

INTRODUCTION

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The three papers included in the symposium on the antiquity of man in California were presented before the Southwestern Anthropological Association in the Fall of 1951. The writing of this introduction and editing these papers has been one of the pleasanter aspects of my role as president of the Association. In this symposium there were brought together three of the outstanding scholars of California and inter-mountain pre-history. Bringing as they do a variety of background and special interests and techniques to a common problem, they serve to highlight the present state of knowledge of this particular aspect of anthropology, and to point toward future needs and expectations.

Though the scholars themselves and other specialists in far Western archaeology may here and there see points of disagreement and even perhaps of controversy, the outsider to this special interest is impressed with the general concordance. This unity of opinion rests upon the solid foundation of empirical research, for each of these scholars has devoted himself to the evidence at hand; neither endeavoring to press some exceptional claim nor refusing to be swayed by the data before him.

One is impressed in this with the strong evidence that man's tenure in California can be reckoned in millennia but does not go beyond the confines of the late Pleistocene. I take it that none of the three scholars would be shocked to discover a dated human remains as old as 20,000 years, though it is clear from the content of these papers that such antiquity is not yet established by any satisfactory archeological technique. Indeed, the cultures that have been examined would appear to have their maximum antiquity at about 10,000 years; that is, nothing in the presentations of Heizer and Brainerd would question the antiquity that Antevs presents in Chart 1 of his paper. Such a scholarly approach to archaeological evidence stands in strong contrast to the kind of assertions that were made in the earlier part of the century with regard to specific finds of human remains in the Americas. Such assertions, it would appear from the recent publications of G.C. Carter, are not a thing of the past and while intriguing claims for higher antiquity may turn out ultimately to be correct, the development of a science of archaeology rests with these more modest assemblages of evidence.

The development of new scientific techniques in archaeology is most impressive to a person whose archaeological experience terminated over 15 years ago. The recent surge of popularity of what might be called atomic-age dating has, of course, caught the attention of all persons interested in anthropology. What impresses me here, however, is that these specialized techniques do not provide the touchstones for the solution of chronological problems. Each specific technique is fraught with its own problems and the blind use of any of them would undoubtedly lead the archaeologist to error. The lesson goes beyond the limits of archaeology itself and applies to any technique used in all the sciences. The scholars here seem to recognize this

problem and are beginning a critical use of carbon 14, fluorine and similar dating methods. I would be derelict, however, if I did not point out that occasionally their use seems a little opportunistic; that is, they quote the carbon 14 date where it serves the purpose at hand, but deny it where it leads to embarrassment. This it seems to me is an inevitable stage in the development of new technical methods; it means merely that a carbon 14 dating is substantiating evidence and must be seen in the perspective of the total assemblage of archaeological data.

The present symposium collates many evidences on the antiquity of man in California, and raises important methodological and cultural problems. Heizer reviews the data from ethnology, linguistics and physical anthropology, and discusses the problems inherent in carbon 14 and fluorine dating. He closes his discussion with an effort to summarize the positive evidences for antiquity and offers his view of the early peopling of the area under discussion.

Brainerd's investigations focus attention on the more arid portions of the state. He calls attention to the virtue of survey technique in developing knowledge of culture history. This is made possible by the development of a statistical means of seriating a number of assemblages from different sites. Brainerd is also interested in going beyond the problem of culture sequence and facing the ecological involvements. He recognizes the relationship between the technological accomplishments and the environment, on one hand, and the density of population and the character of social organization. These are problems that stand before the prehistorians of the California area.

Antevs' presentation of the climatic conditions of the past 20,000 years offers a detailed framework within which the archaeologist must examine his data. The implications for the climatological changes both for dating specific sites and for understanding the social economy of the ancient cultures is of extreme importance. Even more significantly Antevs has ventured a placement of the more important archaeological findings of the desert area within this chronology.

The three papers presented here serve, I believe, as a summary of achievement and a benchmark for further research on the antiquity of man in California.

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