

GETTING THE WORD OUT: SHARING DATA AND IDEAS ON BAJA CALIFORNIA'S PREHISTORY

DON LAYLANDER

A growing volume of archaeological work is being done to study Baja California's prehistory. This raises the question of how its results can most effectively be shared, both among the researchers themselves and with wider audiences. Books, articles, conferences, and other media are all being used with increasing effectiveness. Making greater use of digital media, including CDs and the web, seems to be especially well suited to meeting the needs of this particular field.

INTRODUCTION

The 2007 SCA symposium on "Potential Directions for Understanding Baja California Prehistory" offered an occasion to take stock of the data and ideas that have been coming out of archaeological research into Baja California's prehistory. It was also an opportune moment to look at the efforts being made to share these results, both among fellow researchers and with wider audiences. Considerable progress has been made, and some of the emerging opportunities are worth highlighting.

BOOKS AND MONOGRAPHS

Book-length publications are one measure of the academic or intellectual maturity of a field of study. For Baja California prehistory, the first publications were those addressing the peninsula's outstanding array of rock art. These included notable works by Clement W. Meighan (1969; Meighan and Pontoni 1978), Campbell Grant (1974), Harry W. Crosby (1975, 1984, 1997), and Enrique Hambleton (1979). The first full-length synthesis of both archaeological and ethnographic information on the peninsula was written by Anita Álvarez de Williams (1975). Her book has now been made available again in a new printing (Álvarez 2004). Jerry Moore and I recently edited another volume that attempted to synthesize current data and perspectives on the region's prehistory (Laylander and Moore 2006). Mexico's *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (INAH) has published two book-length monographs on different aspects of Baja California archaeology. Alfonso Rosales-López and Harumi Fujita (2000) have described the results of excavations at an important shell midden site near La Paz, in Baja California Sur. María de la Luz Gutiérrez and Justin R. Hyland (2002) have reported on extensive surveys and limited excavations in the Sierra de San Francisco of the central peninsula.

In addition to formally printed books, works of similar length and depth but which have been less widely circulated exist in the form of unpublished theses and dissertations, such as those by Alfonso Alvarado Bravo, Matthew R. Des

Lauriers, Laura Esquivel Macías, Harumi Fujita, María de la Luz Gutiérrez, Ken Hedges, Celeste N. Henrickson, Justin R. Hyland, Jerome H. King, William C. Massey, Elanie A. Moore, Scott Moore, Eric W. Ritter, Eduardo Serafín Esquivel, Donald R. Tuohy, and the present author. Even more limited in their availability to subsequent researchers have been the innumerable *informes*, or technical reports, that have been prepared for INAH by its staff investigators and by other permit-holding researchers.

ARTICLES

Another equally important venue for sharing research results has been articles published in a variety of professional journals and popular periodicals or in edited volumes that address broader regional or disciplinary themes. The number of published articles on Baja California archaeology has grown significantly during recent years. A few of the places where they have appeared in English include *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* (now *Journal of Anthropological Research*), *American Antiquity*, *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology*, and *Proceedings of the Society for California Archaeology*. Spanish-language publications include *Calafia*, *Meyibó*, *Estudios Fronterizos*, *Arqueología*, and *Arqueología Mexicana*. A new addition to this set, since 2001, has been the glossy bilingual publication *CAREM: Camino Real Misionero de las Californias*, containing articles on prehistoric as well as historical themes. The *Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly* merits particular mention as a leader in the field. Over the last 40 years, *PCAS Quarterly* has published 25 issues that have included papers about Baja California, and at least two more such issues are currently in the works.

CONFERENCES

Annual or one-time meetings have served to bring together the geographically dispersed Baja California prehistorians to share their latest findings, both among themselves and with other interested audiences. From 1963

until 1992, the *Asociación Cultural de las Californias* held annual sessions of its binational Baja California Symposium in Alta or Baja California. These meetings often included papers relating to Baja California's prehistory. Between 1994 and 1998, the *Instituto de Culturas Nativas de Baja California* (CUNA), under the direction of Miguel Wilken-Robertson, staged binational Baja California Indígena conferences to discuss the region's anthropology and history. These conferences were succeeded in 2000 by INAH's annual *Encuentro Binacional: Balances y Perspectivas* symposia. Under the direction of Julia Bendímez and Elinora Topete, with support from the BLM, SCA, and other organizations, *Balances y Perspectivas* is now in its eighth year.

Baja California archaeology has also been represented at many other conferences. These have included meetings hosted in Mexico by INAH, the universities, and historical groups, and in the U.S. by the Society for American Archaeology, the American Rock Art Research Association, and the San Diego Museum of Man. SCA's own annual meetings have occasionally included either individual papers or organized symposia on Baja California since at least 1983, but this participation has become a more frequent and regular feature of the meetings since 1998. A notable innovation in 2006 was the holding of an SCA Southern Data Sharing meeting in Ensenada.

OTHER POPULAR MEDIA

A variety of additional means are available to share the findings of Baja California archaeology with the general public. Among these are newspaper articles, radio and television programs, and internet videos. Museums, as well as providing facilities for curation and research, serve as institutions of informal public education. Important regional museums exist in Mexicali, La Paz, Ensenada, and Tijuana, and there are also at least six small community museums scattered throughout the northern half of the peninsula and still others in the south. In 2006, new Baja California archaeological displays took their place within Mexico's celebrated *Museo Nacional de Antropología* in Mexico City. Selected archaeological sites featuring rock art have been opened to the public in the central peninsula's Sierra de San Francisco and at Vallecitos near the U.S. border.

DIGITAL MEDIA

Particularly worth stressing are the present value and future potential of digital media, including compact disks (CDs) and the worldwide web. The majority of formal papers, theses, dissertations, and *informes* are probably now originally composed on computers, and their wider diffusions in digital format would be a natural next step for archaeologists to take.

Attractively edited CDs have been used to make available papers from each of the first seven *Balances y Perspectivas* symposia. Some dissertations and theses have been circulated among researchers in this format, as have at least a few *informes*. In their use of this medium, the archaeologists who are working in Baja California may be a little bit ahead of their colleagues in Alta California.

Web pages offer great potential as a means for assembling and sharing information, both among specialists and with wider interested audiences. In 2002, Miguel Wilken-Robertson and I initiated www.bajacalifologia.org, a bilingual web page on the anthropology of Baja California, with those objectives in mind. Certainly this initial effort has done no more than scratch the surface of the medium's potential. Other individually created web pages, such as Steven Shackley's discussion of obsidian sources (www.swxrflab.net/swobsrsrcs.htm) or Robert H. Jackson's illustrations of the Baja California missions (www.h-net.org/~latam/powerpoints/TheMissionsofBajaCalifornia.pdf), offer contributions of interest to Baja California researchers. Collectively created, general-purpose sites such as Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) can also be used to make accurate, up-to-date information available to the general public.

Digital media cannot be expected to replace old-fashioned print media within the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing some of the advantages offered by digital publication, particularly for a field like Baja California prehistory:

1. Information can be reproduced, distributed, and stored more economically in this format.
2. The speed with which digital files can be distributed is another advantage.
3. Searchability is an important argument in favor of digital format. Many published books and most journals do not have full analytical indices to help readers locate information on a specific subject. Searching through digital documents using keywords or key phrases can be done easily, rapidly, and accurately.
4. Ease and speed of revision is another important advantage of digital media. Relatively few books or articles ever go through a second edition, but it is nearly effortless to correct, update, and distribute revised versions of digital documents. The web and email also encourage readers to provide more critical feedback to authors.
5. Of particular interest to researchers and students working within a multi-national field like Baja California archaeology is the availability

of computer translation. Today's translation programs are still fairly crude, as can be seen from the following example of the Spanish-language abstract for Antonio Porcayo Michelini's SCA symposium paper as translated by Google:

El objetivo será el de dar ciertos criterios e hipótesis a contrastar en futuros registros de sitios y/o excavaciones, para corroborar que la gente que identificamos perteneciente al complejo San Dieguito, sí tuvieron una conducta que los diferenciaba de otros grupos más antiguos, contemporáneos y tardíos, evidente en sus restos materiales.

The objective will be the one to give to certain criteria and hypothesis to contrast in future registries of sites and/or excavations, to corroborate that people that we identified pertaining to the complex San Dieguito, yes had a conduct who differentiated them from other older groups, contemporary and delayed, evident in their material rest.

Computer translation programs will probably not attain anything close to true linguistic proficiency any time soon. However, for a researcher who cannot read the English, Spanish, French, Italian, or German in which a key document was originally written, the existing translation programs offer a quick and easy way to get at least the gist of what the document has to say.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, substantial progress has been made in sharing the results of prehistoric archaeological research in Baja California. To promote the continuation of this progress, a few small steps forward may be suggested:

- Researchers should continue to make it a priority to publish books and articles and give conference presentations that describe and interpret their findings.
- Researchers should consider the advantages of using digital media to make their findings available, particularly in cases in which hard-copy publication is not planned.
- The circulation of some reports must be restricted because they contain confidential site location information. Researchers should consider organizing their reports so that all such sensitive material is put into confidential appendices and so that the remainder of the data can be distributed as rapidly, widely, and freely as possible.

Above all, what is needed is that as wide a range of individuals as possible be given the means and encouragement to contribute in their various ways to the collective enterprise of refining our knowledge and understanding of Baja California's prehistory. This can happen through the use of many different media, including such diverse forums as PCASQ, *Bajacalifologia*, Wikipedia, *Balances y Perspectivas*, and SCA symposia.

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