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REVIEW

The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Fort Ross, California, Volume 1, Introduction.

Kent G. Lightfoot, Thomas A. Wake, and Ann M. Schiff, Contributions to the University of California Archeological Research Facility, Number 49, 1991, ix + 249 pp., 31 tables, 32 figures, 6 appendices, \$18.00 (paper).

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This is the first volume of an intended series on the archaeology and ethnohistory of the Fort Ross area produced from an ongoing research project. Begun in 1988, the collaborative project involves archaeologists and other researchers from U. C. Berkeley, the California State Department of Parks and Recreation, Sonoma State University, and Santa Rosa Junior College. The general purpose of this first volume is to lay out in detail the broad research design of the project, to place it in the context of earlier archaeological and ethnographic research both at Fort Ross and the surrounding region, and to present some preliminary results from the past three years of fieldwork.

The challenging research design focuses on the complex cultural diversity present at this southernmost outpost of the Russian American Company and the impact of mercantile colonialism on the traditional lifeways of the many native populations present at Fort Ross. The authors define three critical factors they need to control in order to understand these issues: 1) the sociopolitical structure, economic organization, and ideology of the precontact Native American societies concerned; 2) the nature and

degree of destruction caused by introduced European diseases; and 3) the broader European and American colonial policies that articulated the "many-headed" world system that shaped the lives of all Fort Ross occupants (pp. 1-2).

Of these three factors, the data presented in Volume 1 focus on the first. The authors explore the extent to which it is possible to write a history of precontact peoples in the Fort Ross vicinity and surrounding region by integrating multiple data sources, including archaeology, ethnography, ethnohistorical documents, native texts, and native oral traditions. This research is conducted in collaboration with the indigenous people of the area, the Kashaya Pomo. Furthermore, the entire project is designed with an eye towards public interpretation, with the ultimate goal of incorporation into the existing interpretive program at Fort Ross.

To accomplish this difficult task, Lightfoot and his colleagues propose the use of a "direct historical approach." Citing earlier work by Steward and others, the authors state that their use of the term differs somewhat from earlier applications.

Rather than employing ethnographic data as models to reconstruct their past, we view historic observations as revealing of the time when they were recorded, and as the end sequences of long-term developments in native societies [pp. 7-8].

This differs from the more familiar direct historical analogy by emphasizing the diachronic nature of the cultures involved, and remaining alert to the unique problems associated with the various data sources used to draw a chronological profile of those cultures.

This approach leads the authors away from the more synchronic, "slice-of-time" pictures created by analogy, and towards a more holistic

view of all data sources. In particular, it is an approach that relies heavily on the use of archaeological data to create fine-grained chronological frameworks for the ethnographic and ethnohistorical materials. At the same time, it ultimately "minimizes the boundary between 'prehistoric' and 'historical' archaeology," and demands considerable flexibility and creativity from the archaeologists involved (pp. 6-8).

The remainder of Volume 1 presents the preliminary data accumulated by the project for the defined Fort Ross Study Area, a 5 by 10 km. area surrounding the fort proper and stretching inland from the coast across two ridge systems. Chapter 2 provides a good basic history for the Fort Ross settlement during the post-contact era, emphasizing the policies of the Russian American Company toward the indigenous labor force it employed. There is also a detailed physical description of the project area, including relevant plant communities, geology, topology, and zoology (Chapter 3). An extremely useful account is provided of the previous archaeological fieldwork conducted in the vicinity of the fort (Chapter 4), an extensive synthesis of ethnographic and ethnohistorical documentation for the Native Americans present at the historical Russian fort as well as the twentieth century Kashaya Pomo community.

The results of the fieldwork are supplied as both a supplement and a partial test of the diverse earlier interpretations. A total of 54 archaeological sites has been recorded for the project area since the 1930s. The Fort Ross Project employed an intensive survey to relocate a number of previously known sites, as well as recording additional sites within the study area. The major concerns were to refine chronological details and clarify the understanding of subsistence and settlement pattern changes in the area from the Emergent/Protohistoric Period through the present.

Given the complex nature of such disparate data sources, the authors acknowledge the

preliminary nature of the conclusions given in this volume and place the new results in the specific context of the earlier archaeological and ethnographic research in the area. For example, the recent survey work would seem to confirm the existence of a central-based village model of settlement, an interpretation of archaeological and ethnographic data first put forward by Stewart (1943:45-47, 148). The chronological refinements of the Fort Ross Project indicate this pattern was a product of the relatively recent Upper Emergent/Protohistoric cultural history.

The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Fort Ross is an extremely ambitious volume whose strengths range from specific site description to the testing of regional models, and from methodological issues to more generally interpretive ones. The detailed summary of previous archaeological research in the area should be useful to anyone working in the region. The authors provide a complex representation of the Kashaya at Fort Ross as both historical agents and contemporary players in the coast community. The initial efforts at coordinating archaeological and ethnographic materials at a regional level, while preliminary, offer considerable promise for the authors' version of the direct historical method. The work should provoke an interesting challenge for other archaeologists working with the rich corpus of California and Great Basin ethnography and ethnohistory.

As a contribution to the general study of mercantile colonies as a context for interaction between Europeans and indigenous societies of the western hemisphere, the project brings a welcome addition to the primarily Atlantic focus of such research in North America. Finally, the attempt to break down the distinction between history and prehistory is in line with many current trends within both archaeology and anthropology generally (cf. Trigger 1981; Wolf 1982; Sahlins 1985; Thomas 1987, 1989; Simons 1988; Deetz 1989). Although problematic in this execution, it is an approach that promises

to transform much of American archaeology, and Lightfoot and his colleagues are poised to make substantial contribution to this work.

Several issues remain to be dealt with in subsequent volumes. The authors must pursue the points they feel were left unsatisfied at current research levels: 1) defining the specific changes in socio-political structure of Kashaya villages both prior to and following European contact; 2) conducting further tests of the central village model; 3) sharpening their internal critiques of the direct historical approach, possibly through refinement of obsidian hydration work; and 4) extended excavations of a greater range of site types.

There also is a need to strengthen discussion of less traditionally archaeologically addressed issues, particularly religion, gender relations, and material culture in the fullest sense. This would include identifying not only additional categories like architecture, but also material culture processes. For example, where *did* the European mercantile goods known to have been traded into the Kashaya community go, since their presence or use is consistently undocumented in the ethnohistorical documents?

Finally, Lightfoot and his colleagues express an interest in turning the tables, and exploring indigenous influences on the Europeans living at Fort Ross (p. 4). The question of how to do this remains for further research. In part, the answer may come as the project continues to work with

the Kashaya and incorporates an account of their cultural history up to the present into the project research. This is one of the stated goals, but remains to be addressed.

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