

THE CALIFORNIA ABORIGINES*

In the Atlantic Monthly, of March, 1874, there was published an article entitled "Aborigines of California," in which I presented facts tending to show that these aborigines are descended from the Chinese. The conclusions which were arrived at in that paper have been questioned, on the ground that, however great may be their likeness to the Celestials, they cannot be descended from them since they have no pottery, no hieroglyphics, and no monuments; and the time never has been in the historical period when the Chinese were without these. It is argued that no people could lose the art of pottery, or even if they lost the art itself, that the pottery would remain, being almost indestruible. It is not intended to rehearse in this paper the arguments there presented in favor of a Chinese origin, but merely to offer some facts and suggestions as to these Indians and their predecessors on this coast. (63)

The Voy Collection, in the University Museum, contains a large number of pre-aboriginal stone implements; but there is no link to connect the race who made them with the present one except per deterins. In fact, since the California Indians of today have no monuments or pottery, there is no link except those of language, customs, etc., to connect them with any race; hence the consideration of monuments and the like is pretty much eliminated from the discussion, as between them and the Chinese. Even if the very few remains found to-day served to prove that a pre-aboriginal race brought the ceramic art from China and practiced it here, it would still remain to show that that people were the ancestors of the California Indians. There is a gap somewhere, which cannot be passed except per soltum.

The simple fact of the almost total lack of ceramic remains, and the character of the relics found in the Alameda and other shell mounds, show that the present race must either have supplanted or descended from one which was little more advanced than themselves. The few and simple stone implements used by the California Indians resemble, in their main purpose and design, those of the extinct races exhumed in the shell-mounds, only they are conspicuously ruder and simpler. Take the stone mortars, for instance. The pre-aboriginal mortar is carefully dressed on the outside, and has three general shapes: either flattish and round, or shaped like a duck's egg, with the bowl on the side, or with the bowl in a large end, and the small end inserted into the ground. But the Indian takes a small boulder of trap or greenstone, and bears out a hollow in it, leaving the outside rough. Whenever one is seen in possession of a mortar dressed on the outside, he will acknowledge that he did not make it, but found it; in other words, it is preaboriginal. The pre-aborigines used handsomely dressed pestles, evenly tapered to the upper end, or else a uniform cylinder for about three-fourths of the length, with the remaining fourth also uniform, but smaller, for a hand-hold; but the squaw nowadays picks up a long, slender cobble from the brook. The pre-aborigines fought with heavy knives, or swords, carved

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out of jasper or obsidian, which were, probably, used as daggers rather than as swords; that is, the combatants sought to pierce each other with the point, instead of dealing blows with the edge. The Indians of to-day fight with rough stones, such as they pick up, choosing those which are long and sharp-pointed; and their constant aim is to strike each other in the face with the points, just as their predecessors or ancestors probably did with their carved knives. The pre-aborigines made, out of sandstone or other soft stones, a small and almost perfect sphere, as an acorn-sheller; but the squaw nowadays simply selects a smooth cobble from the brook for this purpose. In the collection of A. W. Chase, Esq., of the U. S. Coast Survey, there are spindle whorls of stone, some of them found in mounds made by extinct tribes, and others found among the Klamath River Indians and the Nome Lackees, all of which bear a close resemblance; and, in this instance, there is no perceptible deterioration in the workmanship. I strongly suspect, however, if the Indians possessing these implements had been closely questioned, they would have acknowledged that they found them, and did not make them, just as they acknowledge in regard of the superior stone mortars and pestles. That is, they are really indebted to their ancestors for them. Near Freestone, Sonoma County, I saw in possession of its finder, what was probably a spindle whorl of pottery -- the only instance of the kind I know of. In regard to tobacco-pipes, the deterioration is not so manifest, for I have seen soap-stone pipes of as handsome workmanship as any obtained from the mounds. But I still think there is deterioration shown, in the fact that the Indians nowadays use so many wooden pipes of the rudest construction; though we have no means of showing that their ancestors did not use equally poor ones, since their wooden pipes, if they had any, have perished. Then again, as to the shell-mounds themselves. I am of opinion that they are merely the accumulations of a race of men who dived for clams, as the Wintoons of the upper Sacramento do to this day, to a limited extent. In other words, the Wintoons and other tribes are descended from a people who are more energetic and industrious than themselves.

Langsdorff and La Perouse both mention that they saw many Indians with magnificent beards, but now they are almost totally destitute of beards. Whether the ever-increasing drought and dessication of the Pacific Coast, which have swept away the ancient forests, have also destroyed the ancient forests, have also destroyed the beards of the aborigines, is a question I am not competent to determine.

The two "Village Sentinels," as the Eurocs call them, at the mouth of the Klamath, and the human head carved in stone near the Geysers, seem to be relics of a former idolatry; and indeed the legends connected with the latter state that their ancestors were idolaters. Their religion now, if they can be said to have any, is a near approach to fetichism; that is, the worship of animals, such as the coyote, the white owl, the black eagle, etc. Fetichism is a lower form of religion than idolatry.

There are two legends -- one among the Cahrocs of the Klamaths, and one among the Pallegawanaps of Kern River--which, in my opinion, are undoubtedly a

corrupted version of some old zodiac-myth, and therefore point to a remotely semi-civilized origin for their narrators.

I might extend these instances and comparisons, but it is not necessary. The California Indians, like their predecessors, belong unmistakable to the Stone Age; and the fact that they have degenerated from a higher to a lower grade in that age, argues strongly that their ancestors, after crossing the sea, might have degenerated from the Bronze Age or the Iron Age of China.

For this reason, I am disposed to believe that the California Indians have simply deteriorated from what we (perhaps erroneously) call a pre-aboriginal race; and ultimately, from the Chinese. Instances are not wanting where a people have retrograded from civilization almost to barbarism in the course of many centuries. Witness the Fellahs, who are supposed to be descended directly from the ancient Egyptians. China itself, with all its vast populations, has stood still for twenty centuries; and a colony from it wandering into a new land, where the abundance of nature and the genial climate invited them to relax the efforts which a crowded community had necessitated for the maintenance of life, might degenerate to a low point without difficulty. When the Chinese of to-day come to this land of plenty, how poor are the dwellings and implements they construct for themselves, compared with those they used in China. How poor our own, compared with those we made in the East!

I do not forget that the Indians, almost with one accord, attribute these superior stone implements to a race older and other than their own. There is also a Neestenasaw legend which cannot be very well explained, except on the supposition of a reference to an earlier race of cannibals, from whom their forefathers suffered grewsome damage. On the other hand, they all insist that their progenitors were created from the soil where they now live (to take all their accounts, there must have been a hundred of these "special creations" in California); so that their legends are not consistent.

The theory of degeneration above advanced, is quite in accord with the climatic changes and the deforestation which have taken place on this coast, even within the historical period. We know, from the statements of Biscayno and other early Spanish explorers, that extensive forests were flourishing near San Diego and Monterey, three hundred years ago, where now there are none. Biscayno says the natives of Santa Catalina Island had large wooden canoes, capable of sea voyages, whereas that island is now comparatively treeless. Fossil remains have been discovered in Southern California and Arizona, which indicate that there were once heavy forests where now are barren, wind-swept plains. Ruins of great walled cities, and large systems of irrigating ditches, in Arizona and New Mexico, on the Gila, Little Colorado, De Chaco, San Juan, and other streams, plainly show that these regions once contained an agricultural population, who were ultimately driven out by the ever-increasing drought and the failure of the streams. The great sequoias, on the high

Sierra, may perhaps, be the last lingerers of a gigantic race of forest trees, which the changed climatic conditions of California have destroyed from the plains.

We know that the deforestation of Babylonia, Assyria, Palestine, and Greece, has been accompanied by a corresponding deterioration of the inhabitants, and it may have been, also, largely the cause of it.

While there is nothing to show that the present race of California Indians are descended from an agricultural people, like the New Mexican Pueblos, there is much to show that their predecessors were superior to them, and that their predecessors were also their ancestors. The California Indians are simply a poor copy of the people whom we usually call pre-aborigines; but the copy follows the original so closely that there can be little doubt that that it is a copy made by transmission.

In New Mexico, there is a large and powerful tribe called the Navajoes. There are good evidences that they are descended from the Hoopaws of this State, and that they have migrated, within comparatively recent times, from the Trinity or the Klamath. Of these evidences I will here mention only one -- the similarity of their numerals, as shown in the following table:

	Hoopaw.	Navajoe.
One	Chlah.	Kli.
Two	Nach.	Nahkee.
Three	Tach.	Tah.
Four	Tinckh.	Dteen.
Five	Chwolch.	Estlahh.
Six	Hostan.	Hostons.
Seven	Ochkit.	Susett.
Eight.....	Cahnem.	Seepee.
Nine	Nocostah.	Nastyy.
Ten	Minchlah.	Niznahh.

The Navajoes to-day are superior to the Hoopaws, perhaps not in prowess, but certainly in the arts of peace. They possess the arts of weaving and pottery, which the Hoopaws know nothing about; but it is considered probable that they acquired those arts from the Pueblo Indians since their migrations. Hence, the Navajoes offer no argument against the theory of degeneration. If they carried those arts with them from California, they powerfully confirm the theory, so far as the Hoopaws are concerned.

I offer this paper, not as an exhaustive treatise on this subject, but as giving some facts and theories which I hope others, more capable, will work out more fully.