

**CORRECTING FALSE TRUTHS: ROBERT HEIZER'S VIEW OF THE NEED
FOR ETHNOHISTORY IN CALIFORNIA ANTHROPOLOGY**

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Robert Heizer came to emphasize ethnohistory increasingly in his work in California anthropology. In this paper, I attempt to set forth Heizer's view of ethnohistory: his perception of the need for it in California anthropology, and what he meant by "ethnohistory." I consider the kinds of ethnohistorical publications which he produced and his suggestions for research, assessing their usefulness not as substantive accomplishments (which others in this symposium have done) but as stimuli for ongoing work and work yet to be done, work which might not have been seen as necessary if not for his efforts. Finally, I suggest that the ethnohistorical studies which he proposed have some current applications which he might not have anticipated. The paper is offered from the perspective of someone who was neither a student nor a colleague of Heizer's, but who has found his ethnohistorical publications a stimulus and an aid in pursuing anthropological studies in California.

I first met Dr. Heizer when I came as a student from the East and settled on a dissertation topic involving the archaeology of the San Francisco Bay area. Back East, we thought of Heizer as an authority on California archaeology and people here spoke of him in the same way, although they also told me that he was no longer doing California work. When I spoke with him, I found that to be not quite true. He was still interested and involved in California studies, but his focus had changed from archaeology to a kind of history.

I remember a long talk with him one afternoon in 1972 or 1973 in the Archaeological Research Facility at Berkeley. He told me then that he thought that California archaeology was dead, at least California archaeology connected with Native Californians, due to a combination of the incredible destruction which development had wrought on archaeological sites in the state since the early 1900s and the increasingly strong and effective objections of living Native Californians to archaeological studies. If archaeology meant excavation, he didn't see much more of it in the state. He also saw California ethnography as dead because the aboriginal way of life was gone, though he didn't deny that studies of descendants of Native Californians might usefully be done. In his view, the wave of the future would be ethnohistory: poring through documents which might contain some information which could correct or add to the record of Native Californian lifeways in the ethnographies.

One finds this idea formally expressed in Heizer's writings in several places. For example, in 1975 he advocated a "'new ethnography' -- a fancy title for ethnohistory, but still new in the sense of being not yet done and much needed as a step toward recasting imperfectly interpreted data into more correct form" (Heizer 1975: 12). His proposal stemmed from two concerns, oft-repeated in his introductions to reprintings of historical documents. One was his conviction that the great population loss among

Native Californians after white contact (from about 300,000 in 1769 to about 100,000 in 1850, to about 50,000 in 1870) was accompanied by a tremendous loss of ethnographic fact and by great and varied cultural changes. The second concern was that anthropologists from the beginning (and they began to work in California only after 1870) tried to collect information which applied to the unaltered aboriginal way of life (often referred to as the timeless "ethnographic present"), while they usually ignored the actual acculturated lives of their subjects and also frequently neglected to record circumstances such as biographical data of their consultants which would help the later user evaluate the accuracy of their data.

In an article in 1974, Heizer worried that "there is a huge amount of incorrect data about California Indians already in print, and that in the future there may be increasingly less informed judgment applied to this body of report" (1974: 29). He was concerned that a new generation of workers, unacquainted with California Indians who still recalled the old ways, would be unable to judge the ethnographic record critically. In many writings he cited cautionary examples of presumed ethnographic "truths" about Native Californians which need checking. For example, he noted that many ethnographers ignored the fact that traditional burial practices were often altered very quickly under the influence of white contact; thus our ethnographic record of burial practices may reflect these recent changes more than it reflects traditional practices (1975: 10). He pointed out that most accounts of long distance trading trips by inland peoples to the coast clearly apply to times after white contact, leading him to question whether such travel and trade patterns were relatively new in native California and suggesting the danger of depending too much on ethnographic analogy in formulating a picture of prehistoric economic organization in California (1978e: 692-693). He referred to linguistic indications of group boundary shifts which may have taken place and been forgotten within the century or so between missionization and the arrival of the anthropologist, predicting that our understanding of ethnolinguistic territorial boundaries will continue to be modified as the documentary record is studied and wondering how many changes might have occurred which left no evidence in that record (1978b: 5).

While Heizer presented examples and views of this sort in several places in the California volume of the Handbook of North American Indians, he also made therein what must have been for him a hopeful prediction:

... examination and reevaluation of the assumed aboriginal ethnographic cultures will almost inevitably come, if for no other reason than that it offers such rich results. This promise will make such inquiries attractive to students of Native American cultures that no longer exist even in the memories of living people. Not only social and cultural anthropologists will turn to this subject, I predict, but so also will archaeologists who depend so heavily upon the ethnographic accounts for hints and leads in their effort to interpret the facts of prehistory. The "new anthropology" in California is likely to have a strong ethno-historical orientation (1978b: 4).

It is worth noting that Heizer's understanding of ethnohistory was a bit different from that of at least some historians and some anthropologists. Many of his publications in the last decade consisted of reprintings of historical documents, sometimes with little or no introduction or commentary. Many of them were organized around the theme of white mistreatment of California Indians. An historian reviewing some of the collections worried that they would be little read, because Heizer had provided only raw data, not the interpretation which is necessary to transform such data into ethnohistory. His review contained a definition of ethnohistory: "If non-white history (ethnohistory if it deals with non-literate peoples) is truly a worthwhile undertaking, it must be more than a record of white mistreatment. It must examine the activity of non-whites as they responded to the mistreatment, and it must analyze how this response contributed to the shaping of history" (Phillips 1975: 135).

I think that Heizer's conception of California ethnohistory included this facet, but was more broad, with a cultural component as well. In an article which Heizer often cited and recommended to his students, Wheeler-Voegelin made the point that anthropologists and historians have different interests in historical documents:

It is not the corpus which marks a difference between the historian and the anthropologist, but the different interest which the same document holds for each of them. The historian is interested in documents containing references to American Indians, for whatever information they contain as to how the Indians affected French Colonial, or British Colonial, or American cultural and political history. The anthropologist, on the other hand, is interested in the same documents for what they tell him about inter-tribal contacts, locations, numbers, movements, and population of the Indians mentioned therein, for what information they give him about the culture of the various Indian groups, and whatever data they supply as to how Indian groups were being moved and manipulated by the Whites in their midst, and how their culture was being affected (Wheeler-Voegelin 1956: 366).

In other words, the historian uses documents as sources of data regarding the shaping of history, while the anthropologist uses documents as sources of ethnographic data.

Heizer was certainly interested in the ethnographic data to be obtained from historical documents. But he was also concerned to point out that the events of California history had affected the ethnographic fact. And he agreed, I think, with the implication of his historian-critic's statement quoted above, that the shape of California history was affected by the actions and responses of the people who became the ethnographers' subjects. Hence, to participate in the "new California anthropology" which Heizer envisioned, the California anthropologist must attend to the historical information in documents as well as to the ethnographic detail, and must work towards ethnohistories which are more than ethnographies.

Heizer did not, in fact, produce any such ethnohistories. I do not think that he intended to, himself. One purpose of his historical publications, specifically those documenting the white mistreatment of California Indians, was a reflection of his anti-war sentiments and his dismay at the violent and antagonistic behavior which he came to see as a continuing characteristic of the new Americans who had displaced the native inhabitants of this continent. He hoped, it seems, that some Americans might respond with a revolt against the legacy of the past if they were shown that events such as the Indochina war fit a pattern of brutality and inhumanity with roots reaching back many generations (Heizer 1974a: ix-x). A second purpose of Heizer's studies of California Indians, embracing more than his concern for their historical mistreatment, was to contribute to the understanding of "how an abundance of people living in a small area could survive for many thousands of years;" he saw the American Indians as a "source of information on the human experience of learning to live together" which might be helpful to present and future generations of peoples of the world trying to survive together (1974: 28). This sounds simplistic and perhaps naive, yet it is the basic justification, I think, for the work of most of us who are historians, anthropologists or other kinds of students of human beings.

To this end, then, to contribute to an understanding of California Indian lifeways as it might somehow enrich and inform other people, Robert Heizer became concerned, especially in the last decade, with ensuring that the ethnographic record be as full and correct as possible. He did not make many specific corrections himself, nor did he write any ethnohistories, but he did lay the groundwork for much corrective ethnohistorical work, indicating potential sources of information and providing suggestions as to how the work might proceed.

I would like to mention some work in northwestern California which has used some of the materials published by Heizer, to show how those materials and his research suggestions are contributing to anthropological work in California today. For purposes of discussion, I crudely lump the ethnohistorical materials into three categories:

1) compilations of various documentary historic sources (which are not definitive collections of all relevant sources, but just indicators of the kinds of materials available to be examined),

2) presentations of previously unpublished or hard-to-get work of ethnographers (here I think of his annotated publication of Powers' Tribes of California, his partial publication of the C. Hart Merriam materials, as well as his interest in and approval of the current work being done with the J. P. Harrington materials), and

3) extractions of information from existing ethnographic data which can serve as a check on the record, and which can be applied to some questions which the ethnographies as written do not address (here I think most of his work with his student Karen Nissen on the Human Sources project, a list of names and biographical data about the individuals who supplied the ethnographers with their information, a list which Heizer intended to place in the California Handbook volume, as Dr. Sturtevant has mentioned.)

The work to which we applied Heizer's materials had two facets. One was archaeological survey in ethnographic Chilula territory (the Redwood Creek basin), an area for which there is relatively little "old" ethnography and where almost no archaeology had been done prior to our efforts. The other was a kind of contemporary ethnography, in which we conferred with living descendants of Chilula, Yurok and Tolowa people to learn what their concerns are today for lands and resources within the area of Redwood National Park, concerns ranging from cemetery protection to gathering rights for basketry materials.

Let me offer three examples of the use of Heizer's ethnohistorical materials in this work, one from each of the categories listed above. In one of the historic sources he reprinted, a journal written on a treaty-making expedition in the 1850s, we found a dated reference to the burning of prairie grasses in ethnographic Chilula territory (Gibbs 1853: 134). This had several useful applications. It added specific data for the Chilula to the ongoing compilation of California Indian practices of burning for land management, practices which had become quite limited by the time ethnographers were working, but probably a very important force on the landscape before white contact (see Lewis 1973). It provided information for natural scientists who have been trying to understand the mechanisms by which the prairies were formed and maintained, and it may help the National Park Service botanists who are trying to restore native vegetation on the prairies. Finally, it may be useful to the local Indian basketmakers who still retained the knowledge that they needed to burn over beargrass in order to have appropriate materials for basketry, but who had lost the memory of the proper time of year to do the burning.

As another example, let me mention the usefulness of the Merriam ethnogeographic and ethnosynonymic data which Heizer published (Merriam 1976). We were interested in relating the archaeological sites which we found to recorded ethnographic village sites where appropriate. Merriam's village lists for the Chilula added locational information to what was available in the published ethnography by Goddard (1914). Simply put, three people describing a village location, or even one person describing it three separate times, may help one find the place easier. Merriam's lists contained entries which at first glance seemed redundant, as one village would be listed under several different spellings, but there were slightly different bits of information in the different entries which were useful for our identification problems.

In addition to Goddard's and Merriam's information, we also had another set of information regarding one village site, the memories and oral traditions of some people who were born at the spot but who left as small children. Their information fits one set of information in Merriam by location, and another set by village name. We may have a case here which crosses the historic time line when an old village, abandoned in response to white contact, gave its name to another place, probably a former seasonal camping spot which had been used when the old village was occupied. This other place was a location to which people returned after an initial exodus from the Redwood Creek basin and occupied year-round for a few years in an attempt to return to their traditional lands. While we are still uncertain if we have correctly reconstructed the sequence of

events, it seems clear that we would never have been alerted to this case if we had not used the combination of multiple ethnographic sources as well as the testimony of living people in the course of our work.

As another example of our use of Heizer's ethnohistorical materials, let me mention the listing of informants in the Human Sources compilation (Heizer and Nissen 1973). After working with the Goddard and Merriam materials, we became curious about their sources of information: were they using the same consultants? how old were these people? what were their traditional lands within Chilula territory? were our present day consultants related to these people? It was a surprise to find that the published Human Sources account did not include data on either Merriam's or Goddard's Chilula informants, but it was a reminder that the project is incomplete and that researchers today should continue to extract biographical data from the ethnographic sources and add to the file. The compilation did include information on 13 people of the Chilula/Whilkut linguistic group who had contributed to several ethnographic works which we had not previously considered as potential sources of data. One table in the Human Sources compilation was both useful and sobering. It tabulates consultants by birth year where known. For our area of interest, there was one consultant born in the 1870s, one in the 1880s, and the rest in the 1890s. We may find that some of Goddard's and Merriam's informants were older than these consultants, but it is sobering to realize that most of our ethnographic information was collected from people who were born after the 1850s and 1860s, the decades when all the Chilula were forced out of their traditional lands in the Redwood Creek basin.

Real ties to those traditional lands were sustained, however, and we find records (again, published by Heizer) which can help us follow those ties back from the people alive today who are our consultants. For example, Heizer published the Kelsey census of non-reservation Indians conducted in the early 1900s (Kelsey 1971), and among the people listed in Redwood Valley we can recognize some relatives of our present day consultants. Documents like the Kelsey census could be used as an aid to oral history efforts to work back, through genealogical connections and memories and stories, to piece together and fill in from the minds of different people a history of the Chilula for the postcontact period. Work of this sort by the neighboring Hupa people has contributed to the compilation of a meaningful tribal history for them (Nelson 1978). Aside from its meaning for the people themselves, we find this kind of documentation of continuity important in working with federal agencies who may be skeptical of the validity of the claims of our consultants about their traditional territories and practices.

As a result of our experiences in the northern California work, we will routinely incorporate historical research, use of manuscript ethnographic information and unpublished photographs, and a consideration of the biographical circumstances of both old and new ethnographic consultants in any future work we do in California anthropology. I know that similar integrative and corrective efforts are underway by other Californianists, some stimulated by Heizer's example, some by others'. The need still continues for an approach about which Heizer wrote almost forty years ago (Heizer 1941),

an active interdigitation of the data of archaeology, history and ethnography and the use of the three separate sources as mutually corrective of one another. I think that we are carrying things a bit further than Heizer might have expected in applying the work not just as a corrective to the record of the past, but also to present day concerns of Native Californians. However, I think that he would have approved of this application of ethnohistory in California anthropology and I am grateful that he steered us in this direction.