupied continuously from *at least* the Late Prehistoric period until the colonial period.

CONCLUSION

Spanish-Kumeyaay interactions in Mission Valley were initiated during the Spanish colonization of Alta California. The prehistoric Kumeyaay village of Cosoy was the first village to be contacted during the colonial period in Alta California. A triangulation of evidence from various sources—historical colonial documents, previous archaeological interpretations, and the artifact analysis presented here—suggests that contemporary Old Town would have been an unlikely location for a large Kumeyaay settlement. Old Town would have been exposed to the San Diego flood plain as well as inconsistent with the Spanish colonial project, which consistently constructed presidios and missions in close proximity to, but not directly adjacent to, Native American settlements. Artifact analysis at SDI-4675 demonstrates a Late Prehistoric occupation as well as a protohistoric occupation contemporaneous with Spanish colonization. The location of SDI-4675 as a possible site for Cosoy or as a locus within a larger settlement is consistent with colonial documents and the layout of the Presidio as described by Paul and Greta Ezell (Ezell and Ezell 1987). More attention needs to be given to the geography of colonialism and the effect of colonial structures and institutions on native villages and vice versa. This paper provides an example of how the location of Cosoy likely influenced the construction of the Presidio and how the dialectic processes between these two areas are materialized in the archeological record.

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