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Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

Raab, Cassidy, yatsko, and Howard: California Maritime Archaeology: A San Clemente Island Perspective

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1q73k510>

Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 31(1)

ISSN

0191-3557

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Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed

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California Maritime Archaeology: A San Clemente Island Perspective

L. Mark Raab, Jim Cassidy, Andrew Yatsko,
and William J. Howard. Altamira Press, Lanham, MD,
2009. xix+ 270 pp. \$70.00 (hardcover).

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As the title suggests, this book provides a synthesis of the spectacular 9,000-year archaeological record of San Clemente Island. San Clemente Island is the most southerly and remote of the eight Channel Islands, and is located approximately 50 miles from the mainland. In stark contrast to the rich kelp forests that surround much of the island, its dominant characteristic is the semi-arid, rock-strewn landscape, interspersed with sparse vegetation. Exempt from the ravages of burrowing animals, San Clemente's site deposits allow researchers to reconstruct cultural patterns with a comparatively higher degree of detail, confidence, and chronological resolution than on mainland California. A combination of adequate funding, a long-term effective management program, a rich archaeological record, and exceptional preservation has truly created a "California Galapagos" for the study of coastal prehistory.

The purpose of the book is to summarize the data from two decades of research on fundamental topics central to the study of island and coastal archaeology. One of the greatest contributions the authors make is compiling details from a wide range of archaeological

sources, including field schools, Cultural Resource Management (CRM) projects, grants, and academic masters theses and dissertations. Mark Raab and his co-authors argue that traditional theories about the marginal value of maritime resources, as well as expectations of linear cultural development, continue to prevail, and in response they posit new insights on the origins of social complexity. They propose to simultaneously consider how the compiled data relate to regional trends that characterize the prehistory of the California Bight, while also emphasizing the influence of local variability.

The book is organized and cohesive, maintaining a logical approach with obvious ties among the five sections and 12 chapters. Mark Raab and Andrew Yatsko set the stage in a thematic introduction to the impressive archaeological record that includes 2,500 known prehistoric archaeological sites and over 400 radiocarbon dates. The second chapter provides relevant information on the environmental context of San Clemente Island, in particular noting the paucity of freshwater sources and the lack of native terrestrial mammals of economic significance. It would have been helpful if there had been detailed maps of the island at a scale that identified key place names and the location of sites discussed in the text, which would have aided in appreciating the island's unique landscape. Chapter 3 presents a detailed review of the history of archaeological research on the island and of the cultural history of the Island Gabrielino. This section also illustrates the effective implementation of the island's CRM program and its partnership with universities, which has proven to be a successful avenue for integrating research and resource management.

Parts II through IV constitute a chronological presentation of data and interpretations on eight specific research topics related to maritime adaptations and the emergence of social complexity. In the Early Holocene section, Mark Raab, Jim Cassidy, and William Howard focus on data from the 9,000 cal B.P. occupation at Eel Point (CA-SCLI-43) to expand upon the development of early open-ocean Chumash and Gabrielino watercraft and dolphin hunting (Chapters 4 and 5). The Middle Holocene chapters introduce evidence of house structures that suggest early residential sedentism at the Eel Point and Nursery (CA-SCLI-1215) sites, and *Olivella* grooved rectangular bead data illustrating participation in an expansive regional exchange network “corridor” (Chapters 6 and 7). The Late Holocene chapters begin with Raab’s review of models of cultural change, previously published in *Prehistoric California: Archaeology and the Myth of Paradise* (Rabb and Jones 2004), that are especially relevant to the San Clemente Island subsistence data (Chapter 8). Andrew Yatsko and Mark Raab devote the last three chapters to discussing the devastating effects of the Medieval Climatic Crisis drought intervals on island settlement patterns (Chapter 9), a comparison of evidence on the rise of social complexity between the Northern and Southern Channel Islands (Chapter 10), and the impacts of European diseases that decimated island populations and resulted in ideological shifts (Chapter 11).

The authors conclude the book with a review of the primary research topics presented and an optimistic view of future work. Based on the information presented, the authors state that the traditional paradigms of maritime prehistory are founded on a view of progressive cultural evolution or “coastlines last,” and call for new models of how North America’s coastlines were settled based on multiple lines of evidence. Although the research presented within the book provides a great deal of information relevant to our understanding of coastal cultures and the development of social complexity, I do not believe that the findings from San Clemente Island represent a “new paradigm.” Chertkoff and Chertkoff (1984) and Moratto (1984) are provided as primary references for modeling maritime cultural developments throughout the book, with a limited incorporation of data from more current literature. A significant body of research on the Pacific coast, and particularly on

the California Channel Islands, has accumulated in the 25 years since these seminal studies were published, research in which archaeologists have agreed on the value of coastal and island ecosystems to prehistoric hunter-fisher-gatherers. The interpretations presented in the book would have benefited from an incorporation of a more thorough treatment of this recent body of work into the existing San Clemente Island synthesis.

Although research avenues presented in this book may require additional information, it also appears that many questions can be addressed by making good use of the remarkable existing data sets from San Clemente Island and the Northern Channel Islands. In particular, the authors give limited explicit attention to summarizing the abundant subsistence data available, which would have provided significant information on subsistence change and indications of paleoenvironmental fluctuations. Many of the patterns of exploitation focus on data from the trans-Holocene sequence from the Eel Point and Nursery sites. A temporal summary of the shellfish and vertebrate analyses from a comprehensive site sample would provide a foundation for understanding long-term inter- and intra-island dietary changes. The evidence of Eel Point dolphin hunting could be further explored, for example, by utilizing comparative data from other Channel Islands, specifically the Punta Arena site (CA-SCRI-109) on Santa Cruz Island and the Little Harbor site (CA-SCAI -17) on Santa Catalina Island, where relatively intensive emphasis on dolphin hunting also occurred between 6,300–5,300 cal B.P. (Glassow 2004, 2005; Glassow et al. 2008). All three sites are situated close to steep-sided submarine canyons, attractive to dolphins, and similar watercraft would have been required to procure the species. However, based on the low human population and the limited materials available for building a sufficient number of boats, it is uncertain whether the herding techniques employed in the Solomon Islands today were also possible here, as the authors suggest. Additional corroborating evidence would further develop this argument.

The diachronic importance of marine fish to the overall diet of site occupants is also not clear. Only the Eel Point marine fish remains are summarized in terms of density per cubic meter in Chapter 8. Without comprehensive data from additional sites, it is difficult to understand changes in the abundance of fish remains

and the proportions of major fish taxa represented among those remains. That information is fundamental to identifying patterns related to the development of fisheries over time and reconstructing the exploitation of the prehistoric marine habitat. It is therefore impossible to relate the changes seen on San Clemente Island to other island data sets from the last 50 years. Such information would allow an interesting analysis of the temporal distribution of large pelagic fish remains (e.g., swordfish, tuna) and help researchers evaluate the technological development of watercraft that the authors consider a factor in the rise of early sociopolitical complexity. Des Lauriers' (2005, 2006) research on Terminal Pleistocene and Early Holocene fisheries on Isla Cedros, for instance, provides significant information that should have been considered.

The authors devote considerable attention to the rise of social complexity among the Chumash and Island Gabrielino populations. While it is clear there were different trajectories, the determinants of complexity do have to include a consideration of environmental factors, as well as relations with mainland populations, that are still poorly understood. San Clemente Island (like the Southern Channel Islands in general) does not appear to have had the large contact-period population and apparently complex socio-political organization found on the Northern Channel Islands. With regard to the terrestrial environment, I wonder whether the paucity of freshwater sources (i.e., only one exists near Eel Point) and the limitations of plant resources contributed to this pattern. Future emphasis on paleoethnobotanical research would identify the importance of dietary plant resources and provide additional evidence of basketry, such as that found at Big Dog Cave (CA-SCLI-119). Despite San Clemente's relative isolation, the authors provide strong evidence of its local participation in the Middle Holocene exchange of *Olivella* grooved rectangular beads in a trade "corridor" more than 1,000 km. in length. Although part of this expansive network, it is unclear if the island occupants were manufacturing the beads for mainland or inter-island export. It is also unclear what people were importing to the island (i.e., terrestrial mammals, plant materials, toolstone, etc.) and where these resources may have originated. Similarly, although linked by trade to the Great Basin, there is no mention of obsidian sourcing and hydration

studies on recovered artifacts that would have provided opportunities for the evaluation of mobility and exchange through time.

Clearly, *California Maritime Archaeology: A San Clemente Island Perspective* provides a foundation for future archaeological and historic-ecological research on this amazing island, and is a significant contribution to our understanding of prehistoric maritime hunter-gatherers. The book is an important reference for anyone interested in the archaeology and prehistory of California, and it is required reading for island and coastal researchers. It should be emphasized, however, that many of the arguments presented in the book have been further enriched and expanded upon since publication. This book should serve as a contribution to the literature on the Northern and Southern Channel Islands that will stimulate still more dialogue and collaboration between researchers, thus adding to our better understanding of hunter-gatherer cultures in coastal California and beyond.

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Archaeology Without Limits: Papers in Honor of Clement W. Meighan

Brian D. Dillon and Matthew A. Boxt (eds.)
Lancaster, California: Labyrinthos, 2005. 492 pp. paperback, illustrations, bibliography. ISBN 0-911437-12-6. \$89.95

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This volume is a Festschrift for Clement W. Meighan, with chapters written by a diverse range of anthropologists and archaeologists whose lives he touched as a scholar, teacher, and field researcher. Beginning with his archaeological studies at U.C. Berkeley in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and continuing as a professor and administrator at U.C.L.A. from 1952 until his retirement in 1991, Meighan has been widely recognized for the significant contributions he made to the developing fields of California and West Mexico archaeology. What is less known about his professional trajectory is the breadth of archaeological work he conducted in other areas of Mexico and in various regions of the world, including Chile, Peru, Nubia, Guam, Costa Rica, and Syria. In organizing and editing the Festschrift, Dillon and Boxt have maintained the far-reaching and somewhat eclectic interests of Meighan by including a diverse assortment of papers that concern archaeological investigations from around the world.

The volume is divided into two primary sections: an introductory segment pertaining to the life and times of Clement Meighan, followed by a much longer section containing the papers written in his honor. The introductory section opens with a touching tribute by Brian Dillon that describes the career, interests, and personality traits of this tireless researcher, from his early school days, through his active duty during World War II,

and on to his years at U.C. Berkeley and U.C.L.A. A brief retrospective by H. B. Nicholson follows, with some insights about Meighan's work in Mexico. The final piece of the introductory material is a complete bibliography that lists the more than 300 published works by Meighan, including his film credits.

The majority of the 492-page volume consists of 28 chapters written specifically for the Festschrift by Meighan's colleagues, friends, and former students working around the world. This section is organized by region, beginning with North America (12 chapters), the Caribbean (1 chapter), South America (3 chapters), Mesoamerica (8 chapters), Europe (1 chapter), Pacific Islands (2 chapters), and the Middle East (1 chapter). Given the areal focus of the *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology*, my comments will pertain to the initial twelve chapters that focus on California, Great Basin, and Baja California archaeology and ethnohistory.

As with most Festschrift volumes, there is no central research question, theoretical theme, or areal focus integrating the various chapters. Most of them are solid, empirically-oriented studies that describe the results of survey and excavation work or the analysis of archaeological materials—the kinds of investigations that would have pleased Meighan. The quality of the papers varies somewhat, ranging from excellent syntheses of recent field work and cutting-edge analyses of artifact types to an original version of a paper submitted in one of Meighan's graduate seminars. While there is no thematic structure to the volume, the twelve North American chapters may be divided into four groupings that reflect Meighan's interests and expertise. These include papers on rock art, the analysis of archaeological materials, regional syntheses, and historical archaeology.

Rock Art Studies. Meighan had a long-term interest in documenting and studying rock art sites, which led to his co-founding (with C. William Clewlow) of the