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Fell: *Saga America*

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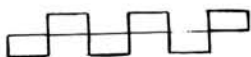
Thomas, David Hurst

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The human sciences today are the poorer, not because of what Xántus did, but because of what he failed to do.



Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History.

Robert F. Heizer and Theodora Kroeber, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, 242 pp., \$17.50 (hardbound).

Reviewed by PATTI JOHNSON

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The story of Ishi, the last Yahi Indian, who was discovered in northern California in 1911, has been told many times. Besides scholarly works on the subject, the public's interest has been kindled by presentations on television, by a conference devoted entirely to Ishi and his unique situation, and particularly by Theodora Kroeber's fascinating biography *Ishi in Two Worlds*. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to see yet another volume on Ishi which appears to cover the same ground. The purpose of this recent work is to present "a collection of nearly forty original documents that concern Ishi." Several of the earlier articles reprinted here provide information on the Yana and Yahi Indians and a few appeared many years after Ishi's death. About half of the articles were originally published in newspapers and magazines and follow his discovery and subsequent years in civilization until his death in 1916. There are five maps to assist the reader in understanding Yana territory (of which the Yahi were a part), language distributions, and Ishi's understanding of his own region as translated on paper. A number of good quality photographs accompany the text; most of these are of Ishi, the Mill Creek area where he lived, and artifacts owned or made by him.

Had this book not been preceded by Theodora Kroeber's previous work, *Ishi the Last Yahi* would have been a particularly informative effort. However, most if not all the sources are referenced in the earlier biography; many of the photographs and maps are the same. While the documents reprinted in *Ishi the Last Yahi* are not commonly found, they are certainly available in public and academic libraries. Considering the substantial earlier literature on Ishi, and Theodora Kroeber's thorough biography, there seems to have been little purpose for the publication of this volume.



Saga America. Barry Fell. New York: Times Books, 1980, 425 pp., \$15.00 (hardback).

Reviewed by DAVID HURST THOMAS

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Barry Fell has really done it this time! When he published *America B.C.* (Fell 1976), I took a pass. Of course, there are profound difficulties with Fell's elephantine thesis that the ancient Celts overran the New World three thousand years ago, but after all, Fell's sites were in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and Vermont. And he only discussed the eastern tribes, like the Algonquins and the Iroquois. It seemed sufficient at the time to leave the repudiation of such obvious drivel to our colleagues in the eastern United States and the Old World. I will admit, however, to a certain gratification when these colleagues demolished Fell's silly proposals (see Ross and Reynolds 1978 and McKusick 1979 for references).

But Fell's newest effort, *Saga America*, invades our own territory. I was first attracted

to the cover, which contained a squiggly line drawing with the caption "The Oldest Known Map of North America." Nothing too eschatological here, at least not by the standards of *America B.C.* Upon closer examination the squiggles appeared strangely familiar. Then I read the book jacket: "this map, found in Nevada, is, according to the author, an Arabic copy inscribed by trans-Pacific settlers on rock *ca.* 800 A.D., copied from a Libyan original drawn *ca.* the first century B.C." My God, Fell's done it now. Arabs in Nevada in A.D. 800?

But there is more—Fell can read the rock art. The Great Basin-Libyan script talks about the Island of "Hawa" (which is, it turns out, also Arabic for "wind"). The "map" shows first of all that there is no northwest passage (and to think of all the time wasted by explorers like Sir Francis Drake and Martin Frobisher). And do you know what else? In the middle of the continent, according to this map, is another Libyan word, MR, which means "land of the other side of the sea," suggested as possibly the origin of the word "America."

According to Fell, Great Basin petroglyphs are not the rock art of the prehistoric American Indian. The inscriptions are the most ancient maps in America, epics carved in stone to record the "great navigation." The petroglyphs, previously mistaken by archaeologists as "Indian doodles," are actually stylized ships, sometimes with Arabic or Libyan lettering. I am really embarrassed to have spent all last summer digging at Hidden Cave without even realizing that the Grimes petroglyph area contained thousand year-old Arabic script!

Did you know that the Inyo County petroglyphs were actually set down as instructions for prehistoric children, probably in a special summer session? Here the prehistoric Basin folk learned that the earth is a globe, encircled by an equator. They also learned how flat maps can be related to the grid originally established by the Libyan scientist Eratosthenes. Fell tells

all. Or take the East Walker River site. Here, recorded in stone, are instructions about how to trim a ship's sails in order to achieve a proper course in the wind (and in the middle of the desert, no less). The Lagomarsino site is actually written in Kufic Arabic and discusses how to convert spherical azimuths to plane surfaces.

I could continue, but will refrain. I discuss Fell's book in these pages in order to bring it to the attention of the serious western archaeologist. All of us are tempted to dismiss books like this with a sneer, and in so doing, we do our profession a disservice. Of course, Barry Fell is a crackpot, but not everybody shares our opinion. In fact, if we were to take a poll, I'm convinced that more of the public would believe him rather than doubt him.

Archaeologists are dutybound to look into publications of this sort. The lay public is too often content to pick up books like this and swallow all that's offered. After all, it is written by an Emeritus Harvard Professor (never mind that he's a marine biologist). Barry Fell is just one example of the enterprising author-archaeologist who has cracked the bookstands of this nation. Books like this grab people and—one way or another—it is this fascination with the past which pays the bills in archaeology. I think we must register the enthusiasm as a positive sign, then attempt to educate rather than simply to ignore.

Although I almost gag on the words, I honestly suggest *Saga America* as required reading for every archaeologist west of the Rockies. Only by keeping our archaeological house clean can we hope to convince an interested public that the archaeological record is worth saving from dams, from strip mines, and from underground firecrackers.

I do think it is reprehensible that Times Books, a division of the New York Times Book Company, insists on publishing such fodder, but it is easy to understand why. The book jacket boasts that the American Booksellers

Association presented *America B.C.*, Fell's first archaeology (?) book, to the White House as one of the best 250 books published between 1973 and 1977.

Can you believe that? The White House! Anybody who thinks that archaeologists should adopt a policy of "benign neglect" toward crackpot archaeology must be joking. Books like these must serve as barometers to measure the extent which we have failed to communicate with the public. Had we better explained the archaeology of the American west, fewer people would have fallen prey to operators like Barry Fell.

My advice is, by all means, to read *Saga America*. But try to borrow a copy; don't buy one.

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Kumeyaay Pottery—Paddle and Anvil Techniques of Southern California. Gena R. Van Camp. Socorro, New Mexico: Ballena Press *Anthropological Papers* No. 15, 1979, 104 pp., 15 illustrations, 3 maps, \$6.95 (paper).

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The success of a paper depends on many factors, but the most important may be whether or not it accomplishes its stated goals. Van Camp states that the objectives of her paper are

... to examine the external characteristics of Southern California prehistoric and protohistoric pottery, to show how it was made, to outline its distribution as discovered by archaeology, to compare it to neighboring groups, and to chart the social forces which might have shaped its distribution and development [page 11].

While it is reasonable to assume that Van Camp invested a considerable amount of time examining the San Diego Museum of Man ceramic collections, in my opinion the paper fails to achieve any of the other stated objectives.

Reasons for the failure of this most promising study are manifold, but certainly include aspects of the following:

1. Poor organization of the material permits the Kumeyaay Pottery discussion (which should be the central theme) to get lost in a sea of generally unrelated comments;

2. The discussion of the technical aspects of ceramic technology is an awkwardly presented paraphrasing of Rogers (1936) and Shepard (1956), and adds little to our understanding of the subject matter. Rogers' monograph and Shepard's detailed and very adequate study of ceramic technology and classification are both readily available;