### **UCLA**

# **American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

#### **Title**

The Ohlone Past and Present: Native Americans of the San Francisco Bay Region. Compiled and edited by Lowell John Bean.

### **Permalink**

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7sx1d2q0

### **Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 20(2)

#### ISSN

0161-6463

#### **Author**

Johnson, Troy R.

#### **Publication Date**

1996-03-01

#### DOI

10.17953

# **Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/</a>

have been made of that material over the years. He suggests that the material from the trading post demonstrates that even while the historic Creeks were becoming politically subordinated by Europeans, they "were creatively altering their resilient culture by selectively adopting elements of European material culture and behavior that were especially amenable to reinterpretation" (p. 195).

Ocmulgee Archaeology, 1936–1986, then, is a misleading title. The volume is only peripherally about the excavations that took place at Ocmulgee and even less about the actual data that were recovered. Rather, the volume provides a summary of contemporary research in the Southeast, particularly on the later prehistory of the region, framed in the context of questions raised first in the 1930s. It is not a celebration of Depression-era research in the region; if anything, it makes clear that research at Ocmulgee produced little tangible evidence to inform scholars today. The volume's most profound impact comes in the recognition of the irony that after fifty years of research, after the completion of massive excavations at sites that are constantly referred to in the literature on southeastern prehistory, we find ourselves in the strange situation of knowing more about the peoples who inhabited the Ocmulgee region from small excavations at little-known sites elsewhere than from the excavations in the Ocmulgee region itself. That is not a condemnation of the volume; quite the opposite. The volume offers a sad story that should be a lesson to all of us engaged in archaeological research: We must analyze and publish what we excavate, or all our labor stands to be lost, just as that of the more than eight hundred people who sweated in the heat of Macon summers has been.

Peter N. Peregrine Lawrence University

The Ohlone Past and Present: Native Americans of the San Francisco Bay Region. Compiled and edited by Lowell John Bean. Menlo Park, California: Ballena Press, 1994. 356 pages. \$22.95 paper.

The Ohlone Past and Present presents the papers of the fourth and last of a series of academic conferences sponsored by the C.E. Smith Museum of Anthropology and convened at California State

University, Hayward (CSUH). This conference, held on 14 November 1992, fulfilled a commitment on the part of Lowell John Bean to contribute to the understanding of the Ohlone people and their descendants, who have been almost totally neglected by the scholarly community. Drawing from prehistoric, ethnographic, historic, and contemporary research, *The Ohlone Past and Present* contains eleven of the fourteen conference papers plus an additional paper submitted after the conference. Earlier conferences in the series resulted in the production of two excellent manuscripts, *Seasons of the Kachina* and *California Shamanism*. This anthology is the final manuscript in the series and is a credit to the conference planners, to the presenters, and to Ballena Press for its commitment to publication of important conference proceedings and specifically to the understanding of California's indigenous peoples.

The term *Ohlone* is an incorrect tribal designation, as is the alternate choice of Costanoan, to describe the indigenous people of the San Francisco Bay Area. The Spanish who made contact with the diverse people living on or near the Bay Area coastline called them costenos, or coast-dwellers. This term was later changed to costenas and more recently Costanoan. Based on language similarity, the people and their languages more recently have been called Ohlonean, derived from Ohlone, a term that the descendants of the disparate Bay Area groups used to identify themselves. The term Ohlone is used throughout this book in recognition of its usage by the present-day Bay Area tribes. However, it should be understood that, historically, the various tribes (not triblets) represented some fifty politically autonomous groups ranging in population from fifty to five hundred each, living in permanent communities. Within each tribe were smaller communities that could come and go from the permanent settlement as necessary to acquire food and other necessary resources. Among these tribes, eight linguistically separate groups have been identified: Karkin, Chochenyo, Tamyen, Ramaytush, Awaswas, Mutsun, Rumsen, and Chalon. It is to these people that the authors draw our attention, using mission records of the Hispanic period: births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. Additionally, this collection presents the renewed voice of the Ohlone people as they discuss their culture, prehistory, and contemporarv Ohlone issues.

The opening selection in *The Ohlone Past and Present* was contributed by Alan Brown, a professor of English at Ohio State University. While one might think an English professor out of

Reviews 235

place among anthropologists and ethnohistorians, Brown's translation and analysis of the diaries of Juan Crespí, the chief recorder of the Pedro Fages expedition of 1772, is an excellent use of historical material and serves to remind researchers how much more data are available in diaries and original source materials. Brown compares previously translated and published material to unpublished texts (diaries) of the earliest Spanish period. The richness of the unpublished material is amazing. Citing only a few examples of material available, Brown traces original village sites and sizes and the flora and fauna that made up the Ohlone environment ("they presented us with some wild onions, potatoes, and pieces of featherwork, together with two geese stuffed with straw") and provides statements by the Spanish diarist about "villages that had the usual well made houses," and "very fair-haired, well-bearded heathens who showed so much happiness that they were at a loss how to handle us." According to the diaries, not all Ohlone were pleased to see the Spanish invaders, and "some eight heathens came out to meet us, heavily armed, using various gestures toward us." It is also to Brown that we turn for an explanation of the use of the misnomer *Ohlone*.

A further glimpse into Ohlone life can be found in Breck Parkman's interpretation of the bedrock milling stations found throughout Ohlone ancestral lands. By comparing the dimensions and locations of Ohlone milling stations Parkman, a research associate at the University of California, Berkeley, is able to judge the size of the collecting units (the stations were more likely to have seen communal use during the fall acorn harvest); also he determined that the stations were seasonal in use and that hard grass seed was an important part of the local Ohlone diet. Parkman declares that "hard grass seeds were as important as acorns to the local diet." In conclusion, he states that, although some Ohlone led a sedentary lifestyle, for the Ohlone of the Coyote Hills area the seasonal round was an important and effective way of life. The overall analysis is that the Ohlone made a "successful adaptation to a rich but expansive environment."

Jeff Fentress, a graduate student in the Anthropology Department, University of Oregon, dispels the commonly held belief that no indigenous rock art exists in the Bay Area. He discusses forty-one possible sites, of which he personally has visited thirty-eight in current-day Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Fentress explores four distinct types of early art work: the "cupules," which are "purposefully made depressions on rock surfaces;

"PCNs," or pecked curved nucleated petroglyphs; pictographs; and petroglyphs. All four of these prehistoric rock art styles are present in traditional Ohlone lands, states Fentress, and "present a variety of form and context. No one set pattern emerges." Fentress acknowledges that the term *rock art* is subject to debate and interpretation and that prehistoric forms may not relate to modern conceptions of "art." Still Fentress emphasizes that, without a doubt, the rock art of Alameda and Contra Costa counties were an effort by the original people to communicate through signs, and that they grow in complexity as the researcher looks closer into form and pattern.

Beverly Ortiz provides the reader with a view into the sacred and secular worlds of the Ohlone through narratives of the Chocheño and Rumsen people. Ortiz uses the identifier narrative to include both Native American folklore and sacred narratives, to avoid the pejorative meanings most people generally associate with the words myth and legend. Ortiz, a graduate student in the Anthropology Department, University of California, Berkeley, provides a comparative analysis of various texts such as "making the world safe," "the origin of death," "origin of the world," and "theft of fire." She uses these texts to instruct the reader in the sensitivity of narrative to interpretation, to show how narratives reflect the relationship between the Ohlone people and their heroes in literature, and to show human qualities such as sadness and sympathy. Ortiz draws extensively from the work of linguist John P. Harrington, who recorded 512 looseleaf pages of narrative from Indian people of the Mission San Jose area in the 1920s, and from narratives recorded by Alfred Kroeber in 1902. Subsection I of Ortiz's article presents texts of the *Chocheño* narrative; subsection II compares extant Rumsen narratives. Ortiz highlights the similarities as well as the dissimilarities "as a means of clarifying the complexities of California Indian narrative traditions." Her conclusion is that Chocheño and Rumsen narrative traditions were different, intertwined with the lifeways of the specific cultural group, and that knowing "Chocheño and Rumsen narrative tradition does not accord with having knowledge of the narrative tradition of all Ohlonean speakers." In order to understand the full meaning of a particular narrative, then, one must know the tribal background of the speaker, from whom that person learned the narrative, and where and when the narrative began. Without that background, it is impossible to understand the meaning associated with the telling.

Reviews 237

Because of space limitations, it is impossible to critique each of the twelve conference papers in this review; however, two additional papers stand out in significance: that of Edward Castillo, a Cahuilla-Luiseño Indian and professor of Native American studies at Sonoma State University; and a coauthored presentation by Alan Leventhal, Les Field, Hank Alvarez, and Rosemary Cambra. Leventhal and Field are ethnohistorians for the Muwekma Ohlone tribe, and Alvarez and Cambra are tribal members. It is my opinion that Lowell Bean, as editor, would done well to begin this book with Castillo's article and close it with the coauthored piece.

Castillo's paper "The Language of Race Hatred" addresses Indian-white contact in general but, for the purpose of this audience, focuses on Indians in California mission history. Castillo correctly avoids the use of antiseptic terms found in some other articles in this collection, where Indian people are "recruited," "invited," or "included" in the mission system. He points out that presidio personnel inaugurated military campaigns to capture Indian people and to return fugitive neophytes. Castillo writes of documented excessive punishment, lack of food, and extreme cruelty exercised by the padres toward Indian workers in the process of completing mission projects. Castillo pays particular attention to gender and punishment within the mission system and states that "Indian women were in fact routinely beaten at the mission[s]," contrary to what most mission apologists would have one believe. In summation, Castillo points out that it is the use of the language of race hatred that made this possible or at least (in the minds of the Spanish) justified the cruel and inhuman practices. California Indian people were identified as dirty savages "only worthy after surrendering their independence, resources, lands, labor and lives to non-Indians." Indian women were viewed as "condemned to the monotonous daily stints of gathering seeds, roots, berries, and acorns," which then justified, at least in the Spanish mind, the enslavement of thousands of California Indians and the "wholesale sexual assault of female neophytes (including children), chiefly at the hands of soldiers." Indian women, rather than being enlightened by the mission experience, "suffered a status decline once they were part of the new mission communities." Castillo castigates authors who perpetuate the language of race hatred and chastizes the mission book stores/gift shops that sell books containing a "self-serving approach to church history."

In "The Ohlone Back from Extinction," coauthors Leventhal, Field, Alvarez, and Cambra reject the notion that the Ohlone are an extinct people. The authors point out that this idea of extinction derives from the field of archaeology, which has provided a conceptual framework and foundation for public acceptance of this misconception. No less a scholar than the revered Alfred Kroeber pronounced, early in this century, that the Ohlone were extinct. More recently, however, dissenters such as anthropologists John P. Harrington and C. Hart Merriam provided documentation that the Ohlone people are still with us today. It is also from Kroeber that we get the mistaken notion that the indigenous people of California were composed, not of tribes but of tribelets. Kroeber erroneously believed that the size of a settlement was an indicator of sophistication in social construction; since some California Indian communities were small, in his opinion they were not tribes, but merely tribelets. Unfortunately, as the authors point out, Kroeber's classification was adopted by later anthropologists and authors. As a result, California people today, if not incorrectly identified as "mission Indians," are incorrectly identified as belonging to some poorly constructed entity known as a "triblet."

Of particular interest and importance is a section of this article titled "The Re-emergence of Ohlone Peoples in the Twentieth Century," which thoroughly dispels any notion that "the Costanoan aboriginal lifeway apparently disappeared by 1810." The authors identify 1970 and the explosion of urban expansion and rural development in the Bay Area as significant events that caused the contemporary Ohlone people to challenge the Kroeberian legacy of extinction. National, state, and local legislation mandated the participation of Native Americans in the monitoring of archaeological exploration of sites where human remains and artifacts are likely to be present. In the Bay Area, this is Ohlone land. The authors highlight the problems faced by the Ohlone people because of lack of federal recognition and the questions surrounding designation of "most likely descendants." Still, as a result of having to document their historical and cultural continuity, the Ohlone have successfully challenged the conceptual framework of extinction The leaders of different bands of Ohlone people have come together and are now working to empower their people more fully. As the authors state, "Coming 'back from extinction' has put these peoples on the road toward a new cultural, political, and economic revitalization."

Reviews 239

The Ohlone Past and Present is a unique collection of writings from a wide variety of disciplines and individuals: anthropologists, historians, government researchers, and the Ohlone people themselves. Research materials and sources include records of the Hispanic period, mission records, archaeological records and reports, government documents, as well as the oral history of the Ohlone people. The book begins where Malcolm Margolin's The Ohlone Way leaves off and provides important amplifying materials. Another recent book on California Indian people is Robert H. Jackson's and Edward Castillo's Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians. Thanks to Bean, Margolin, Jackson, and Castillo, excellent, wellresearched books are now available to college and university teachers who are including the study of California Indian people in Native American studies programs. The Ohlone Past and Present should be required reading in those courses. Other books to consider for use in courses concentrating on California Indians include Robert Heizer's The Destruction of California Indians; George Phillips's Indians and Intruders; Rupert Costo's and Jeannette Henry Costo's The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide, and Albert Hurtado's Indian Survival on the California Frontier.

Troy R. Johnson California State University, Long Beach

**One Hundred Years of Navajo Rugs.** By Marian E. Rodee. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. 187 pages. \$17.95 paper.

To Navajo rug collectors and connoisseurs, Marian Rodee has been an academic reference since she published her 1981 classic Old Navajo Rugs: Their Development from 1900 to 1940. Currently she is curator of Southwest Ethnology at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, where she also teaches in the Department of Art and Art History. Her new volume, One Hundred Years of Navajo Rugs, extends the time period of her previous book to a century, from the 1880s until the 1990s. The book includes two maps, so even the reader unfamiliar with the American Southwest can find the locations of trading posts within the Navajo Nation, the four corner states of New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, and Colorado.