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Title

Busch, ed.: *Alta California, 1840-1842: the Journal and Observations of William Dane Phelps, Master of the Ship Alert*

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There is no significant comparative or interpretive analysis of the materials from the site. The authors suggest that the Hackney Site was occupied on a semi-permanent basis "primarily during the later prehistoric into the protohistoric times. . . . as far back as AD [sic] 1200 until perhaps 1825" (p. 80). Earlier occupation, as indicated by projectile point types is acknowledged, but not defined. Their inclusion of clay figurines among the hallmarks of late period occupation is debatable. Important reports of archaeological work at nearby Buchanan and Hidden reservoirs, and Yosemite National Park are neglected.

The most remarkable thing about *Monograph 22* is the incredible number of typographical, grammatical, and syntactical errors, not to mention stylistic inconsistencies. Typographical errors in picture and figure captions and references, and bibliographic citations are particularly annoying. Inexplicably, of the 41 references in the bibliography of the second paper 16 (39%) are not cited in the text! Many other examples could be listed.



Alta California, 1840-1842: the Journal and Observations of William Dane Phelps, Master of the Ship Alert. Edited and with an introduction by Briton Cooper Busch. Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1983, 364 pp., 7 plates, 3 maps, \$29.50.

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The hide and tallow trade, which flourished during the second quarter of the last century, brought to California a number of Americans who left detailed records of their

experiences with, and observations of, Californios and native peoples. Though filtered through a variety of biases, these records are often of anthropological as well as historical interest. The recently published journal of Captain William Dane Phelps is no exception.

The *Alert*, representing the Boston firm of Bryant, Sturgis & Co., was stationed in California, under the command of Phelps, from June 1840 to December 1842. In that time Phelps visited all the ports in the province and made two trips up the Sacramento Valley. The journal's unusually detailed record of these travels reflects Phelps' intention that it provide his family a full account of his experiences in a then-foreign land.

Phelps by no means escaped the ethnocentrism common to such accounts. He provides detailed descriptions of his elk hunts (with American settlers) and of the mechanics of the hide and tallow trade, but his observations on Californio society, with whose representatives he dealt almost daily, are meager. Indeed, except for tales of alcoholic priests, individual Californios find little place in this record. Phelps admired their hospitality and horsemanship, but little else.

In spite of this, the journal occasionally yields interesting insights. Phelps' testimony, for example, accords with that of other foreigners and Californios alike in depicting the subservient role of Californio women. Yet while in San Diego in May, 1842, he notes that Tomasa Pico de Alvarado (here rendered by Busch as "Tomala" Pico), was responsible for supplying beef to the ships, and had organized an uprising among the local women in opposition to the bishop's intention of removing his headquarters from San Diego to Santa Barbara. References in her brother's reminiscences (Pico 1973: 25, 27), further document Tomasa Pico's activities and indicate the at least occasional involvement of intelligent and strong-willed women in the

financial and political affairs of an otherwise patriarchal society.

If Phelps' opinion of Native Americans was no more flattering (the dominance of the settlers is described as "benevolent"), he at least found their activities interesting. Particularly fulsome during his travels among the Plains Miwok, he provides descriptions of hunting practices, fishing and seed gathering techniques, diet, house construction, preparation of feather blankets, and economic relations with the settlers. A unique note is his confirmation (p. 209) of the use of the teeth in preparing fish nets—a practice previously hypothesized from archaeological evidence (Schulz 1977). Students of Plains Miwok geography should note orthographic differences in Phelps' settlement list as transcribed by Busch (pp. 206, 210) from the same list as earlier published by Bennyhoff (1977: 34).

For California anthropologists, however, surely the most striking account in this book will be found on pp. 206-207, for there is recorded a disturbingly familiar controversy. Phelps, an amateur phrenologist, while hunting with a Miwok guide, happened upon an abandoned village:

I got off my horse and collected a couple of skulls and much to the horror of the indian put them into a bag. When he saw me . . . overhauling dead men's bones, and those the ones of his ancestors, he looked upon me with fear and distrust. But when I offered him the bones and told him to tie the bag to his horse, he started back in utter dismay, and it was not until Mr. Sinclair told him that I was a Medicine Man, and could harm him with my incantations, could he be persuaded to take them. On our arrival . . . he told his companions of my doings and, about 30 of them collecting together near the house, concluded . . . to ask Mr. S. what I was going to do with their fathers' bones. As it would have been impossible to make them comprehend any thing on the subject of phrenology, he told them I wanted to make ornaments of (them) and that I

wished to get some with hair on also. This was quite sufficient for them to know, and afterwards I could not get within speaking distance of them.

Older Native Americans will find the disregard of personal sentiment and religious beliefs displayed here, and the resort to power relationships instead of understanding, painfully familiar. Archaeologists may find in the incident a none-too-welcome heritage.

As for the editing, Busch's lack of close familiarity with local history is occasionally evident in transcriptions or annotations: a minor criticism, however, since for most readers Phelps' text will stand on its own merits. Busch's introduction, on the other hand, contributes an excellent biography of Phelps and an interesting discussion of the relationship between Phelps' description of the hide and tallow trade and that of Dana (1840), who preceded him to California five years earlier.

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