

Comparisons between prehistoric archaeology in Baja California during the early period (1732-1913) and during the subsequent century (1914-2013)

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Abstract

Behind the current flowering of prehistoric archaeology in Baja California lay the pioneering investigations of William C. Massey and, before him, those of Malcolm J. Rogers. However, for nearly two centuries prior the work of Rogers, the peninsula's prehistory was the subject of documented observations and informed speculations. This paper briefly addresses eight areas of comparison between the contributions of that earlier period and those of the subsequent century extending from 1914 to 2013. Those areas include (1) the national origins of the investigators, (2) their professional roots, (3) their gender, (4) their treatment of chronology, (5) the kinds of archaeological remains that engaged their interest, (6) their preferred explanatory models, (7) their attitudes concerning ethnocentrism and racism, and (8) their perception of the potential for future investigations.

Introduction

The history of archaeological investigations into the prehistory of the Baja California peninsula has been sketched briefly in previous studies (see García-Uranga 1987; Laylander 1992). Recently, I have returned to the subject of the history of archaeology in Baja California, to discuss aspects of it in greater detail (Laylander 2013, 2014; Laylander and Bendímez 2013). In considering that history and its implications for future directions in this field, it may be of interest to outline several major respects in which the early investigations were similar to or differed from the studies conducted during the ensuing period, down to the present.

The individuals responsible for the early investigations of Baja California prehistory are briefly identified in Table 1. Their contributions and interpretations have been described in more detail elsewhere (Laylander 2014). Some major themes derived from those investigations are discussed below.

National origins

One point of contrast between the early prehistorians and their successors concerns their national origins. Most of the early investigators were Europeans by birth, coming from Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, England, and Italy. Mexico and the United States were represented, but only minimally. None of the early prehistorians were native Baja Californians.

During the century that followed, a wider absolute range of origins has been represented.

Table 1. Early investigators of the prehistory of Baja California.

Name	Life Dates	Origin	Profession	B.C. Region of Studies	Sources of Information	References
Sigismundo Taraval	1700-1763	Lodi, Lombardy (Italy)	Jesuit missionary	San Ignacio area, Isla Cedros	Oral traditions	Venegas 1757, 1759, 1979; Des Lauriers and Des Lauriers 2006
Lambert Hostell	1706-post 1773	Bad Münstereifel, Rheinland (Germany)	Jesuit missionary	Los Dolores area	Oral traditions	Burrus 1967
Miguel del Barco	1706-1790	Casas de Millán, Extremadura, Spain	Jesuit missionary	San Javier area	Oral traditions	Barco 1973, 1981
Georg Retz	1717-1773	Düsseldorf, Rheinland (Germany)	Jesuit missionary	Santa Gertrudis area	Human (?) burial	Barco 1973, 1981: Clavijero 1789, 1852, 1937
Jakob Baegert	1717-1772	Schlettstadt, Alsace (France)	Jesuit missionary	San Luis Gonzaga area	Oral traditions	Baegert 1772, 1942, 1952, 1982
Francisco Escalante	1724-1806	Jaén, Andalucía, Spain	Jesuit missionary	Mulegé area	Rock art	Barco 1973, 1981: Clavijero 1789, 1852, 1937
José Mariano Rotea	1732-1799	Mexico City, New Spain (Mexico)	Jesuit missionary	San Ignacio area	Oral traditions, rock art, human (?) burial, habitation features	Barco 1973, 1981: Clavijero 1789, 1852, 1937
(anonymous)	?	?	Franciscan missionary (?)	?	Oral traditions, rock art	Salvatierra 1946
Lyman Belding	1829-1917	West Farms, Massachusetts, U.S.A.	Ornithologist	Cape Region	Human burials, artifacts	Belding 1885
Edward Palmer	ca. 1831-1911	Norfolk, England, U.K.	Naturalist	Bahía de los Ángeles area, Cape Region	Human burials, artifacts, shell middens	Wilson 1890; Rivet 1909; Massey and Osborne 1961; Hrdlička 1927; Noble 1973a, 1973b; Tyson 1975a, 1975b, 1977
Herman Frederik Carel ten Kate	1858-1931	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Zoologist, anthropologist	Cape Region	Human burials, rock art, artifacts, rock features	ten Kate 1883a, 1883b, 1884, 1885, 1979, 2004
Léon Diguét	1859-1926	Le Havre, Normandy, France	Chemical engineer, naturalist	Central and southern B.C.	Rock art, human burials, artifacts	Diguét 1895, 1899, 1905, 1973, 1978; Grant 1974
Arthur Walbridge North	1874-1943	Marysville, California, U.S.A.	Travel writer, historian	Northwestern B.C.	Rock art	North 1907, 1908a, 1908b, 1910
Georges Charles Marius Engerrand	1877-1961	Libourne, Aquitaine, France	Geologist, archaeologist	Northwestern B.C.	Rock art, artifacts	Engerrand 1912a, 1912b, 1912c, 1912d, 1913, 1981; Laylander 2013

Investigators have come to Baja California from other parts of Latin America, Canada, and East Asia, as well as various European countries. However, the great majority of recent studies have been done by archaeologists from either Mexico or the United States.

Professional roots

The early investigators were diverse in their professions. The Jesuits were, first and foremost, religious missionaries, although they also served as administrators and explorers. They were usually well-educated men, familiar with several languages and in some cases with strong interests in natural history. Several of the investigators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were naturalists, although they were often self-taught in their fields rather than academically trained. Missionaries and naturalists found in archaeology a logical extension of their core interests. The first professionally trained anthropologist to work in Baja California was Herman ten Kate. He had received his Ph.D. in zoology, but he had also studied with the leading anthropological authorities of his day at universities in the Netherlands, France, and Germany, and anthropology was always his main professional focus. Georges Engerrand was in about equal parts a geologist and an archaeologist, by his training and his early professional activity.

In the decades that followed, Malcolm Rogers (1939, 1945, 1966; Laylander and Bendímez 2013) was something of a transitional figure in this respect. Rogers's professional training had been in geology rather than archaeology, but he had a clear primary professional commitment to archaeology. After Rogers's time, work by professional archaeologists has predominated in Baja California. Nonetheless, collaboration with specialists from other disciplines in the physical and biological sciences has become increasingly common and essential to our work, and avocationalists have continued to play important roles, particularly in rock art studies.

Gender

All of the early-period archaeologists were male. This lack of gender diversity, although not inevitable, should not be surprising, considering the usual patterns in social roles for men and women within Western cultures during that period. It would only be as recently as the 1950s, beginning with the work of Barbro Dahlgren de Jordan (1954; Dahlgren and Romero 1951), that female archaeologists appeared on the scene and began to move toward the fully equal role that they now play within this field.

Treatment of chronology

Early investigators were conscious of the desirability of placing their prehistoric observations within the framework of either a relative (i.e., sequential) chronology or an absolute chronology (i.e., in years before the present). Unfortunately, they were usually able to see little or no prospect of being able to do so successfully. Some investigators did offer a few hints at chronology. The Jesuit historian Miguel Venegas (1979:518) opined that immigrants had entered the Baja California peninsula at some point after the time of Christ. Engerrand (1912b:205) suggested that the northern peninsular rock art sites that he examined were not truly "prehistoric," in the European sense of the term; that is, they were not thought to predate the appearance of writing in the Old World.

This general agnosticism about chronology altered abruptly in the decades that immediately followed. First came the various schemes for a relative chronology that were propounded by Malcolm Rogers (1939, 1945, 1966; cf. Laylander and Bendímez 2013). Those schemes still exercise considerable influence on ideas about Baja California prehistory today, perhaps not always to the field's benefit. Then, beginning in the 1950s, with the work of Carl Hubbs and his collaborators (Hubbs and Bien 1967; Hubbs et al. 1960, 1962, 1965), radiocarbon dating began to open the door to the absolute chronological framework that we now take for granted.

Foci of interest

During the early period, some observations were made concerning various kinds of rock features, projectile points, and other artifacts made from stone, bone, shell, wood, and fiber, as well as the ecofacts represented in shell middens. Despite this, the archaeological investigations of that period were characterized by a very strong concentration on just two classes of prehistoric remains: rock art, and human burials.

Those two classes have continued to be major subjects of interest for Baja California archaeology throughout the ensuing century. However, subsequent investigators have collectively produced a much more balanced and inclusive treatment of the many other classes of prehistoric features, artifacts, and ecofacts.

Explanatory paradigms

Another element of continuity and change concerns the preferred explanatory model that has been used to account for variability within the archaeological record. During the early period, if archaeological assemblages were seen to differ among themselves, or if they differed from the ethnohistorically observed cultures of the region, those differences were almost invariably ascribed to different ethnicities, to the results of prehistoric migrations and population replacements.

That preferred paradigm continued to hold sway for another half century, in the work of Malcolm Rogers (1939, 1945, 1966), Paul Kirchhoff (1942), and William Massey (1961, 1966). The model by no means deserves to be dismissed from our consideration today. However, it has slowly made room for additional, alternative ways of accounting for the differences. Other explanations for variability and change in the archaeological record include such mechanisms as internal evolutionary processes that have taken place within cultures, the diffusion of traits between cultures, and responses to diverse, localized adaptive imperatives.

Racism and ethnocentrism

A notable change in perceptions of prehistoric Baja California relates to the value judgments that investigators have brought into their studies. The strongly negative views concerning the native peoples of the peninsula that were generally expressed by the early missionaries have been summarized and analyzed elsewhere (Laylander 1997, 2000). By the late nineteenth century, the native peoples in the central and southern parts of the peninsula had become extinct culturally, if perhaps not quite physically. A tone of more scientific detachment entered into the discussion of the prehistoric natives, although disparaging remarks might still

occur. Such negative views of the people who were encountered historically seemed to require that any impressive elements that the observers might discover in the archaeological record, such as sophisticated Great Murals rock art panels, must be attributable to some superior race of people that had subsequently vanished from the region. Attitudes of racism and ethnocentrism would generally fade or disappear altogether from Baja California archaeology during the succeeding decades.

Future prospects

A final note of continuity is that it was clearly recognized by the early observers that the peninsula's prehistory was not a closed subject, and that what they were able to offer was not by any means the final, definitive word. The early archaeologists often explicitly acknowledged the imperfections of their knowledge and the potential for making important future studies and advances in understanding. Their successors have emphatically supported similar views. Some of the hoped-for advances were realized during the next 100 years of investigations. Others still lie in our field's future.

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