

UC Merced

The Journal of California Anthropology

Title

Some New Observations Relative to the Indigenous Inhabitants of La Paz, Baja California Sur

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6tj2t46x>

Journal

The Journal of California Anthropology, 2(2)

Author

Mathes, W Michael

Publication Date

1975-12-01

Peer reviewed

Some New Observations Relative to the Indigenous Inhabitants of La Paz, Baja California Sur

W. MICHAEL MATHES

The ethnographic division of Baja California Sur has been universally based upon the territorial extension of the two basic languages of the region, Guaycura and Pericú (Massey 1949; Jiménez Moreno 1974), heretofore derived from Jesuit missionary reports and observations made between 1684 and 1767. Such documents have served to establish the shores of the Bahía de La Paz within the linguistic and cultural extension of the Guaycura (Waicura) group. A detailed study of earlier observations by Spanish navigators to the area between 1596 and 1684, however, may well indicate that such was not always the case, and that demographic change occurred in the La Paz region between its initial discovery in 1535 and its settlement by Jesuit missionaries in 1720.

As a general rule, a sociocultural group does not refer to itself among its own members using a proper name, but rather tends to employ the first person plural, and, in the case of most indigenous peoples, a term which signified "the people," "the beings," or something similar, was used as a proper noun to refer to the group. In the case of indigenous proper names of reference to another group, the term usually is one which distinguishes the other

group linguistically, socially, or culturally. An immediate example of this is the case of the indigenous inhabitants of Loreto, who referred to themselves as Monquí but were called Edú by other Cochimí groups (Barco 1973), a word signifying "people of another language."

The inhabitants of the region of La Paz between 1596 and 1668 were in a constant state of war with the indigenous group inland (Vizcaíno 1596; Nava 1632; Ortega 1634; Lucenilla 1668), and in 1632, 1633, 1634, and 1668 they informed Spanish navigators that the name of the group with whom they were at war was "Guaicuro" (Nava 1632; Ortega 1632, 1633, 1634; Lucenilla 1668). This use of a proper name for the opposition indicates a distinction between the inhabitants of La Paz and the interior group, as well as the existence of a word, "Guaicuro," which had a particular significance within the language of the inhabitants of La Paz. During this same period, in 1644, Alonso González Barriga, a captain in the employ of Pedro Porter y Casanate, reported that the peoples contacted by him at Cabo San Lucas stated that they were at war with the group inland whom they called "Guaicuro" (Porter 1645).

From these independent accounts, for

González Barriga never entered the region of La Paz, we may conclude that the indigenous peoples of La Paz and Cabo San Lucas verbally distinguished themselves from the group occupying the interior, and, more significant, the name applied to this group to the interior was the same, "Guaicuro," in both locations, over 200 kilometers apart.

It is historically confirmed that the indigenous peoples of Cabo San Lucas, Isla Espíritu Santo, and Isla San José belonged to the group known as Pericú, which occupied these areas as late as the eighteenth century (Bravo 1970; Barco 1973). In 1634, the inhabitants of La Paz maintained cordial relations with the peoples of Isla Espíritu Santo and Isla San José and spoke the same language as these insular peoples (Ortega 1634). In the same year, the inhabitants of Isla del Carmen were reported as speaking a distinct language from those of Isla San José, an observation which confirms the capacity of the observer to distinguish between indigenous languages in that, as stated, the inhabitants of Isla San José were known to speak Pericú, while those of Isla del Carmen spoke Cochimí (Ortega 1634; Barco 1973). Furthermore, the word used to signify "pearl" by the peoples of Isla Espíritu Santo, Bahía de la Ventana, and La Paz was *boo* (Ortega 1634; Carbonel 1635; Lucenilla 1668), and the word for "sit down" in Bahía de la Ventana, Isla Espíritu Santo, and Cabo San Lucas was *vtere* (Nava 1632; Ascensión 1632; Carbonel 1635).

The foregoing clearly indicates that, in all probability, the inhabitants of La Paz, Isla San José, Isla Espíritu Santo, Bahía de la Ventana, and Cabo San Lucas spoke the same language, that known historically as Pericú.

In light of these conclusions, which contradict reports of the Jesuit mission period and the studies based upon them, it would be well to consider the following, offered as a probable solution to the dilemma, again based upon documentation from the pre-mission period.

It is historically known that the peoples of

La Paz between 1596 and 1668 were considered peaceful and friendly (Vizcaíno 1596; Ortega 1632; Nava 1632; Porter 1645; Lucenilla 1668), and that the group known as Guaycura was considered bellicose and aggressive (Vizcaíno 1596; Ortega 1634; Porter 1645; Atondo 1684; Baegert 1942; Barco 1973; Bravo 1970; Taraval 1931). Furthermore, it is historically known that for many years a state of war existed between the inhabitants of La Paz, considered to be the defenders, and the Guaycura to the interior, considered to be the aggressors (Nava 1632; Ortega 1634; Porter 1645; Lucenilla 1668).

The foregoing notwithstanding, in the eighteenth century Jesuit missionaries considered the inhabitants of La Paz to be bellicose, and they referred to them as Guaycura, stating that they were at war with the Pericú peoples of Isla Espíritu Santo and Isla San José (Bravo 1970; Barco 1973).

Thus, granting full faith and credit to the reports of sixteenth and seventeenth century navigators as well as those of eighteenth century Jesuit missionaries, it becomes apparent that a drastic linguistic and cultural change took place in the region of La Paz between 1668 and the establishment of the Jesuit mission there in 1720, for in the latter year the inhabitants of La Paz spoke a different language from that spoken on Isla San José and Isla Espíritu Santo, they did not maintain cordial relations with the insular peoples, and they were not considered peaceful or friendly. Considering that an aggressor group against one which by nature is peaceful generally has succeeded in defeating the latter, and that during many centuries there was continuous demographic movement on the peninsula, the following conclusions may be considered:

1. The inhabitants of La Paz, Isla Espíritu Santo, Isla San José, and the coast of the Gulf of California to Cabo San Lucas, between the years 1596 and 1668, were of the group known as Pericú.

2. During these years the Pericú group was subject to constant aggression by the Guaycura group, occupants of the interior.

3. At some point between 1668 and 1720 this aggression achieved its desired end, permitting the occupation of the shores of the Bahía de La Paz by the Guaycuras and forcing the retreat of the Pericúes from that region to Isla Espíritu Santo, Isla San José, and the region of Cabo San Lucas, where they were found during the mission period, still in conflict with the more bellicose Guaycuras.

*University of San Francisco
San Francisco*

NOTE: An earlier version of this paper entitled "Los Habitantes de La Paz Eran Pericúes y no Guaycuras," appeared in El Tiempo de La Paz, II, nos. 581, 582, and 583 (June 27, 28, and 29, 1975).

REFERENCES

- Ascensión, Antonio de la
1632 (See Mathes, Californiana I.)
- Atondo y Antillón, Isidro de
1684 (See Mathes, Californiana III.)
- Baegert, Juan Jacobo
1942 Noticias de la Península Americana de California. México: José Porrúa.
- Barco, Miguel del
1973 Historia Natural y Crónica de la Antigua California. Miguel León-Portilla, ed. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Bravo, Jaime
1970 Testimonios Sudcalifornianos. Miguel León-Portilla, ed. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Carbonel de Valenzuela, Esteban
1635 (See Mathes, Californiana II.)
- Jiménez Moreno, Wigberto
1974 Las Lenguas y Culturas Indígenas de Baja California. Calafia 2(5):17-35.
- Lucenilla, Francisco de
1668 (See Mathes, Californiana II.)
- Massey, William C.
1949 Tribes and Languages of Baja California. Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 5:272-307.
- Mathes, W. Michael
1965 Californiana I: Documentos para la Historia de la Demarcación Comercial de California, 1583-1632. Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, Documentos 29, 34, 36, 177.
1970 Californiana II: Documentos para la Historia de la Explotación Comercial de California, 1611-1679. Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, Documentos 34, 35, 37, 46, 94, 105.
1974 Californiana III: Documentos para la Historia de la Transformación Colonizadora de California, 1679-1686. Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, Documento 25.
- Nava, Diego de la
1632 (See Mathes, Californiana II.)
- Ortega, Francisco de
1632-1636 (See Mathes, Californiana II.)
- Porter y Casanate, Pedro
1645 (See Mathes, Californiana II.)
- Taraval, Sigismundo
1931 The Indian Uprising in Lower California. Los Angeles: Quivira Society.
- Vizcaíno, Sebastián
1596 (See Mathes, Californiana I.)