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Washo Archaeology: Clued In by Clewlow

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This paper concerns C. William (Billy) Clewlow's contribution to archaeological ideas and their development relative to the prehistory of the Sierra Nevada around Lake Tahoe and the western Great Basin between the mid-1960s and early 1970s. The work of Clewlow and his fellow U.C. Berkeley graduate student James F. O'Connell was crucial to the solution of typological problems I faced in trying to organize a large collection of projectile points from the east slope of the Sierra Nevada. Clewlow's work with point typology was important far beyond the east slope, however; it contributed to the development of Great Basin/Sierran point keys still in use today. Clewlow was the first Great Basin archaeologist to recognize in print the utility of named point types with known temporal ranges for the study of disturbed deposits and surface archaeology.

The studies of Great Basin projectile points carried out by Clewlow (1967) and O'Connell (1967) were crucial in helping me address problems that I faced in analyzing materials collected during the 1965 Washo[1] Archaeology Project led by University of Nevada archaeologist Wilber (Buck) Davis. These problems included the lack of a detailed chronology, and uncertainties about where the regional archeology fit into the greater scheme of things. I will first outline the background to my involvement in Washoe archaeology and my relationship to Billy and Berkeley. I will then discuss the problems I faced in trying to order the projectile points we recovered from excavations during the 1965 field season, and how I came to depend on papers written by Billy and Jim O'Connell. I will conclude by tracing the intellectual history of Great Basin projectile point typologies and Billy's place in that history.

THE WASHO ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

During the mid-1960s and early 1970s, I was a graduate student under Wilbur (Buck) Davis at the University of Nevada, Reno, working on his Washo Archaeology Project, which was investigating the prehistory of the Washoe Indians of the eastern Sierra Nevada. I later continued that work as Robert Stephenson's assistant in the newly formed Nevada Archeological Survey.

The Washo Archaeology Project was stimulated by previous research of U.C. Berkeley archaeologists Robert Heizer and Albert Elsasser (Elsasser 1960; Heizer and and Elsasser 1953).The Nevada-Berkeley archaeology axis was very strong at that time. Buck and I took Jim O'Connell to Surprise Valley to view the Rodreiguez site for the first time, and Robert Stephenson provided support to Billy and Richard Cowan during their initial Black Rock Desert sojourn. Heizer and Elsasser both encouraged me on the Washoe project. Most importantly, I was fortunate to interact with, and be influenced by, all of the Berkeley graduate students then working in the Great Basin, including Billy Clewlow.

In 1965, I graduated from San Francisco State College, where I had been trained in archaeology by Adan Treganza and had worked on sites under his direction around the Bay Area. Treganza recommended me to Wilbur (Buck) Davis at the University of Nevada, Reno, who was looking for crew for the 1965 season of the Washo Archaeology Project. Buck hired me as crew chief, and my wife, Cashion Callaway, as camp cook.

Buck was interested in relationships between the Martis and Kings Beach archaeological complexes and the ethnographic Washoe. Considerable information about Washoe site locations, subsistence, and economics had been published or was available in theses and manuscripts written by anthropologists from the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Utah, and the University of Nevada (d'Azevedo 1956, 1963; Downs 1963, 1966; Freed 1966; Lowrie 1939; Price 1962, 1963).

Working mostly from surface survey, Robert Heizer and Albert Elsasser at U.C. Berkeley had worked out the basic prehistoric sequence for the Sierra Nevada region around Lake Tahoe (Elsasser 1960; Heizer and Elsasser 1953). They recognized two central Sierran archaeological complexes: Kings Beach, characterized by arrowheads and small flake tools of chert, dating from about 800 B.P., and Martis, characterized by large dart points and tools made mostly of "basalt" (actually andesite and trachyte) and cross-dated to 3,500–1,400 B.P. Kings Beach and Martis site locations also seemed to differ. Elsasser (1960) found that the Martis Complex exhibited traits characteristic of both the Great Basin and California. Did its "center" lie in either region, or was it "autochthonous," centered on the Sierra Nevada between the two? If Martis was based in either the Great Basin or California, then one would expect to find traits diagnostic of that region in the high altitude parts of the Sierra Nevada (Elsasser 1960).

Buck was an innovative thinker who wanted to look at archaeological sites in all the different ecological zones that a prehistoric group might have exploited. In the case of Lake Tahoe and the valleys along the northern portion of the eastern Sierra front (Truckee Meadows, Carson Valley), Buck thought that variation in the location and content of archaeological sites should reflect different human resource procurement strategies that would mirror, to some degree, ethnographic Washoe transhumance, and that could also help address Elsasser's (1960) question about the center of Martis culture. This drew on the direct historical approach (Steward 1942)—working backwards from what we know—and was quite different from the then prevailing tactic of locating and excavating a cave, and then projecting that cave's sequence on an entire region. Graduate students from U.C. Berkeley and U.C. Davis would soon employ similar approaches (O'Connell 1971; Thomas 1971).

Buck did not pursue formal systematic survey of the kind pioneered in the Great Basin by O'Connell (1971) and Thomas (1971). Through informal survey and tips from relic collectors, Buck located sites in different ecozones, and we excavated four of them in the summer of 1965: 26DO38 at Spooner Lake on the crest of the Carson Range between Carson Valley and Lake Tahoe, 26DO37 on Daphne Creek in Jacks Valley (Carson Valley), and 26WA700 and 26WA701 on Nine Hill overlooking the Washoe Valley and Washoe Lake (Elston 1971).

FACING THE LIMITS OF DESCRIPTIVE TYPOLOGY

At the end of the season, I was confronted with the task of organizing the collection, which contained 345 projectile points. The division between Kings Beach and Martis was clear, and the temporal significance of the Desert Series (Baumhoff and Byrne 1959) and Rose Spring (Lanning 1963) and Eastgate points (Heizer and Baumhoff 1961) was already recognized. At historic contact, the Washoe had been using points that fit the Desert Series: small, plain, and side-notched, triangular arrowheads. However, dealing with the larger dart points was problematical.

Over the next two or three years, I struggled to make typological sense of these artifacts. First I tried using the number/letter Berkeley typological system developed by Heizer and Elsasser (Heizer and Elsasser 1953) and slightly modified by Elsasser (Elsasser 1960; Heizer and Elsasser 1953) to classify Martis points. This system divided points into 11 types and 22 subtypes on the basis of variations in formal attributes such as blade shape, base shape, stem (if any) shape, notch shape, and notch placement. This system, much like the one Riddell used for points from the Karlo site (Riddell 1960), forced me to divide my large point collection into many small groups. However, these groups did not sort out by level or by our (relatively crude) stratigraphy, and the analytical system hindered thinking about all of this variability as variation within fewer and larger groups. I was unable to obtain anything like a temporal sequence using the Martis typology on the heavy basalt points that we collected. Buck recommended that I try Cressman's (Cressman et al. 1960) typology, which was developed for the Dalles site on which Buck had worked, but it monitored a different set of morphological attributes than those present in our collection and it had similar problems to the Martis number and letter system.

SAVED BY CLEWLOW AND O'CONNELL

In 1967, two papers were published that showed me a way out of my impasse. Clewlow's seminal paper "Time

and Space Relationships of Some Great Basin Projectile Point Types" (1967) cited Krieger's (1940) admonition to move away from purely descriptive point typologies to typologies that "have demonstrable historical meaning in terms of behavior patterns." I had already discovered Krieger's approach to typology building (Krieger 1944), via Cressman, but Clewlow described how this could be done in the Great Basin. Clewlow cogently criticized "purely descriptive systems which reduce point types to a welter of letters or numerical codes with little if any cultural significance." He argued that these schemes were holdovers from American archaeology's astratigraphic beginnings, when the idea of real time depth was a rare and radical notion, and suggested that we were now far past the time when they should be abandoned.

In place of static descriptive typologies, Clewlow recommended the method used to type projectile points from Wagon Jack Shelter employed by Heizer and Baumhoff (1961). Wagon Jack Shelter produced a number of dart points that occurred stratigraphically below smaller arrow points. The dart points were mostly similar in size, shape, and manufacturing technology, but differed in the placement of notches and whether the base was straight or deeply concave. Heizer and Baumhoff (1961) subsumed this variation in a series named Elko with three subtypes, Elko Corner-notched, Elko Eared, and Elko Side-notched, all of which were assumed to be equivalent in age. Essentially, this method ignored morphological variations that did not reflect temporal/spatial relationships. Most importantly, Clewlow pointed out that named projectile point types from dated contexts (Elko Series, Pinto, Humboldt Concave-base, Rose Spring, Eastgate, Desert Side-notched, Cottonwood) could be used as time markers wherever they were found (Clewlow 1967). This was reinforced by O'Connell's analysis of time and space relationships involving Elko points (O'Connell 1967).

While I could see a lot of similarities between many of the dart points in my collection and named Great Basin types (Pinto, Humboldt CCB, and Elko Series), there was obviously a great deal more morphological variability in the collection. In any case, I decided to start from scratch using Krieger's approach to typology building (Krieger 1944), and then to apply the insights about Great Basin points reached by Clewlow (1967), O'Connell (1967), and others.

Following Krieger (1944), I first created two arbitrary or inductively derived groups, or working patterns, that I called Kings Beach and Other. Kings Beach comprised all the small arrow points. I next sorted the points into 48 very uniform working groups (which essentially was what was involved in the old Martis and Karlo typologies) on the basis of formal and technological attributes.

The final step was to recombine the working groups into tentative types based on geographical, temporal, and associational distributions that would "consistently combine through site after site, in the same temporal horizon and in the same cultural complex" (Krieger 1944). My guides for these dimensions were previous studies in which points were observed in stratigraphic and geographic contexts at sites such as Rose Spring and Wagon Jack Shelter (Baumhoff and Byrne 1959; Clewlow 1967; Heizer and Baumhoff 1961; Lanning 1963; O'Connell 1967).

About 40 percent of the dart points closely matched Great Basin types (Humboldt Concave Base, Pinto, and Elko), and the remaining 60 percent fell into four morphological types that I named Sierra Stemmed Triangular, Martis Triangular, Martis Stemmed Leaf, and Martis Corner-notched. If Martis Corner-notched points were considered a regional variant of Elko Corner-notched, then 50% of the dart points and all of the arrow points in our collection were Great Basin types.

The work of O'Connell (1967) and especially Clewlow (1967) helped me to identify the strong Great Basin component in Martis and the earlier Spooner Complex, which led me to the conclusion that both represented essentially Great Basin-oriented adaptations to the eastern Sierra Nevada involving transhumance (Elston 1971).

EAST SLOPE PROJECTILE POINT KEYS

About this time, David Thomas asked what exactly were the physical and morphological attributes that allowed us to visually distinguish between the named Great Basin projectile point types discussed by Clewlow (1967) and others? This question led him to devise the Monitor Valley projectile point key (Thomas 1970, 1981), which allows points to be placed into types with less ambiguity than is the case with visual sorting, although it involves a lot of tedious measurements.

When I later used the Monitor Valley key on collections of dart points from the Martis region on the Sierran east slope and front valleys, it identified many points as Great Basin types, but others I had named in my (Elston 1971) visual sorting exercise (e.g., Sierra Stemmed Triangular, Martis Triangular, Martis Stemmed Leaf, and Martis Corner-notched), fell out of the key. My colleagues and I subsequently reworked my Martis typology (Elston 1971; Elston, et al. 1977, 1994; Stornetta 1982), and in the process came to recognize more Great Basin affinities.

Nevertheless, like Elsasser (1960), I was, and continue to be, intrigued by Spooner/Martis point variability that is outside the norm for Great Basin point types on the East Slope. Much of this variation remains unexplained. Some could be due to technical problems involved in working fine-grained volcanics such as andesite and trachyte, but perhaps a better explanation lies in the fact that the Sierra Nevada was a border region between the California and Great Basin culture areas. Far from being a physical barrier, however, the high meadows drew summer foragers from both sides of the range, where they could meet and trade goods and ideas, activities confirmed by the presence of exotic tool stone on each side of the range. Contracting-stem Martis and leaf-shaped Steamboat points resemble Windmiller points from interior California, but both of these types were manufactured in East Slope sites. At the least, this suggests an early, broad connection over the mountains between the western Great Basin and interior California.

CONCLUSIONS

By the mid-1960s, several Great Basin dart and arrow point types had been described and their temporal ranges established via radiocarbon dating (Baumhoff and Byrne 1959; Heizer and Baumhoff 1961; Lanning 1963). It remained only for someone to call attention to the fact that each of these types was a *time marker*, and both O'Connell (1967) and Clewlow (1967) did that.

Clewlow's 1967 paper went further, however. It explained why number-letter descriptive typologies were a dead end, and urged their replacement by named types with known temporal ranges. Clewlow also pointed out that because each type marked a temporal range, one could use points to estimate the dates of occupation of disturbed or buried sites, as well as date and compare the ages of surface sites. This fact became immensely important to Great Basin archaeological research and cultural resource management projects that increasingly depended on large-scale surface surveys (d'Azevedo 1986).

Clewlow's (1967) paper on time and space relationships of Great Basin projectile points not only contributed to my understanding of geographical and temporal relationships on the East Slope, but also set the stage for the comprehensive projectile point typology and chronology later formalized by Thomas (Thomas 1970, 1981), and that is employed today in the central and western Great Basin.

NOTE

[1]Ethnographies and archaeological reports used the spelling "Washo" until publication of the *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol, 11: Great Basin* (d'Azevado 1986), when "Washoe" became universal.

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