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COMMENT

Heizer, Strandt, and the Effigy Controversy

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Circumstantial evidence indicates that a number of southern California steatite effigies and effigy pipes of unusual composition (e.g., Burnett 1944) are probably forgeries, being either fantasy pieces or good pieces creatively altered for sale to antiquities dealers, collectors, and museums. A recent article by Georgia Lee (1993) focused on Robert Heizer's attempt to ferret out the hoaxers, and included correspondence among several scholars. Also reproduced were letters written by Herman F. Strandt, one of the three alleged culprits in this archaeological whodunit. The three, Strandt, Arthur R. Sanger, and O. T. Littleton, had all collected from sites and dealt commercially in artifacts. Whether Strandt, Sanger, and Littleton, either individually or as co-conspirators, faked prehistoric effigies is a question left unresolved by Lee (1993).

Certain passages in correspondence among Heizer, Arthur Woodward, and Frederick Johnson have been interpreted as indicating timidity in exposing the fakery. The question has been posed as to whether the investigations of fakery might possibly have been dropped subsequent to pressure applied as Heizer and others were "closing in on someone with influence" (Lee 1993:213). Our commentary offers an alternative interpretation based on certain passages highlighted by Lee in order to explain any reluctance by Heizer or others to pursue the controversy. We also offer cursory historical dimension on the background of Herman Strandt,

including information exonerating him of the allegation of plagiarism.

HEIZER'S PROPER CAUTION

We believe there is no cowardice on Heizer's part in the matter of the alleged fake effigies. Indeed, Heizer wrote, "I am not one to get into arguments, but this may be one which should be entered . . ." (Lee 1993:201).

The reference to someone "putting the pressure on" may not relate to a possible mystery person of influence who could derail the scholars' investigation (Lee 1993:213). There are two references to "pressure" in the Woodward letter (Lee 1993:209). First, art dealer Earl Stendahl wanted Woodward to authenticate effigies already donated to the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art. In the second passage, Woodward wrote, "Who is the person trying to put the pressure on? Is it Stendahl? He has a batch of the stuff at his home which is as yet unsold" (Lee 1993:209). Again, Stendahl receives mention. We suggest that Woodward used a dramatic device, albeit oddly worded, to emphasize an additional motive for Stendahl to seek a seal of authenticity bestowed on specimens otherwise lacking pedigree. We believe that there was no "pressure" coming from an unknown person having enough influence to frighten off Heizer and others.

There is another explanation for the reluctance of Heizer and his colleagues to proceed on the issue of fakery. While Heizer was "morally certain" that Strandt manufactured artifacts, he lamented having no real evidence (Lee 1993:204; also 202, 207, 212). We believe Heizer exhibited a caution one would expect of persons steeped in scientific inquiry. Short of either a confession or corroborated eyewitness testimony, the fakery issue may have appeared insoluble.

The catalyst for the numerous letters exchanged between Heizer and his colleagues was Strandt's request to the SAA for his annual membership card. Strandt explained that the card would facilitate access to private land to collect artifacts. He was not denied SAA membership, as his name appears on the SAA roles for 1946-1947, published in *American Antiquity* in April 1947. Interestingly, Strandt's name fails to appear on the 1948-1949 SAA list of members published two years later. SAA personnel failed to locate any record of censure of Strandt (D. Craib, personal communication 1994).¹

STRANDT'S BACKGROUND

In the correspondence published by Lee (1993), Herman Strandt is the focus of scrutiny. Arthur Woodward, curator at the Los Angeles County Museum, regarded Strandt as a stubbornly unrepentant relic collector and seller (Lee 1993:207). Heizer and Woodward both believed he falsely claimed authorship of reports attributed to John Winterbourne. They knew little of Strandt's background. Substantial material on Strandt is assembled in the archives of the Pacific Coast Archaeological Society, including interviews with Strandt and those who knew him, contemporary newspaper stories, his obituary and death notice, correspondence between Strandt and George Heye, and other documents. Here, space limitations allow only cursory comments on the background of Strandt.

Settling in Anaheim in 1920, Strandt made his living as a cement contractor and builder, and soon began his artifact searches in Orange County (Chace 1965:6). His relic collecting extended into Riverside, San Diego, Inyo, Kern, Napa, and Kings counties, and into central Arizona, often with the intent of finding "good things" to sell to museums. He developed close personal ties with wealthy museum patrons, including George Heye, who created the Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian. Strandt built a private museum behind his Anaheim

home, where he enjoyed showing his specimens to the public, "adults, boy scouts, and school classes" (Strandt 1965a:32). He lectured on Indian culture, encouraged young people to study archaeology, and gave interviews to newspaper reporters. Strandt developed a reputation as an "expert" on local prehistory. Herman Strandt saw himself as an educator and researcher (see Strandt 1965a).

Without Herman Strandt, Orange County may never have had a Depression Era archaeology program. The Santa Ana office of the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) employed Helen Smith to interview "professional and nonmanual" relief applicants. A job interview with Strandt sparked her suggestion that SERA engage in an archaeological project (Chace 1965:6). Soon, John Winterbourne was administering SERA survey and excavation programs, with Strandt guiding the crew in the actual fieldwork. Strandt wrote three studies in 1935 under SERA Historical Research Project No. 31-F2-96: (1) *Life and Customs of the Southwestern Coast Indians in Prehistoric Times*; (2) *Burial Customs of the Orange County Indians*; and (3) *Peculiar Artifacts of the Prehistoric Indians of the Southwest*. These essays from 1935 later were published (Strandt 1965a, 1965b, 1965c). Clearly, Heizer and Woodward erred in their belief that Strandt misrepresented himself as author of these papers.

Heizer and Woodward both thought Strandt was misrepresenting himself as author of other relief program archaeology reports, believing Winterbourne the sole author of all excavation manuscripts (Lee 1993:207). Most of these "reports" are little more than daily notes, and no field report carries authorship. A SERA document entry dated July 8, 1935, reads, "Herman Strandt in charge. The following was taken from his field notes . . ." (Anonymous 1935:2), indicating that Strandt might fairly be regarded as a sometimes co-author. We believe that Strandt was writing daily field notes of the excavations,

but Winterbourne may have been the person editing and producing the typed versions. Strandt is referred to in the third person in some of the final typed WPA field reports (Anonymous 1936, 1937a, 1937b), an indication of Winterbourne as editor and author. Robert Lamb, a contemporary coworker in the field program, remembered Strandt as the key archaeologist. In an interview, he recalled that "in the early days of the WPA project, Strandt was the whole thing, as he knew so much about Orange County sites." The July 6, 1965, Lamb interview notes are archived in the Pacific Coast Archaeological Society library. The anonymous interviewer may have been Aileen McKinney (J. Gothold, personal communication 1994).

STRANDT AND THE HEYE ARTIFACTS

The Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian publication describing southern California effigies appeared in 1944 (Burnett 1944). George Heye had assembled at his museum, essentially through purchases, "an astonishing collection," as noted by Lee (1993:196). The introduction to the Burnett book indicated that most of the specimens had been acquired through O. T. Littleton and Arthur R. Sanger, both of Los Angeles, but it added that, "Some pieces were acquired from Mr. Herman Strandt of Anaheim" (Burnett 1944:13). Can a link be established between Strandt and phony artifacts? Is there evidence to indict Strandt as an active party to artifact forgery?

A page from Strandt's ledger lists a number of artifact sales, including \$1,405 worth, to George Heye at the Museum. The ledger does establish a link between Strandt and particular artifacts described by Burnett (1944:Plate 37). It documents the sale of "stone rings" to George Heye for \$550 in 1941. Strandt drew a small sketch of a "stone ring" in the ledger, a stylistic match with the chlorite schist discs of Burnett's Plate 37. These discs are genuine prehistoric ob-

jects unearthed in 1940 during trenching for water lines in San Mateo Canyon, San Diego County. The isolated San Mateo Canyon cache contained perhaps 11 or 12 discs. This cache and similar stone discs found in southern California have been documented elsewhere (Chace 1972; Irwin 1978).

The ledger also documents Heye's purchase of a fishmouth pipe and an elbow pipe for \$55 in the following year. We believe it is likely that the fishmouth pipe and elbow pipe recorded in Strandt's ledger may be illustrated in Burnett (1944). The ledger page offers no further description of the two pipes that would help identify which fishmouth pipes or elbow pipes in Burnett (1944) might have been the ones sold by Strandt. These two objects very possibly were not genuine. Where did Strandt acquire these items? Could he have been duped either by Sanger or Littleton? Sanger had admitted to embellishing some genuine pieces for the market (Lee 1993: 213).

Strandt was acquainted with both Sanger and Littleton. Strandt (1965c:23) noted that O. T. Littleton possessed a particularly fine cogged stone, which Strandt eventually acquired. Strandt worked alongside and maintained a long-term relationship with the wealthy Los Angeles yachtsman and collector, Arthur Sanger. In his 1935 writings, Strandt referred to two "war" clubs in Sanger's collection, which had been found the previous year on San Miguel Island (1965c:25). Aboard Sanger's yacht, the *Dreamer*, Strandt accompanied Sanger in 1937 on an excursion and collecting trip with ten or more people to San Miguel Island (Gothold 1993). Thus, Strandt knew the other individuals linked with the suspicious effigies. However, we could find no evidence that Strandt ever manufactured any unusual artifacts with intent to pass them off as genuine pieces. Nor did Heye, Woodward, Heizer, Johnson, Lee, or anyone else ever find evidence that Strandt manufactured phony artifacts.

FINAL REMARKS

Herman Strandt operated within a "grand museum tradition" that flourished in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see McFadden 1971; Meyer 1973; Hess 1974). His efforts were on a regional level, energetically excavating for prehistoric treasures, seeking new knowledge, and selling exhibit-quality specimens to the institutions of those times. He associated himself with museums operating within the mode of this grand tradition, as well as with wealthy patrons. He exhibited his collections, lectured to school groups, and on occasion wrote of his findings. His ethics obviously were not those of academically based modern archaeology, but rather those of an older museum tradition. We believe that the suspicions and allegations now published, put to print almost half a century after they were penned, reflect mostly on judgmental considerations of Strandt against ever-evolving ethics. Regardless of whether Heizer pondered this clash of ethics, it is to his credit that neither he nor the others publicly impugned Strandt when any evidence, at best, was only circumstantial.

NOTE

1. Frederick Johnson, the SAA official to whom Strandt wrote about his SAA membership renewal, died on August 22, 1994, just months before Lee's article (1993) became available (November 30, 1994, correspondence to senior author from Packenham, Schmidt, and Federico, Boston).

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