

ENCOUNTER AT *TAMÁL-HÚYE*: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

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This paper will present a research design for examining cross-cultural interactions and processes of change and continuity in sixteenth-century northern California. Using a shipwreck as a unique case where contact is mediated through introduced material culture without the presence of colonizing populations, research will examine whether material culture introduced during a short-term encounter was the primary conduit of cultural change, or if long-term social relations with a colonizing presence was necessary for change to occur. Synthesizing archaeological data from both on land and under water, this study will examine a 1595 cross-cultural encounter between Spanish seafarers from the shipwrecked Manila galleon San Agustín and Coast Miwok hunter-gatherers in Tamál-Húye (the Coast Miwok name for the region), now called Drakes Bay and part of Point Reyes National Seashore.

INTRODUCTION

Examining how the Coast Miwok incorporated European and Asian material culture into their daily lives is especially significant in the case of the *San Agustín* shipwreck, given that it occurred outside the normal context in which indigenous people obtained European goods—that is, trade with explorers and through long-term colonial entanglements (Wilson and Rogers 1993). Beyond the initial exchanges that took place with the Coast Miwok, the Spanish were not present to structure use of European materials. This research will therefore evaluate the degree to which cultural change can be attributed to foreign material culture alone, versus that incorporated in long-term colonial contexts. In this regard, while the project fits comfortably within a larger body of literature on culture-contact archaeology, it presents an opportunity to approach issues of cultural change and continuity and how they are affected by material culture from a slightly different perspective. In this case, the focus is on how the Coast Miwok actively selected materials for salvage from a diverse range of goods, rather than selecting objects whose availability was mediated by early traders and colonists.

The project has two phases: first, a “terrestrial” phase will focus on museum collections and reanalysis of original field notes, data, and reports from excavations conducted in the 1940s-1970s by the University of California, San Francisco State University, Santa Rosa Junior College, and other institutions. I will examine artifacts from the *San Agustín* recovered from wholly native contexts of contemporary Coast Miwok sites around Point Reyes to understand how indigenous Coast Miwok incorporated material culture from the wreck into their daily practices. The study will test whether reuse and re-contextualization of these objects by indigenous communities resulted in change to Coast Miwok cultural practice, both locally in negotiating

social relations and identities; and regionally, if objects were incorporated into larger trade networks. Following Lightfoot’s work at Fort Ross (2003; Lightfoot et al. 1993, 1998), the terrestrial phase of research will be holistic, using multiple lines of evidence from archaeology, ethnography, ethnohistory, and oral traditions, and multi-scalar, nesting multiple levels of analysis from the artifact to a pan-regional perspective. Second, in a “maritime” phase, a multi-agency and interdisciplinary team from the National Park Service (NPS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the University of California, Berkeley will investigate magnetic anomalies from 1997-1998 geophysical surveys conducted by the NPS in Drakes Bay to locate and assess the *San Agustín* wreck site. Evaluating the wreck will contextualize the European perspective of the encounter and identify a range of possible materials available to the Coast Miwok for salvage and reuse. Planning for the maritime phase is under way; however, this paper will focus on the project’s terrestrial phase.

BACKGROUND

The Spanish Manila galleon *San Agustín*, carrying a diverse cargo of Chinese trade goods including porcelains, silk, and other luxury items, wrecked in *Tamál-Húye* (which was not actually called Drakes Bay by Europeans until the seventeenth century) in November of 1595 while en route from the Philippines to Mexico. The vessel anchored in the bay to reprovision and to assemble a small launch for coastal exploration, but was driven ashore during a storm after its arrival. For more than a month, both before and after the wreck, and while completing the launch in which they would eventually return to Mexico, the Spanish crew interacted with the indigenous Coast Miwok population. The surviving Spaniards successfully continued their voyage to Mexico, but abandoned the *San Agustín* and its cargo.

From the Coast Miwok perspective, this was likely just the beginning of their interaction with the shipwreck itself, as small-scale collecting, opportunistic salvage, or possibly systematic exploitation likely continued for some time. In fact, Coast Miwok salvage of the wreck began before the Spanish had even departed—Cermeño, the *San Agustín's* captain, noted in his log a confrontation between Coast Miwok inhabitants who had collected ship's timbers, and the Spaniards, who needed the timbers to modify their launch for the return to Mexico (Cermeño 1924 [1596]:23). This month-long interaction between Spanish sailors and Coast Miwok represents one of the earliest documented contacts between Europeans and indigenous peoples on the northern California coast, and the last recorded contact for more than 150 years until the Spanish colonized the region in the mid-eighteenth century.

Despite a rich archaeological and documentary record about the encounter, previous archaeological work on these sites at Point Reyes reflects earlier research interests focused on culture history and on the discovery of material evidence of historical events. To date there have been few attempts to use material from the excavations to focus on Coast Miwok cultural practices or to engage with the data from a modern, culture-contact perspective.

University of California archaeologists excavated a total of seven village and midden sites around Drakes Bay from 1940 to 1951 (Figures 1 and 2) (Heizer 1942; Meighan 1950; Meighan and Heizer 1952), but were interested primarily in locating sixteenth-century material culture from the *San Agustín* to provide a chronometric marker for refining the area's culture history (Heizer 1942:9). Although the researchers found that nearly 20 percent of artifacts recovered from sites were European and Asian in origin (Meighan 1950:29), they viewed Coast Miwok reuse of the porcelain ceramics in a strictly utilitarian way. Heizer (1942:17) noted, "[t]hese blue decorated porcelain bowls and plates seem to have been regarded by the Drake's Bay Indians as utilitarian containers and were discarded with other damaged tools, emptied clamshells, picked bird bones, etc., when they became broken." Researchers from San Francisco State and later Santa Rosa Junior College excavated at Point Reyes from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, and their research uncovered additional sites with material from the *San Agustín*, bringing the total to more than 15. Unlike the Berkeley archaeologists, their primary research interest focused on finding evidence of Sir Francis Drake's possible 1579 landfall (Von der Porten 1963:13).

In contrast to these historical and culture-historical approaches, Lightfoot and Simmons (1998) examined protohistoric cultural encounters in California from an anthropological perspective, and offer a more nuanced interpretation of Coast Miwok reuse of material from the *San Agustín*. They suggest that because of the context that

structured the Coast Miwok's first encounter with Europeans, which likely occurred during the Kuksu ceremony, the native people may have collected porcelain sherds and iron spikes because they were valued as symbols of previous encounters and as objects that signified unknown worlds (Lightfoot and Simmons 1998:160). This is one of the hypotheses that this project will examine.

METHODS

I will address my primary research question – whether introduced material culture can be the primary agent of cultural change alone, or if long-term social relations with a colonizing presence is necessary – by drawing on theories of culture contact in which material culture has an active role in creating new cultural practices; developing hypotheses, or models, for how Coast Miwok hunter-gatherers incorporated introduced material culture from *San Agustín* into their daily practices; and comparing these models to expected archaeological outcomes. The two models I propose can be broadly delineated as a *utilitarian, or pragmatic*, model and a *non-utilitarian, or symbolic*, model. I envision these models as two ends of a spectrum, and that an object's actual use and meaning may fall anywhere along this continuum, or indeed intersect it at multiple points.

The utilitarian, or pragmatic, model suggests that introduced artifacts were used primarily for functional purposes (Heizer 1942; Meighan 1950; Meighan and Heizer 1952; Von der Porten 1963, 1972). Plates and bowls were used as containers for food and other things, and were discarded as they broke. Iron spikes were not themselves used, but were incidentally deposited as timbers were used for fuel or in shelter construction. If a primarily pragmatic use of introduced materials (especially ceramics) were the case, then presumably only whole vessels would have been salvaged for reuse, resulting in multiple fragments of each ceramic vessel being present at each site. Broken ceramics and iron spikes would have been discarded in middens with other refuse. At the same time, the introduced material culture may have been used as raw materials for traditional indigenous artifact classes, such as scrapers, beads, and pendants. In this case, the Coast Miwok may have collected broken ceramics from the ship or beach, and a significant percentage of individual (or non-mendable) sherds may be present, but they should be found in various states of production and in the same contexts as lithic material or shell. Spatially, these worked objects should be primarily incorporated into workshop areas. Also, if transformed into culturally-appropriate trade items, porcelain artifacts may also have been traded within established exchange networks to surrounding areas, and should be found in regional and pan-regional contexts. In short, objects would have been incorporated into existing cultural practice, and would not have resulted in a behavioral shift.



Figure 1. Archaeologists from University of California, Berkeley excavating CA-MRN-307 on the bluff above Estero de Limantour (now part of Point Reyes National Seashore) in 1950. Photo courtesy of the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California (Ms079).



Figure 2. Large iron fasteners, possibly from the Manila galleon San Agustín, located during University of California, Berkeley excavations at Point Reyes. Photo courtesy of the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California (Ms079).

The non-utilitarian, or symbolic model, suggests that artifacts were primarily used as indexes to other worlds or to deceased ancestors (Gell 1998:26; Lightfoot and Simmons 1998). Introduced objects would have inherent meaning by themselves, which might lead Coast Miwok individuals to collect broken ceramics from the shipwreck or the beach. This might be reflected in ceramic sherds from many different vessels at each site (indicating there was no preference for intact versus broken vessels), or possibly sherds from the same vessels found at different sites in *Tamál-Húye*. There may also be evidence for sharing or exchange of individual, unmodified ceramic fragments, locally, regionally, or pan-regionally. In addition, artifacts would be spatially associated primarily in non-utilitarian or ceremonial contexts, and possibly associated with symbolic objects, such as charmstones. In this case, foreign objects would have been incorporated into practice in ways consistent with Coast Miwok worldviews, but would have represented new ways of practice and taken on fundamentally new kinds of meaning.

PLAN OF WORK

My project will focus on collections curated at the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at U.C. Berkeley and at Point Reyes National Seashore. Sampling and analysis will be conducted at multiple scales, beginning with each of the site assemblages in the *Tamál-Húye* area with material from the *San Agustín*; next narrowing focus to look at the introduced material culture from each site in detail; and finally moving outward to examine regional and pan-regional sites. In this way, each level of data collection will contribute to the project's research questions in a hierarchical way by focusing on individual artifacts, site assemblages, local sites, regional sites, and finally pan-regional sites. Proposed research will be conducted in four consecutive stages.

The first stage of research will focus on Coast Miwok sites in the primary study area that yielded material from the *San Agustín* and will examine artifact assemblages and spatial contexts for each of the sites. Original excavation records and field notes will be consulted to reconstruct previous excavations. Analysis will focus on evaluation of the contexts and spatial associations of both introduced and indigenous materials to identify artifacts associated with particular activities and determine how they were used in daily practice. Spatial patterning should reveal if introduced artifacts were associated with specific activities or with classes of indigenous artifacts that reflect particular practices.

In the second stage, I will narrow the focus of analysis to the introduced material culture from each of the sites, primarily examining sixteenth-century ceramics to verify vessel form, minimum number of vessel (MNV), and estimated vessel equivalents (EVE). This will result in an

estimate of the total number of ceramic vessels from the *San Agustín*'s cargo present at each site, which can be used for two purposes. First, MNVs and EVEs will be used to estimate the percentage of cargo represented by the total assemblage. From vessel forms and knowledge of Manila galleon lading practices, hypotheses can be developed for the possible location of these vessels within the ship to address questions of Coast Miwok salvage of *San Agustín*. Second, I will use ceramic counts to compare percentages of vessel forms to determine if particular forms were selected more frequently than others. Ideally, these results will be compared to the percentages of available vessel forms, which may be reconstructed from the *San Agustín*'s bill of lading or from an evaluation of the wreck site. A preference for hollowware versus flatware vessels, like that seen on many plantation sites in the American south, for example, may indicate utilitarian incorporation of porcelain ceramics into existing foodways. In addition to vessel form, I will critically examine and compare design motifs to identify frequency patterns. Designs will be compared to ethnographic literature and oral traditions to determine if salvage and selection of particular objects was dictated by cultural values, which might indicate symbolic meaning (Wilkie 2000; Wilkie and Farnsworth 1999, 2005). After collecting basic information and descriptive statistics about the assemblage, I will use the detailed analyses to address the question of Coast Miwok reuse of the artifacts. I will carefully examine the ceramic assemblage for evidence of modification and functional reuse, including use as raw materials for traditional artifact types such as scrapers, beads, and pendants.

Because isolated sixteenth-century porcelain finds have been reported from at least two sites outside Point Reyes, stages 3 and 4 of my study will broaden the research focus to examine collections from other Coast Miwok sites within their traditional territory, and from sites outside the traditional Coast Miwok territory but within their area of established trade networks with other California Indian groups. The goal is to determine if local Coast Miwok groups from *Tamál-Húye* exchanged the introduced material culture with other Coast Miwok groups or pan-regional California Indian groups.

CONCLUSIONS

This project will contribute to our understanding of how native populations adopted introduced material culture in situations of cross-cultural engagement, and should be of interest to a wide range of both prehistoric and historical archaeologists. The project will contribute a unique perspective to our understanding of early inter-cultural encounters between indigenous populations and Europeans. By examining the material consequences of coastal hunter-gatherer contact with European voyagers, the project will address the synergistic effects of early cross-

cultural encounters, and will add to a small but growing body of maritime archaeology literature contributing to research concerns fundamental to anthropological archaeology.

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