

**THE SCIENCE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE RESPONSE
FROM WITHIN NATIVE CALIFORNIA:
THE ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOHISTORY OF ME?TINI VILLAGE
IN THE FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK**

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ABSTRACT

The archaeological investigation of the Me?tini Village site (CA-SON-175) in the Fort Ross State Historic Park in northern California is a collaborative effort involving the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the Kashaya Pomo tribe, and U.C. Berkeley. This paper considers how Kashaya Pomo elders resolved the dilemma of jointly participating in an archaeological project that involves the study of a sacred site. A ritual blueprint was developed that required all participants in the project to respect Kashaya cultural views, taboos, and sacred practices while working at the Me?tini Village site. An important consideration in the decision to participate in this project is the sacred responsibility of elders to pass on knowledge of Kashaya culture and history to their children. It was recognized that archaeological work at Me?tini, in combination with tribal oral traditions, may provide important information about the past that may be handed down to Kashaya children.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1998, a collaborative research program involving the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the Kashaya Pomo tribe, and U.C. Berkeley was initiated at the Me?tini Village site (CA-SON-175) in the Fort Ross State Historic Park in Sonoma County, California. The Me?tini Archaeological Project is investigating the chronology, spatial pattern, and lifeways of this sacred Kashaya Pomo site and how it relates to the history of the Russian colony of Fort Ross (1812-1841). The purpose of the paper is to consider the participation of the Kashaya Pomo in the project, and how they resolved some very important issues concerning the sacred nature of the site and the implementation of archaeological fieldwork. The following account discusses how the fieldwork was initiated within the ritual context of the Me?tini site by a field school class taught by Kashaya elders and tribal scholars, as well as State Park and U.C. Berkeley archaeologists. The paper is written from the perspective of the Kashaya Pomo by Otis Parrish, the senior author. As he outlines below, in order to understand the Kashaya Pomo negotiation of sacredness and the potential impact of fieldwork, it is critical to understand that ritualizing important issues is an

ancient Kashaya method of problem solving within its human and spiritual landscape.

The Me?tini Project is an opportunity to piece together and finalize the structure representing the guide for acting out ceremonials which in human activities are coordinated in such a way that order is formulated and laid out over the ceremonial landscape. We were embarking on a most important journey, where decisions we make about Kashaya relations with archaeology would be set for the next century.

The final component of the blueprint for structuring the archaeological fieldwork was integrating the ritual and ceremonial landscape with contemporary archaeological method and theory beginning with the 1998 field season at the Me?tini Village site.

The Kashaya felt that the right to follow the sacred laws of the rituals and accompanying ceremonials would have to be of the utmost importance if scientific archaeological mitigation was to occur at any sacred site. The Kashaya felt also that the ritual exercise, as is in religious beliefs along with the social values that integrate an academic educational experience, could be a

valuable learning experience for students of anthropology as well as instructors.

The Kashaya deliberated on the question of participation and that it should take place only if we could exercise our religious laws and beliefs regarding sacred places. It was also decided that students would have to act out those traditional behaviors we apply to ourselves during sacred situations in undertaking fieldwork at the Me?tini site. The work at the site had to be an educational and academic experience for the undergraduates and graduate students interested in California Indian cultures. It turned out to be a significant cross-cultural experience for every individual involved.

That was the last piece of the structure to be put in place and will be the underpinning for involving cross-cultural communications as an educational tool. It was also an academic exercise for university students of anthropology for creating theoretical approaches from a cross-cultural perspective that may be at such time applied within the context of the post-processual universe. Any archaeological work to be initiated within the aboriginal territory of the Kashaya, especially within the State Parks, must include this ritual model, with its ceremonial parts involving three main overarching laws and taboos:

First, all problems which have important implications related to the well being of the people must be religiously ritualized and ceremonially acted out. It is through those deliberations that problem solving must occur, with resolutions at the completion of the ritual.

Second, ritual and ceremonial leaders integrated into the process must know the structural framework of rituals and ceremonials as well as their meanings. It is incumbent upon those leaders to understand the meanings of those structures and to interpret them in resolving the problem. Elders who are known to be wise at interpreting rituals and their meanings, with knowledge of the taboos related to those human endeavors acted upon by individuals, families or groups, must always be consulted for their guidance.

Third, taboos related to the archaeological

endeavor begin with admonitions that any disturbance of a sacred site will have negative reciprocal results for the perpetrator(s) whose activity resulted in the disturbance of the sacred.

At this point the senior author will define from the Kashaya view how one comes to defining what sacred is. Sacred is defined as anything that requires a ritual or ceremonial action, or is considered to have some power related to spirituality.

A Kashaya sacred site is considered as such where power forces from the center of the earth are believed to be focused at specific spots across the geographical landscape. They are known also as power places.

Another type of a site considered to sacred is a village, mainly because of the ritual and ceremonial effort which goes into preparing for the creation of any main village site. Most main villages will also have a sacred ritual structure situated within the parameters of the village site.

Prior to the 1998 field season at the Me?tini Village site, the Kashaya always maintained that no scientific archaeological investigation would occur at any site considered to be sacred. Yet, by the beginning of the 1998 field season at the Fort Ross State Park, the work at the Me?tini site began to take on new meaning. The blueprint for the religious ritual and ceremonials for the entire project was not quite completed. That completion would occur with the onset of the Me?tini Project.

During the deliberation, elders felt that to only carry out the efforts of the ritual blueprint was important but not enough to make this project a more meaningful effort; it was decided to build the collaboration around another important aspect of the project and that was to get the students involved in the ritual process as a means of an academic exercise. This was a way to have students go through the ritual exercises never before open to the outside world, to give them actual experience as budding anthropologists to have them understand some of the Kashaya meanings that come into play. The ritual blueprint employed at Me?tini was the outgrowth of prior Kashaya experiences with archaeologists.

During the mid-1990s we were confronted with a challenge inadvertently through another mitigation project at the Salt Point State Park directed by Kathy Dowdell, archaeologist for Caltrans. It was during this project that we resolved how we as a group would deal with the archaeology in our tribal territory.

Kathy brought to us her expertise in the technical aspects of archaeology and the cultural system she worked in. This in turn gave us a view of how we could proceed in resolving some issues that we had to work out within our culture.

During the initial stages of the Caltrans project, our meetings with her helped to formulate our collaborative efforts and to give those Kashaya elders and youth, and anthropology and archaeology students, an experience in acting out the strict laws that apply to the sacred, and to give the Kashaya youth and students the opportunity to experience our Native cultural views.

Within the Kashaya Community, discussions about how we would proceed with applying our sacred laws to archaeology were resolved.

Kathy Dowdell's Caltrans Project at Ca-Son-1661 provided the avenue for us to work out related issues and to complete our efforts to articulate a definition of what is sacred to us.

By the beginning of the 1998 field season at the Me?tini Village site we still continued to look deep into our ceremonial structure for answers to the new issues that arose with the Me?tini Project.

The two important issues were:

- (1) How do we justify the destruction of our sacred site?
- (2) How can we best manage the work to be done relative to our strict taboos and religious beliefs?

Of the first question we decided to put the complete project within the context of Kashaya rituals and ceremonials.

We discussed also those things set out for us in the laws and taboos of our ritual landscape.

Elders came together to interpret those laws and taboos, to formulate a strategy for interpreting what constituted the sacred and for determining what understandable form it would take in the present reality.

What was interpreted from the sacred rituals and ceremonials were religiously important aspects of our culture.

We recognized the sacredness of the ceremonial structure and the sacredness within the confines of the village site. The Me?tini Village site contains a large depression that we believe is the remains of a sacred roundhouse.

The other was the sacredness of knowledge, as it relates to tribal history.

And the third was our sacred responsibility to our most sacred of blessed beings - our children.

For the sacredness of the ceremonial structure and the village site we had the ritual and ceremonial laws that took care of those aspects.

It was decided that no work or destruction of the soil within or near the ceremonial structure would occur.

The structure could be mapped. But nothing else.

There would be no eating within ten feet of the ceremonial structure.

Women who were on their menstrual periods would not be allowed to work within the confines of the village parameter. And husbands of those wives would also not be allowed to work on site. Back at camp, women on their menstrual periods would not be allowed to cook or do any kitchen chores and their husbands would have to serve their wives breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The justification for working at the Me?tini Village was to understand that in Kashaya beliefs, ceremonies that apply to the creation of a village site can be invoked by ritual practices that apply the laws of behavior and taboos to that specific ceremonial context.

In the deliberations a priority had to be set between sacredness of the ceremonial structure and village site; the sacredness of knowledge and responsibility, and the sacredness we hold for our children. The archaeological work would give us knowledge of our ancestors (i.e., history).

Once we have the knowledge of the information from archaeological interpretation we could then take that knowledge and invoke our awesome responsibility to pass that information and knowledge on to the most sacred of our culture, our children.

At the completion of our deliberations there were three primary factors that guided us in deciding whether we would collaborate with archaeologists in undertaking the Me?tini Project and Fort Ross State Historic Park.

First there was sacredness in the ceremonial structure and the grounds of the village proper.

Applying strict ritual and ceremonial law to individuals who worked on the site would place them into ceremonial contexts that would be related to the original village ceremonies.

And by taking ritual and ceremonial care of the sacred structure and village site, we had to decide which was the most important direction we could take. That is, we had to decide between the sacredness of the village site with the underground roundhouse, the sacredness of the knowledge of our pre- and protohistoric past, the sacred laws of oral histories, and the sacred responsibility to pass on that knowledge to our most sacred of sacreds, our children.

The final decision was made known to us through the use of ceremonies. It was within the context of the last ceremonial deliberation where it was decided we weighed the sacred of the village with its underground roundhouse, knowledge of our past from a different view point (archaeological investigation), and the responsibility of passing on knowledge, thereby giving our children the opportunity to relate to the past from a different view point.

It was decided that the latter three factors overrode the sacredness of the village complex

basically because we have ceremonials that the old people left for us to address these types or issues.

There is also one important guiding principle in the ritual system we held to throughout our ceremonial deliberations and that was a ceremonial edict which is that:

"No one, no other culture (no federal or state agency), will interpret for the Kashaya, how we should define our sacred."

It is built on the sacred respect for others that, as a culture, we should never attempt to define for others how they should define their sacred or "sacredness."

NOTES

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