

# Ancestors, ghosts, and enemies in prehistoric Baja California

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## **Abstract**

Recent investigators have argued that the worship or veneration of lineage ancestors is a key to understanding the prehistoric archaeology of Baja California, and in particular the central peninsula's Great Mural rock art. However, a review of the ethnohistoric, ethnographic and archaeological evidence favors a different interpretation: that prehistoric Baja Californians regarded the dead primarily as a source of danger to the living, to be avoided and forgotten rather than venerated; and that the human figures depicted in the Great Murals are more likely to have represented the painters' enemies than their ancestors.

Baja California is famed for the larger-than-life painted human and animal images that tower above many of the central peninsula's rock shelters. The Great Mural rock art has evoked the curiosity of Western visitors for more than two centuries, and it has inevitably posed the question: For what purposes were the paintings made?

Two of the leading recent investigators of Great Mural archaeology, Justin R. Hyland and María de la Luz Gutiérrez Martínez, have proposed that the prehistoric archaeological record of Baja California was strongly shaped by a "peninsular ceremonial complex" (Gutiérrez 2000, 2002; Gutiérrez and Hyland 2002; Hyland 1997). This complex encompassed traits that were widespread within the peninsula and in some cases were endemic to it, including a great importance attached to funeral and mourning rites, key roles played by shamans, and the use of such ceremonial paraphernalia as human-hair capes, wooden *tablas*, pipes, and batons. According to Hyland and Gutiérrez, evidence from archaeology, early ethnohistoric accounts, and ethnographies of the surviving Yumans of northern Baja California suggests that a central role within the complex was played by the worship or veneration of patrilineage ancestors. It may be useful to reconsider whether on balance the evidence tends to support or to contradict this interpretation.

## **Cultural differences in attitudes toward the dead**

Attitudes toward deceased ancestors vary distinctly among different cultures. Within modern Western culture, the predominant attitude can be characterized as veneration. The physical appearances of distinguished antecedents are commemorated in statues, in portraits, and on postage stamps. Their names are preserved in the personal names of their descendants or admirers and in the designations given to cities, streets, geographical features, public institutions, businesses, and awards. It is expected that their physical remains in cemeteries deposited will be protected from disturbance and available to be respectfully visited. The Association of Professional Genealogists, dedicated to tracing the links between ancestors and their living

descendants, boasts more than 1,400 members, and the number of amateur genealogists is probably much greater. More on the margins of the cultural mainstream, spiritualist mediums promise to their clients a direct communication with the deceased, either on a retail basis in séances or wholesale through nationwide television programs. Ancestor veneration or worship is attested in even more pronounced forms in many of the traditional cultures in East Asia, Oceania, and some parts of Africa.

Although the veneration of ancestors has been widespread, it would be a mistake to think of it as a cultural universal. In particular, within many parts of aboriginal North America, the dead were regarded primarily as a source of danger to the living. A similar attitude has also been expressed by folk elements within Western culture. According to this Western folk tradition, the spirits of the dead, or ghosts, constitute a serious threat if they persist in haunting the persons or places of the living. Among many Westerners, strong feelings of fear may be evoked by nighttime visits to cemeteries or by contact with human cadavers or skeletons.

In aboriginal Baja California, as Hyland and Gutiérrez have noted, substantial cultural importance was attached to death and to the dead. This is attested by ethnohistoric and ethnographic evidence relating to funerals and mourning ceremonies and by archaeological evidence for funerary customs. It remains to be considered whether the attitude that was being expressed in these practices was one of veneration for the ancestors, recent and remote, or whether it was anxiety over the potential danger that lingering ghosts might pose.

### **Ethnohistoric and ethnographic evidence**

Reconstructing the idea systems that prevailed among the native groups of Baja California prior to European contact is far from being a simple or straightforward matter. However, there are several types of evidence that can be brought to bear on the question, including the early ethnohistoric accounts by explorers, missionaries and others, and the more detailed ethnographic studies compiled during the early twentieth century.

The ethnohistoric record for much of Baja California is an unusually rich one, thanks in particular to the detailed accounts that were produced by many of the Jesuit missionaries working on the peninsula during the eighteenth century. This record is at its best when it comes to topics such as subsistence, material culture and languages. Unfortunately it is much weaker in the realms of social organization and ideology (Laylander 2000:61-67). Contradictions, polemical exaggerations, and evident misunderstandings were not infrequent. Nonetheless, the accounts have preserved a considerable amount of valuable information.

For the Yuman-speaking groups in the northern part of the peninsula, twentieth-century ethnographic descriptions give much more detailed, comprehensive and objective information than the earlier ethnohistoric accounts (Figure 1). The extent to which Yuman beliefs and practices can legitimately be projected to areas farther south is problematical. However, there are many known cultural continuities between the regions, some of which have been discussed by Gutiérrez and Hyland. The relationship of the Yuman languages to the Cochimí speech of the central peninsula is a fairly close one, which also suggests that it is not unreasonable to suppose that many other elements of a cultural tradition shared with the Yumans were present at least as far south as the Central Desert.

The specific issue addressed here is the attitude toward the dead indicated by the ethnohistoric and ethnographic records. Testimony relevant to this issue was both expressed directly and implied by various practices, including ones associated with funerals, mourning



Figure 1. Ethnolinguistic map of the Baja California peninsula.

ceremonies, disposal of personal property, use of names and genealogies, human hair capes, anthropomorphic images, impersonation of the dead in ceremonies and ideas about the afterworld. Also noteworthy are the differences between the behavior that was considered appropriate for relatives of the deceased and the behavior expected of non-relatives and enemies.

### *Explicit attitudes*

Direct ethnographic testimony about ghosts is recorded from all of the Yuman groups in Baja California, including the Kiliwa, Paipai, Kumeyaay, Cocopa, and Quechan. In these accounts, the spirits of the dead were consistently described as beings who had to be feared as a potential source of danger, not as welcome patrons of the living (Davis 1919:31; Forde 1931:180, 185, 191-193, 255; Gifford 1931:58, 1933:294, 294, 306-307, 311, 313; Gifford and Lowie 1928:349; Hohenthal 2001:247, 260-261; Kelly 1949b:153, 1977:75, 89; Meigs 1939:34, 45, 50; Ochoa 1978:250; Spier 1923:324; Waterman 1910:278).

### *Funerals*

Among all of the Yuman groups, cremation was either the primary or the exclusive means of disposing of the dead. Personal possessions, and sometimes various articles of food and clothing, were cremated along with the body (Drucker 1937:36, 1941:146; Heye 1919:15; Kelly 1949b:152-153, 157; Meigs 1939:58-59; Ochoa 1978:249-252). However, special burial offerings do not seem to have been common, and their use was specifically denied by several groups, as was any subsequent placement of offerings on top of the graves (Drucker 1941:147-

148; but cf. Forde 1931:211; Kelly 1949b:153; Ochoa 1979:249). The cremated bones were usually buried, although some of the Kumeyaay put them into pottery urns that were deposited in remote locations.

For the Kumeyaay, one report says that the location of a buried cremation urn was sometimes marked by a broken and inverted metate (Davis 1921:97). Otherwise, there does not seem to be any testimony that the locations of graves were marked, that the graves were maintained in any way or that they were revisited ceremonially. The remains were sometimes deposited within living areas, sometimes apart from them. In some Kumeyaay cremations, the urn containing the bones and ashes was buried in a pit and “the remaining ashes and charcoal were scraped into the pit, and the whole leveled with the ground, so that all traces of the cremation were obliterated” (Davis 1921:96-97). Among the Kiliwa, after the ashes had been buried, “the surface was leveled off so that in a short time no trace of the grave could be seen” (Meigs 1939:60). The ownership of burial places was specifically denied (Drucker 1937:46).

Cremation also seems to have been the primary method of disposing of the dead farther south in Baja California, although inhumation was also practiced. Utilitarian burial offerings, including bows and arrows, nets, and sandals, were provided for use in the afterworld (Aschmann 1966:64-65, 91-92). In one telling note, the Guaycura were reported to have broken the spine of the corpse and rolled it into a ball, because “without this care the dead ones would get up again” (Baegert 1982:179).

### *Mourning ceremonies*

Among the Yumans, the subsequent mourning ceremonies were usually more elaborate than the funeral observances. Often several distinct mourning ceremonies were involved. Activities included expressions of grief, such as crying, as well as many of the features common to other ceremonies, such as feasting, dancing, gambling, athletic contests, and courting. The ceremonies were not memorials addressed to the past dead in general, but were concerned specifically with individuals who had died since the last such ceremony had been held (Davis 1919:15; Forde 1931:221; Gifford 1933:295; Halpern 1997:7-13; Hohenthal 2001:261; Kelly 1977:89; Meigs 1939:50; but for a presumably recent variant, see Ochoa 1979:251).

Of particular interest is the Kiliwa *ñiwey*, the most elaborate of that group’s mourning ceremonies, which was also practiced by the Paipai. The last *ñiwey* was said to have been held around 1893, and a description of it was reported by Peveril Meigs (1939). A shaman called together the *páiajasé*, or ghosts, of all who had died since the previous ceremony, “to satisfy the dead so that they would stay away” (Meigs 1939:50). The shaman screamed with fear at the sight of the dead, and he himself was believed to die temporarily. One of the ghosts would take possession of the shaman, and through him the ghost would reveal where he had hidden something while he was still alive. “As long as they had things hidden, the dead would not go away and it was bad for the people. When the hidden things were removed, the dead could leave and stay away” (Meigs 1939:56). An incidental element of this ceremony was the use of the bullroarer to frighten away ghosts.

### *Personal property*

An expected concomitant of ancestor veneration might be the preservation of physical relics associated with the deceased person, whereas their destruction or relinquishment suggests

a desire to make the break with the dead as sharp as possible. All of the Yuman groups destroyed the houses in which the dead individuals had lived. A similar practice was reported among the Guaycura (Nápoli 1970:42). There is no reason to believe that these structures were being dispatched for use in the afterlife; the motive for their destruction was evidently purely a concern about possible dangers to the living. Similarly, if slightly more ambiguously, the personal possessions of the dead were either burned in the cremation fire or during a mourning ceremony, or else they were given away to nonrelatives at the conclusion of a mourning ceremony (Drucker 1937:29, 36-37; 1941:146-147, 208; DuBois 1905:621, 1908:170; Forde 1931:208, 211; Gifford 1931:57, 1933:294; Heye 1919:15-18; Hohenthal 2001:257, 259-260, 327; Kelly 1949b:153-161, 1977:87; Meigs 1939:34, 46, 58, 60; 1977:17; Waterman 1910:278-279, 306).

Such an attitude of contamination-by-association was carried even further in some cases. Among the Kiliwa, a house could not be rebuilt on the deceased person's house site for a year after the death, because of the fear of haunting (Meigs 1939:34). Cocopa and Quechan agricultural lands belonging to the dead were not inherited but were instead abandoned, and the Quechan abandoned standing crops in the fields (Drucker 1941:133; Forde 1931:211). Among the Cocopa, even the footprints of the deceased had to be obliterated (Gifford 1933:295).

### *Names and genealogies*

A widespread taboo in aboriginal North America prohibited the speaking of a dead person's name. Such a taboo was present among all of the Yuman groups of northern Baja California (Davis 1919:24; Drucker 1937:29, 36-37, 1941:141; Forde 1931:149; Gifford 1931:56, 1933:294; Gifford and Lowie 1928:341; Hohenthal 2001:259; Kelly 1977:87, 93; Meigs 1939:17; Rengland 1987:103-104). The motive for this restriction seems to have been that saying the name might summon a dangerous ghost, although that specific rationale was not always expressed by the native consultants.

Given the existence of the name taboo, it is not surprising that Yuman settlements and other geographic features were not named after prominent individuals who had been associated with them. The same seems to have been true for the fairly numerous aboriginal place names that are known from farther south on the peninsula (Laylander 1997:79-83). Yuman clans and lineages did not take their names from actual or mythical progenitors, with one notable exception. Among the Kiliwa, four brothers, who were the sons of the Creator, were known by name and were considered to be the ancestors of the four existing Kiliwa clans (Meigs 1939:17). Other named human or semi-human characters are found in various Yuman myths, and these people were probably considered in a general way to be the ancestors or at least the predecessors of modern people. However, the links between the remote mythic past and the genuinely remembered recent past or the present were never specified, and an indefinite chronological gap intervened.

The preservation of genealogies is another trait that might be expected to accompany ancestor veneration, although it would be difficult to reconcile such a practice with the taboo on names. There is no evidence that the Yumans or other native Baja Californians remembered any extended genealogies, either for their chiefs or for ordinary people. Ethnographic questioning was generally able to recover only the names of ancestors going back about two generations. This time range would have been within the scope of the consultant's personal memory. It also fell well within the limits of the historical period, during which the traditional name taboo was probably being increasingly relaxed as Western culture was introducing political and economic

incentives for being able to trace one's descent.

Within the traditional Yuman cultures, rights to land and resources might be inherited, and leadership roles were usually at least partly hereditary. However, these prerogatives were based on immediate family relationships that were well known to all members of the community. They never seem to have been based on more remote descent that would have required justification by remembering genealogies or the deeds of distant ancestors.

### *Human hair capes*

One of the most unusual items of paraphernalia in the peninsular ceremonial complex was a cape made from human hair and worn by a shaman during various rites. The use of human hair capes is well attested among the Cochimi, Guaycura, and probably the Monqui. The Kiliwa represent the northern extreme in the distribution of this trait, as well as the southern limit of modern ethnographic evidence. According to the Meigs's (1939:52) consultants, the Kiliwa believed that the capes had exclusively been manufactured long ago, probably at the time of world's creation, and that they had been made from the hair of virgins who had died (cf. Ochoa 1979:254). Because such capes would have been perishable, the modern Kiliwa disavowal of any recent experience in producing or maintaining them is probably an indication of the attrition of the traditional Kiliwa culture. However, the insistence that the hair had not come from any recently deceased person, and indeed that it had come from people who were definitely not ancestors (i.e., from virgins), seems to reflect the prevailing squeamishness toward the physical remains of dead ancestors.

Gutiérrez and Hyland (2002:347), following Homer Aschmann (1959:114), suggested that the hair for the shamans' capes was obtained, at least in part, from the dead. Several ethnohistoric accounts mentioned that the shamans acquired the hair in other ways, including from mourners, in payment for administering cures or for instructing boys (Baegert 1952:88; Clavigero 1937:109, 114; Venegas 1943-1944(1):96-97, 1979(4):409, 527, 545). Only one account seems to suggest that the material might have been taken from the dead. The Dominican missionary Luis Sales (1956:44), speaking of unspecified northern Baja Californians, mentioned "a sort of rain cape of dead men's hair." The reference to "dead men's hair" could possibly have meant merely that the hair was old and had come from people who were now presumably dead, as the Kiliwa also believed, but it does seem more likely to imply that the hair had been removed from corpses, at least according to Sales' understanding. It may be significant that no other early writer confirmed such an origin for the capes and that none of the ethnohistoric or ethnographic descriptions of Yuman or other Baja Californian funerary practices mentioned hair being removed from the corpse as a part of the ceremony. Such a trait would have been likely to attract the attention and interest of the missionaries.

A quite different use for a dead person's hair was mentioned in one ethnohistoric account (Venegas 1979(4):547). It was reported that when a person was thought to have died from unnatural causes, his hair was cut. Vengeance was taken upon the presumed murderer or upon some other member of the murderer's community, and the first victim's hair was then stuffed into the mouth of the new victim. This practice evidently reflected an attitude in which the physical remains of the dead were viewed as a source of malignity rather than as relics to be venerated.

## *Anthropomorphic images*

Most Yumans, including the Kumeyaay, Quechan, Cocopa, and Paipai, constructed effigies or painted images of the dead for use in their mourning ceremonies (Davis 1919, 1921:97, 1968; Drucker 1937:39; DuBois 1905:625-627; Forde 1931:221-222, 229-234, 255; Gifford 1931:60, 1933:296; Halpern 1997:8-12; Kelly 1977:90, 94-95; Michelsen and Owen 1967; Waterman 1910:312-313; but cf. also Drucker 1941:149). These effigies were not permanent representations of the ancestors, but instead were specifically made to be destroyed as part of a mourning ceremony. Their destruction served to reiterate the final separation between the living and the dead that had been expressed previously in the cremation ceremony.

The Quechan carried enemy scalps into war “mounted on short red and black painted sticks,” and the Cocopa also displayed trophy scalps on sticks (Forde 1931; Gifford 1933:300). These objects may have amounted to anthropomorphic images, and unlike the mourning images they were not made simply to be destroyed. However, they reflected an attitude directly opposite to veneration.

Quite distinct from the temporary images of the dead used in mourning ceremonies by other Yuman groups was the Kiliwa *ñipumjós*, an anthropomorphic painted wooden figurine used in mourning and other ceremonies (Meigs 1939:54; see also Hedges 1973). The *ñipumjós* was not destroyed, but neither was it associated with an ancestor or any other deceased person, according to Meigs’ account. On the other hand, in the 1970s Jesús Angel Ochoa Zazueta (1978) reported that each Kiliwa family had a *ñipumjós*, which represented its common ancestor. Ochoa’s version clearly suggests ancestor veneration, in contrast with all of the other attested Yuman practices. Mauricio J. Mixco (1983:282-284) raised serious doubts concerning the reliability of some of Ochoa Zazueta’s data, on linguistic and ethnographic grounds, and it may be best not to overestimate the importance of this apparent anomaly.

Early missionaries in Baja California considered the question of whether the native Californians were “idolaters” to be a matter of some theological importance. Several observers denied that these peoples possessed any idols (Baegert 1952:91; Burrus 1984:246; Cardona 1974:100; Clavigero 1937:107, 242; Geiger 1976:119; Longinos 1961:38; Piccolo 1967:57; Sales 1956:35; Venegas 1943-1944(1):88, 1979(4):326, 521). This was contradicted by other observers, who convincingly reported the use of anthropomorphic images in native religious activities (Aschmann 1966:64, 67; Burrus 1967:46-50, 1984:247; Mathes 1974:103; Ortega 1944:403-404; Taraval 1931:252). These “idols” were evidently not merely temporary representations, like those produced for the Yuman mourning ceremonies, but generally there are no indications that they were intended to represent ancestors or other specific human individuals.

There are a few ethnohistoric cases that could represent the veneration of ancestral images. The Jesuit historian Francisco Clavigero (1937:114) reported that some of the deceased were honored “by placing their figures, crudely made of branches, on the end of long javelins near which a *guama* [shaman] took his place to preach their praises.” This sounds like an analog of the Yuman mourning practices, although it was not specified that the crude images were destroyed. The Dominican missionary Sales (1956:35) claimed that the northern Baja Californians had no idols. However, he also reported that during the mourning ceremony, the shaman was said to carry “on a little stick the hair of the dead man,” with which he carried on a dialog (Sales 1956:49). Sales did not specify whether these objects were preserved or destroyed. Additionally, a shaman would display

some tablets painted with a thousand ridiculous figures which represent the most

able men they have had, the best *curanderos* (quack doctors), the bravest, the best runners and the strongest, and from these alone he builds up an outstanding eulogium, but he always adds that he is greater than all the rest [Sales 1956:45].

Sales' testimony concerning the painted tablets is an isolated instance that does suggest an ongoing commemoration of dead predecessors, in contrast to the fears and taboos expressed in almost all other accounts.

### *Impersonation of the dead*

Another form of direct involvement between the living and the dead was the practice of impersonating dead individuals during ceremonies. In the Cocopa mourning ceremony, individuals were assigned to dress up and impersonate the recently deceased individuals (Gifford 1933:297; Kelly 1977:91, 93-95, 97). The Kumeyaay may have followed a similar practice (Davis 1919:14). Like the Yuman use of mourning images of the dead, these impersonations were temporary, one-time events. Ochoa Zazueta (1979:253-254) described a late-twentieth-century Kiliwa *ñiwey* that contained two elements of impersonation. First, a group of boys painted themselves to represent the various recently deceased persons. This seems to be analogous to the Cocopa practice. Second, the human hair capes were worn on a rotating basis by individuals who were said to represent the founding ancestors of the four Kiliwa patrilineal clans. In the latter practice, Ochoa Zazueta's account stands alone and seems to run counter to numerous other ethnographic and ethnohistoric accounts cited above, which assign the capes specifically to shamans.

Hyland (1997:352) suggested that "deity/ancestor impersonation is also abundantly supported in the ethnohistoric sources." However, the single cited case of impersonation refers to a Cochimi ceremony in which the impersonator represented "the man who came from heaven" in ancient times to confer benefits on mankind (Barco 1973:355; Clavigero 1937:110). This figure was evidently a deity and was nowhere identified as an ancestor.

### *The afterworld*

All of the Yuman groups espoused beliefs in an afterworld that was physically removed from the land of the living and to reach which the newly deceased were required to make a journey (Davis 1919:24, 33; Drucker 1937:43, 1941:148; Forde 1931:179; Gifford 1931:70-71, 1933:306; Gifford and Lowie 1928:349; Hohenthal 2001:147, 260; Kelly 1949:152, 1977:87; Meigs 1939:60-61, 1977:17; Waterman 1910:278). The Cochimi and Monqui had similar beliefs (Aschmann 1966:91; Barco 1973:217; Clavigero 1937:111). This land of the dead was variously situated on the top of a high mountain, in the sky, to the north, or far to the south in the Gulf of California. The dead might return on certain occasions, either when they were summoned by a shaman or on their own initiative (Kelly 1949b:153; Meigs 1939:60-61). However, their presence among the living and their involvement in human affairs was not a continuous, a normal, or in most circumstances a desirable state of affairs.

An indirect clue concerning Yuman attitudes toward the afterworld comes from the body of traditional narratives. One of the most widespread themes in the oral literature of aboriginal North America was the Orpheus legend, according to which a grieving person, usually a young husband, traveled to the afterworld to try to bring his dead relative back to the land of the living (Gayton 1935; Hultkrantz 1957). The story is well documented throughout most of the continent,



but it is conspicuously rare among the Athapaskans and the Yumans. (One Mohave tale contains several Orpheus-like elements but does not match the general Orpheus pattern and does not specifically concern a journey to the afterworld; cf. Devereux 1948:249-252.) Among the Athapaskans, a link has been suggested between the scarcity of Orpheus stories and those people's great fear of the dead (Hultkrantz 1957:223). The story's absence among the Yumans may perhaps also be attributable to an unusually strong aversion toward the dead.

### *Relatives, nonrelatives, and enemies*

It is noteworthy that for the Yumans the danger that was posed by the dead and the things associated with them applied primarily to the deceased's close relatives. It was somewhat attenuated or even absent in the case of unrelated people. Personal possessions that had not been destroyed during the funeral or in a mourning ceremony might be given away to nonrelatives, but not to relatives (Drucker 1941:146; Kelly 1949b:153; Meigs 1939:58, 1977:17). Among the Kiliwa, an unrelated person might occupy the site of a deceased person's house within a year after the death, although a relative could not do so (Meigs 1939:58, 60). Among the Quechan, a stranger could cultivate the agricultural fields of a dead man after a full season had elapsed, but a relative could not make use of this land (Forde 1931:211). The Kumeyaay and Cocopa name taboos were not as strict for nonrelatives as for relatives (Hohenthal 2001:259; Kelly 1949b:1544). In some instances, the images of the dead used in mourning ceremonies were made by nonrelatives, and the persons who danced with them were nonrelatives (Drucker 1937:39; Forde 1931:224; Gifford 1931:60). The dead were impersonated in the Cocopa mourning ceremony by nonrelatives (Kelly 1977:93).

In the case of members of antagonistic social groups, the taboos that affected relatives of the dead might be completely reversed. Members of different Kumeyaay kinship groups were allowed to verbally ridicule the dead (Spier 1923:323; Waterman 1910:290). The Cocopa, Quechan, and Kumeyaay took scalps from enemies who had been slain in battle and then displayed them in ceremonies, in contrast to the aversion to contact with the remains of their own recently deceased relatives. Among some groups, old enemy scalps were preserved and subsequently carried into war, evidently as a way to taunt their enemies or to cause them injury (Drucker 1937:30, 1941:134-135, 137; Forde 1931:165-166; Gifford 1933:300-301; Kelly 1949a, 1977:134-136; Hohenthal 2001:243). Speaking of the use of such trophies, the Quechan would say, "Cocopa hair is good to kill Cocopa only" (Forde 1931:166). Sales (1956:44) reported that the skulls of those who had been killed in war were ceremonially displayed. He did not indicate whether these skulls had belonged to kinsmen or to enemies, but the latter seems most probable.

An additional instance of hostile use of an enemy's physical remains comes from a Kumeyaay myth (DuBois 1904:238, 1906:156-157). In the story, two brothers marry two sisters but are murdered by the members of the community where their wives and in-laws live. Their mother-in-law wears the bones of her sons-in-law when she dances, until she is killed by the posthumous son of one of the brothers, who is becoming a powerful shaman. The people of the community also paint the dead brothers' heel bones and use them as balls in their field games, until the son intervenes and throws his father's and his uncle's bones far away.

In summary, the preponderance of the ethnographic and ethnohistoric evidence paints a fairly consistent picture, despite a few hints to the contrary in the writings of Sales and Ochoa Zazueta. Lingering or returning spirits of the dead were believed to constitute a threat to their

living relatives. Elaborate ceremonies and taboos were used to ensure that there was a definitive separation of the dead from the living. By the end of the mourning period, it was imperative to dispose of their physical remains, their personal possessions, and even their names and memories. The attitude, at least among the Yumans and probably farther south on the peninsula as well, was the diametrical opposite of ancestor worship or veneration.

### **Archaeological evidence: burial practices**

Archaeological information on human burials is available from a considerable number of sites in Baja California (Fujita 1995; Fujita and Poyatos 1998; Hyland 1997; Massey 1955; Massey and Osborne 1961; Noble 1973; Ritter 1998; Ritter and Schulz 1975; Rosales and Fujita 2000; Tuohy and Van Wormer 1995). Most of the burials have not been firmly dated, and their cultural contexts and associations were often incompletely reported. Moreover, the implications of burial practices with respect to prehistoric attitudes toward the dead are frequently ambiguous. Nonetheless, this evidence merits consideration. Potential clues include the degree of ceremony involved in burial, the nature of the grave goods, the selection of locations for burial, the presence or absence of grave marking, the practice of secondary reburial and collective burials.

#### *Ceremonialism in burial*

The disposal of the physical remains of the dead may either be a fairly perfunctory matter, or it may be heavily encrusted with ritual elements, some of which may be visible in the archaeological record. Perfunctory burial practices would tend to argue against an attitude of veneration toward the deceased. Elaborate burials testify to the importance attached to death and to the funerary rites, but the nature of that importance is ambiguous. Ritual elaboration might be the homage due to an honored predecessor, or else, as among the ethnographic Yumans, it might mirror strong fears that required a formal and definitive separation of the dead from the living. Some of the prehistoric burials in Baja California may have been fairly perfunctory, at least as far as can be judged from the surviving archaeological evidence. Many others show signs of strong ritual elaboration.

#### *Grave goods*

The use of grave offerings is also ambiguous with respect to the issue of veneration or fear. Offerings may have served as tribute to a venerated predecessor; they may have been personal possessions, feared for their associations with the deceased and requiring prompt disposal; or they may have been gifts offered to appease the spirit and speed it on its journey to the afterworld. In Baja California, archaeologically documented grave goods can be grouped into three classes: items of food, which were most likely to have been intended to assist the deceased on his trip to the afterworld; durable utilitarian items, which were probably the personal possessions of the deceased; and non-utilitarian items, such as beads and pendants, which may have been either personal possessions or specially-manufactured grave offerings. Durable utilitarian items appear to occur most frequently, but non-utilitarian items are also common.

### *Burial sites*

The locations used as burial sites indicate something about the prevailing attitudes toward the dead, or at least toward their physical remains. If veneration were the main concern, it might be expected that the sites would be easily accessible from living areas, but sufficiently set apart to avoid being profaned by everyday activities. A considerable number of Baja California burials have been identified at separate burial caves or rock shelters, but a sizeable proportion were deposited within habitation middens. The frequency of midden burials suggests that the long-term maintenance of grave locations and their protection from disturbance were not major concerns for prehistoric Baja Californians.

### *Grave marking*

Another expectation with ancestor veneration is that individual graves would be marked on the surface in some way, both so that they could be revisited and so that excavations for future burials would avoid disturbing them. Most burials in prehistoric Baja California seem to have been unmarked, at least as far as the archaeological evidence indicates. Some burials, particularly in the north, were overlain by milling stones, but these seem likely to have functioned as buried grave goods rather than surface markers. A few cases of pebble, cobble, or boulder cairns being built over burials have been reported. It is uncertain whether the cairns was intended to mark the burial locations, to serve as offerings, or protect the graves from animal disturbance. There does not seem to be any reported archaeological evidence for additional offerings being added to individual grave locations subsequent to the funeral, such as might be expected with ongoing practices of ancestor veneration.

### *Secondary burials*

Hyland (1997:280) suggested that the practice of subsequent reburial was indicative of ancestor veneration. The practice certainly attests to a continuing concern with the dead after their initial interment, as well as a willingness for someone to come into contact with their physical remains. However, it is not clear that secondary burial represented veneration of the dead, rather than the need for some definitive ritual termination of contact with the dead at the end of a mourning period, such as was expressed in the Yuman mourning ceremonies. It is also unknown whether the persons who handled the remains and prepared them for reburial were the relatives of the deceased, or whether they were ritually more remote and therefore perhaps less threatened individuals.

Secondary burials in Baja California are best known from the Cape Region, far to the south of the Great Mural area. However, similar burials have recently been reported from the Sierra de San Francisco and Sierra de Guadalupe, including bones that had been painted with red ochre and black pigment within one non-Mural rock shelter (Hyland 1997:279-280). The radiocarbon dates associated with this site, calibrated to about 1700-1100 B.C., are significantly earlier than the majority of the radiocarbon dates that appear to be associated with Great Mural activity itself, which postdate about A.D. 200 (Hyland 1997:284). The practices of secondary burial and Great Mural painting may have been separated in time and culturally unrelated to each other.



Figure 2. Human and animal figures in the Great Mural paintings in Cueva Pintada, in the Sierra de San Francisco. Photo by Enrique Hambleton, in Crosby (1997).

### *Collective burials*

Although most of the burials documented in Baja California are discrete deposits of single individuals, several collective primary or secondary burials have been also identified. The mixing together of the remains of several individuals within a single grave may argue against any practice of veneration for individual ancestors.

In summary, most burial evidence from the peninsula seems to be compatible with either the presence or absence of ancestor veneration. There are a few patterns -- although they do not necessarily predominate -- that suggest attitudes other than ancestor veneration. These include perfunctory burial, utilitarian grave goods, burial in habitation middens, the absence of grave marking, and collective burials.

### **Archaeological evidence: Great Mural rock art**

Why did prehistoric Baja Californians paint the impressive human figures, or *monos*, that adorn so many of the central peninsula's rock shelters (Figure 2)? A definitive answer cannot be given, and one many never be proven beyond dispute. However, there are several lines of evidence that can be used to evaluate the relative probability of competing hypotheses. Explanatory contexts for the Great Mural *monos* that have been suggested include ancestor veneration (Gutiérrez 2000, 2002; Gutiérrez and Hyland 2002; Hyland 1997), shamanic trance states (Gutiérrez and Hyland 2002; Hyland 1997; Jones 1990), hunting magic (Grant 1974:43,

107; Meighan 1969) and rituals associated with warfare and conflict (Crosby 1997:115; Dahlgren and Romero 1951:176; Grant 1974:39, 114; Hambleton 1979; Ritter 1979:395). Evidence to consider in evaluating these hypotheses includes the settlement contexts of the paintings, the ways images were treated subsequent to their painting, comparisons between the ways human and animal forms were used, the particular animal species that were painted, the depiction of projectiles, the representation of gender and age and the representation of individuality or group identity.

### *Site contexts*

Some of the Great Mural rock art occurs in contexts that are isolated from other archaeological remains, but much of it is directly associated with habitation debris. Clearly such sites were not “sacred” locations, in the sense of being areas reserved exclusively for esoteric or dangerous activities. If ancestors were being evoked in the paintings, evidently they were not believed to represent a danger to their living descendants, in marked contrast to ethnographic Yuman attitudes. On the other hand, if enemies were depicted, the ethnographic analogy suggests that their images could have been displayed with impunity. Such images might even have served to protect the rock shelters’ occupants, by making the locations into fearful places for members of hostile groups.

### *Treatment of previous images*

One of the most conspicuous features of Great Mural painting is the prevalence of overpainting. Successive images frequently and freely overlap or cover earlier ones, indicating that there was little or no concern with maintaining the integrity of previous work. There is apparently evidence that existing figures were sometimes repainted (Gutiérrez and Hyland 2002:85; Hyland 1997:43), but it is unclear whether this was at all common. Despite occasional exceptions, the emphasis in Great Mural rock art seems to have been on the act involved in painting an individual figure, not on developing a coherent pictorial scheme or on maintaining previous images (Crosby 1997:70). Quite a different treatment might be expected for ancestral icons.

### *Humans and animals*

Another notable fact about the Great Murals is the largely indistinguishable way in which human and animal images were presented. There were indeed some differences in the specific conventions that were used with some animals and humans. Humans, as well as birds, turtles, and most fish, were drawn in dorsal/ventral views, while most other mammals were shown in side profile. To some modern observers, this contrast has given a static feel to the human figures, and a more dynamic feel to the other mammals. Clement W. Meighan (1969:68) thought that the contrast expressed the dominance of men over the animals they hunted. Alternatively, the convention can be interpreted merely as a way to maximize the recognizability of the silhouettes. The unnaturalistic contortion of the outlines in order to display more clearly the antlers, horns, animal ears, feet, hands, and breasts also attests to the priority that was given to iconic recognizability over other considerations.

If, as Meighan (1969) suggested, the Great Murals were essentially hunting magic, in

which the “anonymous” human figures were included in order to express men’s dominance over the animals, it would be expected that the *monos* would occur only in association with animal images. The nine Sierra de San Francisco sites that were seen by Meighan all contained either both human and animal figures, or only animals. Subsequent, more extensive investigations in the region have identified a few sites that have only human figures, as well as many individual panels in which humans occur without any closely associated animals (Crosby 1997).

Most commonly, human and animal images appear together on the same panels, overlapping each another indiscriminately, drawn on similar scales, and filled with similar colors. The conclusion seems inescapable that both sets of images were painted by the same painters and that they were intended for related or closely similar purposes. If the *monos* were venerated ancestors or shamans and the animals were something entirely different, it would seem difficult to account for this lack of discrimination in the ways they were presented. If both represented objects of violence in warfare or hunting -- whether the violence was prospective, retrospective, or generalized -- their similar treatment would have come naturally.

### *Animal species*

The particular animals that were depicted in Great Mural rock art may say something about the function of the animal images, and by extension they may also say something about the function of the associated human images. Species identifications are not always certain, and many different kinds of animals were represented at least occasionally. However, according to the usual interpretation, by far the most common animals are mule deer, followed in frequency by rabbits and bighorn sheep (Crosby 1997; Gutiérrez and Hyland 2002; Hambleton 1979; Hyland 1997; Meighan 1969). These three species are well attested ethnohistorically and ethnographically as important aboriginal game animals.

An association of shamanic trance states with these same species is also possible. However, shamanic associations seem to have been far more likely for “powerful” animals such as lions, bobcats, coyotes, rattlesnakes, and raptorial birds, which variously competed with or threatened humans, rather than for the more passive food animals. There is some evidence that Kumeyaay shamans were believed to be able to turn themselves into animals, particularly bears and mountain lions (Driver 1937:42). Carnivores, snakes, and raptors were portrayed in some Great Mural paintings, but they are distinctly uncommon. If the prevalence of food animals in the murals suggests that the context for their depiction concerned hunting, then by extension this may also suggest that the context for the similarly presented human images was also one of violence rather than either shamanic trances or ancestor veneration.

The fairly common occurrence of rock art images of fish, sea mammals and sea turtles at sites located dozens of kilometers inland has been cited as one of the arguments against the hunting hypothesis as an explanation for the animal images (cf. Rector 1981; Rector and Ritter 1978; but see also Ritter 1986:167). By extension, this might also argue against the conflict explanation for the human images. This pattern of marine animal images at inland sites is a telling argument against any proposal that the murals were produced as invocations or celebrations immediately before or after particular hunting or fishing episodes. In any case, the large amount of effort that must have gone into preparing for and painting the images would argue against their having been produced on such a spontaneous basis. On the other hand, a more generalized celebration of past successes or a promotion of future efforts would be quite compatible with the distance between inland rock art sites and coastal fishing and hunting





Figure 3. Human figures pierced by projectiles in the Great Mural paintings of San Borjitas in the Sierra de Guadalupe. Photo in Crosby (1997).

locales, provided that the inland groups made seasonal treks to the coast.

### *Projectiles*

Many of the Great Mural images of both animals and humans were shown as penetrated or overlain by spears, darts, or arrows (Figure 3). Meighan (1969:56) thought that the relatively uncommon projectiles associated with human figures in the Sierra de San Francisco sites postdated the *monos* themselves. This might support the idea that the projectiles were added by later intruders at the sites as an intentional desecration of their predecessors' ancestral images. However, with more extensive experience, Enrique Hambleton (1979:22) concluded that the

projectiles were painted at the same time as the figures themselves, based on the similar degrees of weathering and identical paints used. If the projectiles were integral parts of the original images, this fact fits poorly with Meighan's hypothesis that the images served to express human dominance over game animals.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that penetration by arrows may have been a metaphor for the deceased status of the ancestors or for the death-like trance experiences of shamans (Hyland 1997:362). The combination of veneration for antecedents with the pictorial representation of their physical agony comes naturally to a Western tradition that has been steeped in images of the crucifixion of Christ and the martyrdom of the Christian saints. It is probably a less natural association in most other cultural contexts. A simpler and less forced explanation would be that the penetration of animals by projectiles in some way represented hunting, and that the similar penetration of humans in some way referred to warfare or conflict.

### *Gender and age*

Most of the Great Mural *monos* cannot be assigned definitely to one gender or the other, but a significant minority of the images show female breasts, and in some areas, notably the Sierra de Guadalupe, other figures show male genitals. Apart from their breasts or genitals, specifically male and female images do not seem to be consistently distinguished either from each other or from the majority of images that are nonspecific as to gender. If the *monos* represented patrilineal ancestors, it might be expected that depictions of females would be rare or absent. Hunting magic to express human dominance over game would also have been less likely to make use of female images. On the other hand, if the images concerned warfare and conflict, the depiction of both genders is more easily understood. Despite the early rumors about the presence of Amazons, women were not generally warriors in aboriginal Baja California, but the women of enemy communities were considered to be appropriate targets for violence.

A few of the smaller Great Mural *monos* in composed groups have been tentatively interpreted as representing children (Crosby 1997:54, 90-91). If these identifications are correct, it is more plausible to interpret the children as victims of warfare rather than as either shamans in trance states or lineage ancestors. This is perhaps analogous with the moderate frequency of animal images that have been interpreted as fawns, which are likewise more suggestive of hunting practices than of either shamanic trances or ancestral totems.

### *Individuality and group identity*

The degree of variability in the Great Mural *monos* and the way that variability is distributed geographically may say something about the identity of the figures that were being represented. If the Great Mural *monos* depicted specific lineage ancestors, it might be expected that they would be presented in some way either as individuals with recognizable personal traits or else as standardized stereotypes for each lineage. Clearly the Great Mural paintings are not portraits; there is no evidence of any attention to the physical peculiarities in face or body of particular persons.

Considerable variability is shown in the more emblematic dimensions of painted body colors and head styles. Campbell Grant (1974:108), considering the differences in the ways the human silhouettes were filled, thought it possible that "each village or family group had an identifying color pattern that was applied for ceremonial occasions or in time of war." Meighan



Table 1. Head styles of Sierra de San Francisco *monos*.

| Arroyo / Site       | Head Style |    |    |    |    |       | Total |
|---------------------|------------|----|----|----|----|-------|-------|
|                     | A          | B  | C  | D  | E  | Other |       |
| Arroyo San Pablo    |            |    |    |    |    |       |       |
| Cueva Pintada       | 29         | 12 | 12 | 9  | 2  | 10    | 74    |
| Cueva Las Flechas   | 4          | 6  | 1  | -  | -  | 3     | 14    |
| Cueva de la Música  | -          | -  | 4  | -  | -  | -     | 4     |
| Cueva El Ratón      | 6          | -  | -  | 2  | -  | 1     | 9     |
| Cueva de la Soledad | 6          | -  | 1  | 1  | -  | -     | 8     |
| Cueva La Palma      | 3          | -  | 2  | -  | -  | -     | 5     |
| Cueva El Cacarizo   | 2          | 2  | -  | 1  | -  | -     | 5     |
| Arroyo San Gregorio |            |    |    |    |    |       |       |
| San Gregorio I, II  | 26         | 2  | -  | -  | -  | 2     | 30    |
| La Palma            | 11         | 3  | 8  | 5  | 2  | 1     | 30    |
| Cuesta Palmarito I  | 38         | 1  | 2  | 30 | -  | 4     | 75    |
| El Parral           | 172        | -  | -  | 3  | 66 | -     | 241   |
| Total               | 297        | 26 | 30 | 51 | 70 | 21    | 495   |

Source: Gutiérrez and Hyland 2002:272.

(1969:58) suggested that variations in the head type or headdress of human figures in the Great Mural paintings were “undoubtedly symbolic of particular classes or kinds of people.”

Hyland and Gutierrez extended Meighan’s interpretation to propose that the figures represent lineage ancestors and that the distribution of head styles reflected lineage territories (Hyland 1997:371-381; Gutiérrez and Hyland 2002:369-378). In a sample of 495 *monos* recorded in the Sierra de San Francisco, 15 different head styles were identified (Table 1). Just five of the head styles accounted for 97% of the sample. The variation in head styles among the four major arroyos included in the study was found to be nonrandom, and this was interpreted as reflecting lineage territoriality. The two northern drainages (Arroyo San Pablo and Arroyo San Gregorio) each had relatively even variation among the major styles, while the two southern arroyos (Cuesta del Palmarito and Arroyo del Parral) had significantly less diversity. The fairly equal frequency of multiple head styles within the northern arroyos was attributed to lineage segmentation through time.

Variability may well be attributable to some factor other than lineage identity, such as social status (age, rank, etc.), or to mere artistic license. Granting for the moment that head styles were in fact lineage markers, their distribution does not accord well with the notion that they mark the ownership or occupation of particular arroyos or sites by particular lineages. None of the sites with more than four *monos* has exclusively a single head style. None of the head styles represented by more than four examples in the sample is restricted to a single site or even to a single drainage. The distribution accords poorly with the hypothesis that the head styles served to identify the resident social group. On the other hand, both the nonrandom geographical distribution of head styles and their lack of local uniformity would be consistent with an hypothesis that they identified the social groups of the painters’ enemies.

In sum, the variation in the way *monos* were depicted was neither extensive enough to suggest individual identities, nor standardized enough to suggest a few lineage prototypes. There are essentially identical configurations of characteristics shared by multiple figures within the

same or at different sites, but there is no consistent uniformity at any given site. Specific head styles and body colors are not consistently associated with each other.

A particularly telling case is the well-known Cueva de la Serpiente panel, with its large group of images that are thought to have been the work of a single painter. The *monos* of the panel include varying traits of head style and body paint, indicating either that these features were not lineage markers or else that the figures shown were not the painter's lineage ancestors. The panel also includes multiple images with essentially identical head and body patterns, which may argue against the notion that a pattern identified a single individual, such as the founding ancestor of a lineage.

## Conclusions

Sigmund Freud is famously supposed to have said, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." It must also be true that sometimes a picture of a man pierced by arrows is just that: a picture of a man pierced by arrows, and not a metaphor for a shamanic trance state or for a dead ancestor. The Great Mural paintings of central Baja California seem to be a prime case in point. The preponderance of the ethnohistoric, ethnographic, and archaeological evidence favors a relatively literal interpretation for this outstanding collection of rock art, in terms of warfare and hunting. It does not suggest that the region's prehistoric ideology was focused on any worship or veneration of ancestors.

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