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# Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers.

Kent G. Lightfoot. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 338 pp., \$45.00 (cloth).

## Reviewed by GLENN J. FARRIS

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Nearly two decades ago, Professor Kent Lightfoot made a bold move in re-introducing the UC Berkeley Anthropology Department to California archaeology, which it had virtually abandoned in the later years of Robert F. Heizer. Despite his extensive background in shell-midden studies and prehistoric archaeology, Lightfoot embraced a study of the interaction of cultures of an unusual sort that took place at Fort Ross. His excavations of the Koniag (Alaskan Native) village situated adjacent to the stockade at the Russian American Company settlement of Colony Ross (1812-1841) led him through a series of considerations of the interactions of ethnic Russians, Native Alaskans, Creoles (derived of Russian and American natives), and the indigenous California Indians who lived in the vicinity of Fort Ross (Kashaya Pomo) and Bodega Bay (Coast Miwok). In order to achieve a level of perspective on this experience, Lightfoot has compared the native experience in the Russian controlled territory with the Franciscan mission system that dominated much of the rest of coastal California ranging south from Sonoma to San Diego.

To set a framework for his study, Lightfoot appeals to the newly developing discipline of "historical anthropology" that seeks to carve out a niche in the long recognized field of historical archaeology by using the historical record in

combination with archaeological finds to shed a clearer light on the period of contact and acculturation. Lightfoot sets up a comparison in this work between the highly proselytized Roman Catholic Spanish missions of California and the trade and production oriented Russian American Company "counter" of Fort Ross. However, rather than being focused on the European ruling class, he seeks to comprehend the impact on the California Indian populations.

The book is divided into 9 chapters. It begins with a discussion of "Dimensions and Consequences of Colonial Encounters." This chapter sketches out the participants in this historical period including the Spanish priests and military, the range of Indian tribes directly affected by missionization, and the interaction with the Russian American Company at their point of intersection in the vicinity of Bodega Bay and Fort Ross. The basic tenets of "historical anthropology" are discussed in this chapter. Lightfoot also lightens the mood of the book by introducing dialogues he has with imagined characters who question his sanity as an archaeologist digging in someone else's garbage. These encounters lead to ruminations on why archaeology is done in the first place.

The second chapter, "Visions of Precolonial Native California," bring in the anthropological data developed by generations of ethnographers and linguists in the study of California Indians. Alfred Kroeber is the principal mover on the scene as he had been virtually from his arrival at UC Berkeley in 1901 until his death there in 1960. Lightfoot points out in this chapter the major impact on the public and professional perception of the California Indian that was developed by Kroeber. Kroeber's goal was to attempt to preserve knowledge of the Indians as they were before their traditional cultures were tainted (if not destroyed) by outside, mainly European, forces. The problem with this approach is that it assumed a cultural constancy for the 10,000 or more years prior to the arrival of these outsiders (particularly after 1769) and then a precipitous destruction of the culture and language of the people to such a degree that the "civilized Indians" were of little interest to anthropologists. The hispanicized Indians of

the mission environment were especially suspect as reliable carriers of the traditional native cultural practices.

"Franciscan Missions in Alta California" forms the third chapter. The development of the California missions and the theocratically-run agricultural communities that they became is described with an attempt to focus on the life of the Indians. Although Lightfoot appears not to have availed himself of Edith Webb's "Indian Life in the Old Missions" in this section, he has made good use of a large number of other more recent studies that have focused more on the Indians than the missionaries in the mission environment. Having set the stage, Lightfoot in chapter 4, "Native Agency in Franciscan Missions" delves even more deeply into the lives of the Indians in the missions, with special attention to their degrees of voluntary and coerced involvement in mission life. Recruitment, native reaction, active resistance, daily practices, enculturation, relocation, labor systems, social mobility, and interethnic unions are all explored in this chapter.

Chapter 5 brings us to a description of the Russian merchants in California. Beginning with an overview of Russian colonization in the Pacific, Lightfoot zeros in on the development of the Ross Colony as an office or "counter" of the Russian American Company. The levels of acculturation demanded, or offered to the native peoples are discussed. Lightfoot makes it clear that this is a very different enterprise where the primary goal is Company profits and not making converts. The fact that there was never a resident Orthodox priest stationed at Fort Ross is indicative of the low priority on enforcing cultural change on the native population. This leads to chapter 6, "Native Agency in the Ross Colony," that seeks to describe in detail the various native peoples (Alaskan and Californian) that made up Colony Ross and how they interacted. It is made clear how erroneous is the popular image of this being a "Russian" colony rather than a population of native peoples with a Russian gloss. In most cases the California natives seem to have interacted far more with the native Alaskans and creole populations than with the ethnic Russian overlords.

A comparison of the "Missionary and

Mercantile Colonies in California" forms the seventh chapter. Here Lightfoot points out the results of the two forms of colonial environment in terms of the melding of native cultures brought together in each system. He contrasts the degree to which the Spanish system extracted native people from their traditional ways and re-cast them in a new form while the Russians' impact on the California Indian traditions and life-ways was in no way as severe.

This leads to his final chapter, "The Aftermath" in which Lightfoot points out the way these differing approaches and impacts on native peoples led the anthropologists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to either embrace or ignore various Indian groups as valid study subjects of anthropology. Obviously, the more heavily impacted Mission Indians were dismissed as culturally tainted while the people directly affected by the Russians (Bodega Miwok and Kashaya Pomo) were avidly sought as having more intact cultures. This had a further impact when it came to governmental recognition of various tribes. Following the Kroeberian prejudices, the Mission Indians have rarely been given federal recognition. On the other hand, the Indians in the Russian zone of influence have been more readily recognized.

With this book, Lightfoot not only adds a useful text to the study of colonial effects on the Indians of California, but fosters his arguments for the developing field of "historical anthropology." His long view of the selective impacts of the choices made by field anthropologists, particularly Alfred Kroeber and many of his students, on the peoples to be regarded as culturally intact Indians leading to the direction taken by federal authorities is an intriguing argument that will generate a healthy discussion. As a final note, I would recommend the book for its extensive bibliography which will no doubt be a boon to many other researchers.

