

SOME BYWAYS OF R. F. HEIZER'S ETHNOHISTORIC RESEARCH

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If Robert Heizer is to be remembered as one who has had any significant influence on Western U.S. ethnohistory, it must be said that, in a sense, he was molded in this direction by A. L. Kroeber, who almost single-handedly guided his graduate research in California Indian studies. Kroeber evidently believed that when he himself appeared on the California scene around 1900, it was more important to investigate the rapidly dwindling and endangered ethnographic resources of the state rather than to devote any major efforts to prehistory. He probably did not envision the tumultuous population and industrial growth of California that was so markedly to jeopardize the archaeology since 1946. While Heizer was not the only one to carry out prehistoric research in California since 1930, he certainly must be considered as one of the key figures in promoting these studies just before and then after World War II.

Kroeber characteristically guided Heizer's doctoral dissertation essentially in ethnography rather than prehistory, but it was almost certainly Kroeber who was instrumental in having Heizer appointed director of the California Archaeological Survey at Berkeley around 1947. In this position Heizer attempted to do for archaeology what Kroeber did for California ethnography earlier. At the same time, Heizer's interests were surely not confined to archaeological survey and excavation, and his California archaeology was almost always closely identified with the ethnography already done on such a relatively large scale. He strove to fill in many gaps left by Kroeber and others, and to initiate, in collaboration with others, certain specialized approaches to ethnohistory. Evidently he was engaged, practically throughout his career, in digging out long unused documentary materials in places like Bancroft Library at the University of California, and editing them for publication or reprinting.

It may be argued that ultimately someone else would have got around to doing this, but the fact is that Heizer happened to be the one who was directly responsible for seeing to it that a great deal of work pertaining to California Indian history was published in usable form. In conjunction with his Bancroft Library work, however, Heizer also had on his hands the great collection of work on California Indians by C. Hart Merriam. This was only acquired by the University of California in 1950. During his lifetime, Merriam evidently thought of Kroeber as a kind of rival, and not a particularly friendly one, but in any event, by 1950 Kroeber had already retired, and at the time Heizer seemed to be the logical custodian for the collection. Merriam, who died in 1942, had a long record of Indian studies behind him, which included collecting of news-clippings, photographs, and various printed articles pertaining in any way to western American Indians. In addition, he had himself amassed a great deal of ethnological and linguistic data on California Indians, much of it unpublished at the time of his death. Through the generosity of the family of E. H. Harriman, the railroad financier, who had long been a friend and benefactor of Merriam, funds were provided for the publication of Merriam's work. From the beginning, at Berkeley, perhaps around 1955, with the publication of

the book, Studies of California Indians, Heizer's name was associated as editor of Merriam's posthumous publications. Moreover Heizer encouraged publications by other anthropologists, like M. A. Baumhoff, of monographs which extensively utilized Merriam's carefully collected data.

During this course of publication, Heizer always had a lively enthusiasm and interest in the graphic material collected by Merriam. Merriam was an excellent photographer himself, and in his collections were also many photographs and sketches by others, including photographic prints of 19th century drawings of Indians, for example those of H. B. Brown. In his collecting career Merriam was known to have purchased part of the papers of J. R. Bartlett, who was a commissioner of the U. S. - Mexican Boundary Survey in the 1850's, and an amateur artist himself. Bartlett had an association with H. B. Brown, who produced some of the finest depictions of California Indians known to us from the period essentially before the advent of effective photography. Rare prints of some of Brown's original sketches wound up in the Merriam collection.

Heizer looked upon such graphic materials as valuable documents, adjuncts to ethnohistoric reports; moreover he felt that they were often pertinent to his archaeological work. Indeed, anything that recorded customs of relatively early post-Contact Indians he saw as of great value in helping to interpret even early prehistoric data. This sounds like something too obvious to be worth mentioning, but we should consider several factors here. First, Mission fathers in large part almost shamefully neglected the splendid opportunities they had to record observations of the native customs of a people they were so bent on converting. I believe that S. F. Cook, not by coincidence a close collaborator of Heizer in studies of habits of Indians in early historic times, did more to elucidate the real experiences of the Mission Indians than, with a few exceptions, the missionaries themselves, on the spot. A great deal of this work was done in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, where Heizer and Cook came to know the California ethnohistoric documents probably better than anyone else at the time.

Next to be considered is the comparative dearth of visual or graphic materials on California Indians in the nineteenth century. Although the Indians were fine subjects for artists, they simply did not attract the attention, for example, that the Plains Indians did. Thus, every picture that could be elicited from archival or other sources, no matter how poor artistically, was to be treasured as a sort of ethnohistoric note. Parenthetically, the great early depictees of California in the 19th century were essentially landscape artists, like Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Hill, or William Keith. Although Indians were sometimes well represented by these artists, it was clear that they were not the main focus of their art. Heizer was certainly elated, and grateful to the Bancroft Library for its acquisition of the great Honeyman collection of graphics pertaining to early California history. I don't know if he played a part in their acquisition or not, but I had the feeling at the time that even if the Bancroft Library did not acquire the collection, it was just a question of time before Heizer would begin some move to give it more exposure as a valuable ethnographic tool. When the Lowie Museum of Anthropology at Berkeley was planning a Bicentennial exhibition in 1976, it was decided that a pictorial review of the Indians of

California during the first hundred years or so of contact would be appropriate and worthwhile. I was given the responsibility for research on this exhibition, and I discovered early on that Heizer was probably the best single mine of information on the subject. When we brought probably 90 percent of all non-photographic pictures together for the first time, in cooperation with Theodora Kroeber, it was most gratifying to note the great number of ethnographic details that had been pictorially recorded or confirmed for the period from about 1770 to 1870 (Kroeber, Elsasser and Heizer 1977).

Even before 1770, some valuable drawings were made, and with respect to this early group, it should be mentioned that one of Heizer's early significant achievements in the ethnohistoric field was his balanced outline of the controversy revolving upon the landing place of Sir Francis Drake on the coast of California in 1579 (Heizer 1949). Here he made excellent use of the graphic material on the landing. He combined the evidence from the graphics, from the historic writings, and from archaeology to demonstrate the value of evidence from ethnography to elucidate certain historic problems.

Again, in his volume on the comparatively little-known Indians of the San Francisco Bay region, the Costanoans, Heizer utilized all graphic material possible to fill out the reconstruction (Heizer 1974). In sum, this work tells us more about the Costanoans, or Ohlones, as they are called by some, than any other work available until the early 1970's, at least, including the fairly sketchy ethnographic outline by J. P. Harrington in the Culture Element Distribution lists in University of California publications (Harrington 1942).

In the matter of photography and its uses in ethnohistoric research, Heizer recognized that with a few exceptions, for example, that of C.H. Merriam, there was, paradoxically, less to be gained for his research than with original drawings and sketches. In the end, there was an almost overwhelming quantity of photographs concerning California Indians, even though many of these showed hardly more than the sadly beautiful or wrinkled faces of surviving Indians dressed in European clothing. Heizer never attempted to bring together a corpus of photographs of California Indians. He once told me that when he was collaborating with Theodora Kroeber on the volume titled Almost Ancestors, which was a selection of portraits of Indians, there was a point when the esthetic aspects of the final selections began to pall upon him. There were simply too many charmingly wistful faces to choose from, but rarely, much of anything in the way of ethnographic detail in the pictures. Moreover, this sheer quantity of collections available, including those which seemed to have been hidden away but then suddenly coming to light was too daunting a prospect for an anthropologist to confront. This could be left to historians of photography, like Peter Palmquist of Humboldt State University. One of the projects which delighted him, on the other hand, was the editing and annotation of the great work of Stephen Powers on California Indians, first published in 1877, and never reprinted until 1976. Here Heizer savored the uses of photography, for many of the excellent, informative lithographs in Powers' original work were evidently taken from early or contemporary pictures which at the time could not properly be reproduced as photographic prints. This was almost certainly the case with

numbers of other published engravings of the time on Indians, i. e. , they were done in a printing office, using an often unnamed early photographer's print as a model.

It seems to me that Heizer's approach even to petroglyphs showed what might be called a secondary or even incidental interest in the appealing esthetic merits of the art. For him the social meaning of this graphic art was paramount, and it was only after many years of frustration and cogitation on such aspects as distribution of symbols or other elements, and location of these that he could come to some valuable conclusions about the meaning of at least one important segment of this art. If Heizer had available to him, for example, J. P. Harrington's extremely pertinent ethnographic information which could refer to the relationship between shamanism and rock art of the Santa Barbara and adjoining regions in the historic period, it would no doubt have led to a significantly different cast to his definitive work with C.W. Clewlow on the rock art of California.

It may be repeated, in summary, that Heizer had what amounted to a passion both for discovery and publication of little-known written and graphic documents on California ethnography, or in editing and providing cogent comments on works such as those of C.H. Merriam and Stephen Powers. In a recent exchange of views in the pages of the California Journal of Anthropology, we may note that Heizer expressed some negative, perhaps excessively negative, feelings about J. P. Harrington, who during his life produced such a tremendously valuable quantity of notes on California Indian linguistics and ethnography. Heizer was driven by impatience to integrate the work of ethnographers and archaeologists by utilizing every resource possible, including graphic works by artists and even casual travelers. He somehow felt that Harrington's apparent bent for withholding or at least not paying much mind to publishing significant information which others could use to advantage, was almost unconscionable. This resentful notation about Harrington's apparent propensity for hoarding or at least sometimes intolerable delay was perhaps a result of Heizer's training under A. L. Kroeber, but I think in a way it epitomized the leit-motif of a substantial part of Heizer's academic career perfectly, and at the same time explains why he has provided such a tangible influence on so many aspects of California Indian studies besides archaeology itself.