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### Title

Wiberg: *The Santa Rita Village Mortuary Complex (CA-ALA-413): Evidence and Implications of a Meganos Intrusion*

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### Author

Fenenga, Gerrit L

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*The Santa Rita Village Mortuary Complex (CA-ALA-413): Evidence and Implications of a Meganos Intrusion.* Randy S. Wiberg. Coyote Press Archives of California Prehistory, No. 18, 1988, vi + 99 pp., 8 tables, 35 figures, appendix, \$5.95 (paper).

Reviewed by:

**GERRIT L. FENENGA**

Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, California State Univ., Bakersfield, CA 93311-1099.

This report is the only published account of a significant archaeological discovery made in the city of Pleasanton, California, in the Amador Valley in 1978. It is a revised version of Wiberg's Master's thesis at San Francisco State University and represents a theoretical analysis and discussion of portions of the mortuary assemblage found at CA-ALA-413. This site was discovered accidentally while trenching for a sewer line by the Livermore-Amador Valley Water Management Agency. Although the project was partially funded by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and implemented by the California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), the resulting archaeological work conducted by Holman and Associates was entirely of a salvage nature. Unfortunately, the archaeology appears to have been dictated more by the interests and goals of the SWRCB and the "local" Native American group, the Ohlone Cultural Association (OCA), than by scientific interests. As a consequence, this project represents a case where cultural resource management is clearly not archaeology. Some 64 human burials and their associations were "salvaged." Many of the graves contained associated goods, including one individual who was buried with more than 28,000 *Olivella*

beads. At the time of the field work, there were promises of detailed analyses and publication of the final results, but to my knowledge, none of this has occurred and the materials are now reburied.

Wiberg attempts to use data collected from the salvage work at the Santa Rita Village site to present evidence for a Meganos intrusion into the Livermore-Amador Valley and to examine evidence for social ranking in the mortuary complex, with the intent of relating these findings to previous research and discussing their implications for central California prehistory. His report, although well written and clearly organized, is inherently flawed due to the data upon which it is based. This is anticipated by Wiberg himself, who points out some of the problems, including: (1) a lack of understanding of spatial dimensions of the cemetery; (2) an inability to relate the recovered sample to the site universe; and (3) the large number of disturbed and incompletely exposed burials. To these I would add the absence of basic information regarding the context of the cemetery complex itself, poor chronological control, the lack of an explicit scientific approach to the problem, and a generally weak understanding of both California prehistory and the analysis of social behavior from mortuary evidence. In Wiberg's own words, his resulting interpretations "are mostly subjective impressions" (p. 48).

The idea of a Meganos "culture" and its eventual "intrusion" from the Delta region of central California into the San Francisco Bay region during the Middle Period of central California prehistory was first proposed by Bennyhoff (1968). Bennyhoff subsequently elaborated on this concept (1987), and both of his papers on

the subject have recently been published (Bennyhoff 1994a, 1994b). The Meganos Aspect (as it was originally termed) was hypothesized by Bennyhoff as a fusion of the Windmill and Berkeley patterns into a distinct culture of long duration (Bennyhoff 1994a:7). This culture originated in the Stockton District of the Delta during the Early/Middle Period Transition, or roughly between 500 and 200 B.C. During the Late Phase of the Middle Period, Meganos expanded into the Walnut Creek Valley and down San Pablo Creek. By the Terminal Phase of the Middle Period, this expansion had reached the Livermore Valley and the southern end of the San Francisco Bay (Bennyhoff 1994b:83). The following Middle/Late Period Transition, roughly dating to around A.D. 700 to 900, was a time of great change in central California prehistory, and population movements resulted in the Meganos people retreating back into the Delta and the northern end of the San Joaquin Valley. There they either amalgamated with, or became, the Northern Valley Yokuts. The latest Meganos cemeteries date to Early Phase 1 of the Late Period and are documented at the Cardinal site (CA-SJO-154) in Stockton and the Wolfsen Site (CA-MER-220) near Los Banos.

The Meganos culture originally was identified upon the basis of sites that were recognized as atypical Middle Period central California sites in that the cemeteries were located away from living areas, and ventrally extended primary inhumations were the dominant mode of interment. These are characteristic traits of the earlier Windmill Pattern. Other aspects of the mortuary complex are more reflective of the Middle Period Berkeley Pattern, notably burial orientation and the frequency and nature of mortuary offerings. The pronounced westerly orientation of Windmill burials is not evident in Meganos cemeteries where burials are oriented in all directions, as is typical for the Berkeley Pattern. Grave goods are generally less frequent in Berkeley Pattern cemeteries, and there is less

emphasis on ground stone artifacts. When offerings do occur, they tend to be shell, chipped stone, or bone. Bone artifacts are rare in Windmill sites. Meganos cemeteries in the Stockton District are quite impoverished, while those to the west and south tend to have more associated offerings.

With the discovery of the Santa Rita Village site (CA-ALA-413) and other recently investigated sites containing similar mortuary assemblages, Bennyhoff came to recognize that there was more variability within the Meganos culture than he had originally identified (Bennyhoff 1994b: 83-89). In some ways, this pattern reflects the same developments that led to dissatisfaction with the original Central California Taxonomic scheme.

Archaeological entities identified in one area of California will become increasingly difficult to recognize as distance increases. In the case of the Meganos culture, more and more unique traits appeared as additional sites were discovered. Add a temporal dimension to all of this, with associated technological and behavioral developments, and eventually you end up with something entirely different than what you started with. The Santa Rita Village mortuary complex contained some elements consistent with the Meganos culture, notably ventral extensions with a nonwesterly orientation, but also many elements that are quite different. One of these elements is interment within an apparent habitation site. Bennyhoff stated it seemed "more like a campsite" (1994b:88), and Wiberg used the term "village" in his title, and then says "whether the cemetery is part of or contiguous to a village site is not altogether clear" (p. 7). Other elements include substantial quantities of grave goods, pre-interment fires, and a number of unique artifact forms. In spite of these differences, Bennyhoff (1994b) clearly felt that the site was within the parameters of his hypothesized Meganos culture and that it provided support for his model of Meganos expansion.

Wiberg's paper does little more than reiterate Bennyhoff and certainly does not critically evaluate the merit of the Meganos hypothesis, the meaning of observed differences between CA-ALA-413 and other Meganos sites, nor how the evidence from the site reflects on the hypothesized expansion of Meganos during the Late Middle Period or its subsequent demise. His discussion on the dating of the site is unconvincing beyond the obvious fact that the site has a Middle Period assemblage. Temporal data are provided by four radiocarbon dates, stratigraphic placement of burials, and typological analysis of some of the associated grave goods. Unfortunately, a portion of the "artifactual data suitable for cross-dating are available but . . . an in-depth assessment of these data is beyond the scope of this study" (p. 33). The radiocarbon dates were run on "charcoal or burnt bone," but which material produced which date is not specified (p. 8). One of the dates apparently was obtained from a hearth feature associated with a burial and another from charcoal retrieved by screening the matrix surrounding another burial (p. 33). The remaining dates are not specifically discussed. Wiberg identifies two temporal components to the site primarily upon the basis of the deep occurrence of fully flexed burials and the occurrence of some graves with Early Phase Middle Period bead lots (p. 35). He also suggests an occupational hiatus during the Intermediate Phase due to the absence of pure saddle *Olivella* bead lots. The majority of the cemetery is assigned to the Late Phase of the Middle Period.

There is a number of problems with the dating of this site. The stratigraphic arguments are not substantiated since there were extended burials at depths "equal to or slightly below the flexed burials" (p. 31). In addition, this site was buried under up to a meter of sterile sedimentary deposits and the original ground surface was not clearly identified. The issue of burial posture and antiquity is clearly ambiguous in the

recovered sample. The nature of the sampling and lack of complete analysis prohibits any meaningful discussion of the typological dating. The radiocarbon dates probably reflect some part of the use of the site, but exactly what part is not clear. The matrix date, for example, may be entirely unrelated to the associated burial.

Wiberg's theoretical and analytical treatment of the subject of social ranking in central California prehistory is no more enlightening than his contribution to our understanding of the Meganos intrusion. Quite frankly, there is nothing new or particularly interesting in his discussion of this subject. Most California archaeologists realize that by Late Middle times, we can anticipate the differential distribution of grave offerings in cemeteries and that these probably are associated with the kinds of social distinctions between individuals, families, and social institutions seen ethnographically. There is essentially nothing in this study that has not been addressed by other researchers who have investigated this issue in the Santa Barbara Channel, the Sierra foothills, or the San Francisco Bay. In fact, it is amazing to me that Wiberg even attempted to study this topic with the data collected at this particular site. Assuming the aging, sexing, and basic recording of the burial data are correct (a critical subject not addressed in this review), the history of previous research in this realm has, if nothing else, pointed out the necessity of adequate sampling, the essential nature of spatial information, and the need for accurate temporal control in a study of this sort. The archaeological investigations at this site clearly fall short of these requirements.

This report might be of value to individuals with a general interest in Middle Period prehistory in central California. Since it is the only published documentation from an important site attributed to the Meganos culture, I recommend it to those concerned with this issue. It is reasonably inexpensive and contains a few useful

depictions of some of the recovered artifactual material. There are also good illustrations of some of the burials. The burial data are summarized in tabular form and might be used for reference or comparison. These data should be used with caution, however, since their validity cannot be assessed within the context of this document. For example, the criteria used to determine age and sex of individual skeletons are not presented or discussed. Bennyhoff (1994b: 88) has referred to confusing terminology relating to burial posture in which Wiberg identifies semi-extended burials as flexed. I would not recommend this volume to scholars concerned with utilizing mortuary evidence for reconstructing social organization, except as an example of how not to do it.

Bennyhoff's (1994b:81) hypothesis that the Meganos culture was produced by intermarriage between Windmill and Berkeley Pattern peoples is an intriguing and testable proposition. Genetic links between these populations might be distinguishable using nonmetric skeletal traits and mitochondrial or other DNA comparisons. The Santa Rita Village site archaeological project serves as a lesson in the potential loss of valuable data through incomplete analyses and contemporary reburial practices in the context of an opportunity to address meaningful anthropological problems. After all, the origins of California's native peoples remain as perhaps the single most important contribution that California archaeologists can make. If Bennyhoff and Wiberg are correct, the most likely descendants of the individuals buried at CA-ALA-413 will be found among the remaining Yokuts in the northern San Joaquin Valley.

#### REFERENCES

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#### *Backtracking: Ancient Art of Southern Idaho.*

Max G. Pavesic and William Studebaker. Idaho Museum of Natural History, 69 pp., 1 map, 57 figs. (42 in color); with a foreword by Catherine S. Fowler, \$21.95 (paper).

*Reviewed by:*

#### **DONALD R. TUOHY**

Dept. of Anthropology, Nevada State Museum, Carson City, NV 89710.

This all-too-short book was derived from an exhibit presented by the Herrett Museum in Twin Falls, designed by Bill West, under Museum Director, James C. Woods. The book, which has the same name as the exhibit and the museum catalog, has 69 pages, a map of southern Idaho, a poem in the Preface, and four chapters. The poem "Backtracking" was written by William Studebaker, as were chapters 3 and 4. The first two chapters were authored by