

Archaeological Expectations for Communal Mourning in the Greater Los Angeles Basin

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Ethnographic and ethnohistoric data are used to develop expectations for communal mourning features in the archaeological record of the greater Los Angeles basin. This analysis establishes that such ritual was distinct from funerary activity at the time of death in both practice and meaning, and the material remains of communal mourning may be identified based on constituents, object condition, item placement, feature structure, and intrasite context. Diachronic changes in communal mourning revealed in the ethnographic and ethnohistoric record also suggest, however, that archaeological evidence of such practices in the distant past may not conform in all respects to expectations derived from written sources. Cross-cultural information on the place of public performances of mourning and remembrance within small-scale societies in California provides a context for future studies on the social significance of communal mourning in the distant past.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST IN COMMUNAL Mourning, as it is described in the ethnographic literature of southern California, dates back at least to the 1930s, when Edwin Walker (1936, 1952) suggested that dense aggregations of lithic objects recovered at several sites in the greater Los Angeles basin (CA-LAN-21, -26, -138, -167, -407; the CA- prefix will be omitted hereinafter) represented such an activity (Fig. 1). While acknowledging Walker's work, subsequent researchers (Treganza and Bierman 1958; Wallace 1954) were often reluctant to attribute such meaning to similar features observed at other sites in the basin or in nearby areas (e.g., LAN-1, VEN-1), due in part to the fact that the apparent antiquity of these sites suggested a continuity in traditions at odds with current preconceptions about native cultural persistence (e.g., Treganza and Bierman 1958). Nevertheless, recent archaeological investigations at several well-dated sites on the coastal margin of the Los Angeles basin (LAN-63, ORA-263, ORA-1055; see Fig. 1) have again revealed features that have been interpreted as loci of communal mourning (Cleland et al. 2007; Douglass et al. 2005; Hull et al. 2007; McLean et al. 2008:80), evidently confirming the fact that such rites were a facet of native life in the region for more than 2,000 years.

Although contemporary archaeologists are more comfortable than the previous generation in positing a continuity in practice in coastal southern California over such a long time span, a thorough discussion of both the actions and meanings of communal mourning in the distant past would benefit from the development of clear archaeological expectations for such behavior. Therefore, the current study presents detailed ethnographic and ethnohistoric data on mortuary practices and mourning ceremonies among native people in the greater Los Angeles basin, with the goal of differentiating these two forms of ritual and specifically defining the material consequences of communal commemoration. Furthermore, this study considers cross-cultural data that illuminate the place of public performances of mourning and remembrance within small-scale societies in California, as a context for interpreting the potential significance of such practices in the ancient past. Through the careful examination of available sources, this analysis establishes communal mourning in both practice and meaning as something distinct from funerary activities at the time of death, and in so doing lays the groundwork for future assessments of both the existence and potential evolution of communal mourning as represented in the archaeological record of the greater Los Angeles basin.

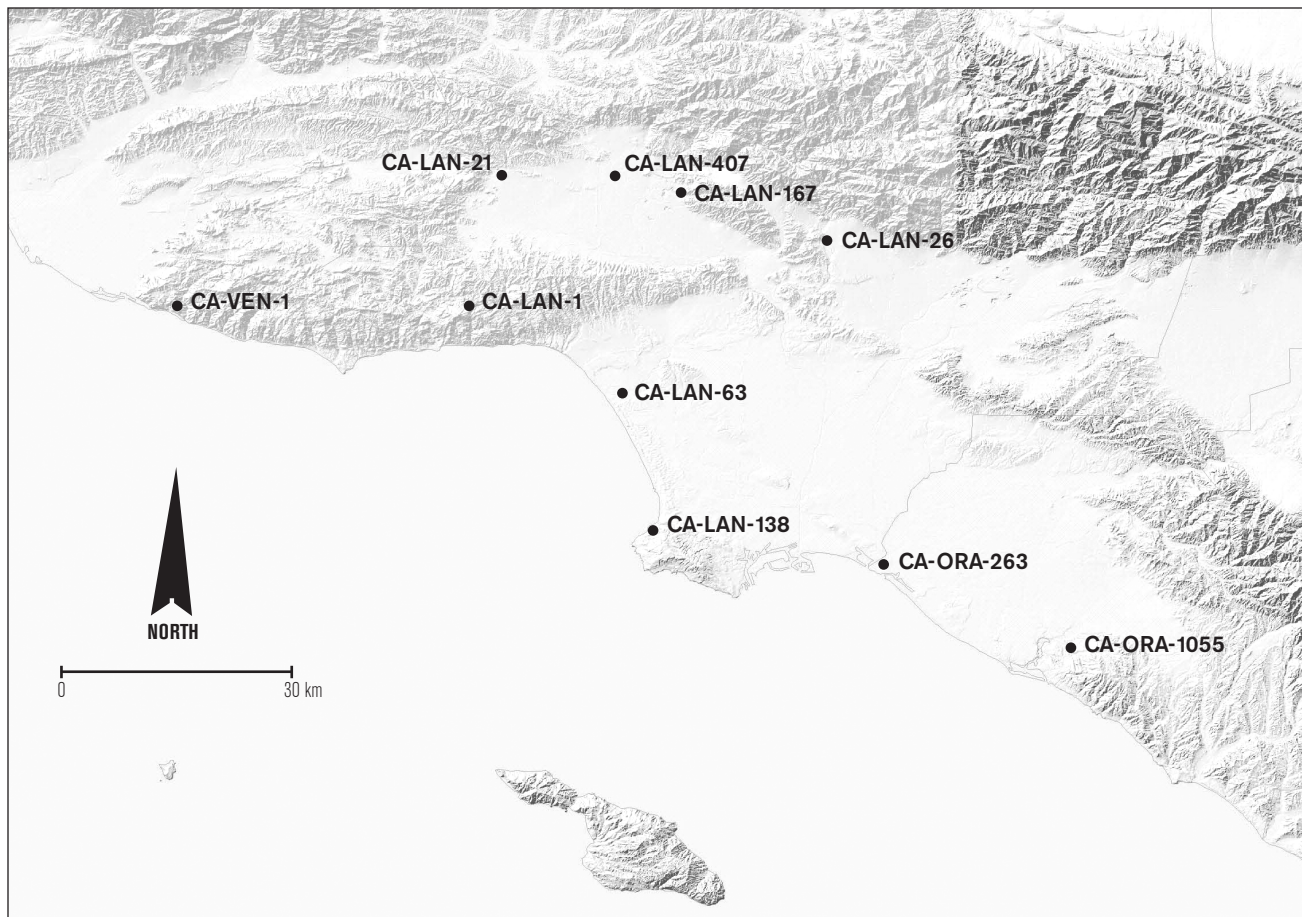


Figure 1. Location of archaeological sites in the greater Los Angeles area with putative communal mourning features.

THE CONTEXT OF RELEVANT ETHNOGRAPHIC AND ETHNOHISTORIC DATA

Ethnographic data on indigenous mortuary practices and mourning rites in California were largely collected in the early decades of the 1900s by faculty, graduate students, and other scholars associated with the University of California at Berkeley, although additional significant information for southern California native groups was being gathered by John Peabody Harrington of the Smithsonian Institution at around the same time. These researchers, who were engaged in “salvage” ethnography, conducted work at an often dizzying pace, constructing an “ethnographic present” of the mid-1700s on the basis of memory culture; i.e., many traditional practices had already fallen from regular use or their original meanings had been lost in the face of colonial and subsequent social and economic pressures, but anthropologists brought a combination of ethnographic and linguistic

evidence to bear on the task of reconstructing traditional lifeways, albeit practices and beliefs that potentially had already been significantly impacted by a century of European colonialism. Given the scope of the undertaking and the dissolution or reorganization of many native communities, such data were organized in terms of broad ethnolinguistic groupings (Fig. 2).

Along the central and southern California coast, this colonial history included the voluntary or involuntary recruitment of native people into the Spanish mission system, with the Franciscan missions of San Gabriel (est. 1771), San Juan Capistrano (est. 1776), and San Fernando (est. 1797) being located in the greater Los Angeles basin (see Fig. 2). These missions drew native people from numerous distinct “lodges” (Reid 1968) — i.e., affiliated villages with a shared communal identity, roughly equivalent to what Kroeber (1955) referred to as “tribelets” in central California. These, in

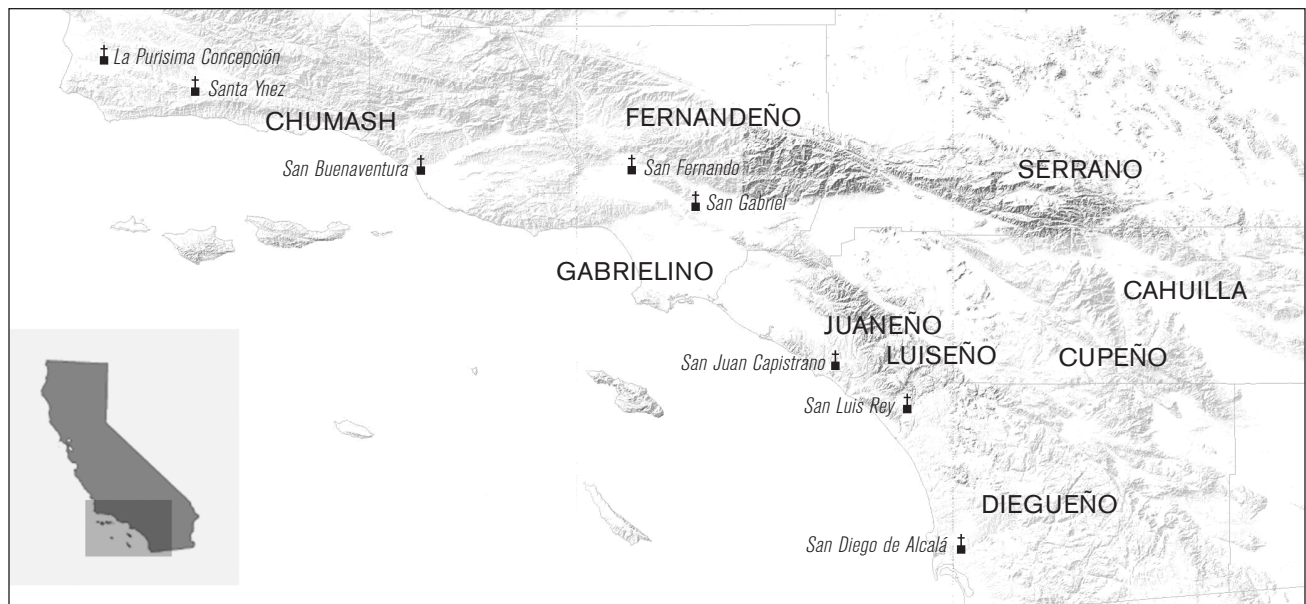


Figure 2. Location of historic Franciscan missions in southern California relative to ethnolinguistic groups studied by early ethnographers.

turn, represented at least three ethnolinguistic groups known in the region (i.e., Luiseño [subsuming Juaneño], Gabrielino [Tongva], and Fernandeño [Tataviam]; see Fig. 2). Within these colonial institutions, native people were compelled to abandon traditional ritual practices and beliefs, although the resilience of at least some elements of practice in non-mission venues or in private spaces within mission compounds is demonstrated by both archaeological and ethnohistoric data (e.g., Boscana 1978:79, 90; Cook 1943; Costello and Hornbeck 1989:315, 316; Duhaut-Cilly 1999:119; Farnsworth 1989; Robinson 1978; Tac et al. 1952). These data also provide glimpses into mortuary and mourning practices in the common arenas of traditional native life prior to the incorporation of people into the mission system in the greater Los Angeles area, and thus complement the ethnographic work of the early 1900s that was focused primarily on other areas of southern California.

BOSCANA'S OBSERVATIONS ON THE COAST

Around 1825, Friar Geronimo Boscana prepared what is widely considered to be the earliest ethnography describing indigenous religious beliefs and ritual practices in coastal southern California (Boscana 1978); he intended to use this information to facilitate the religious conversion of native people at San Juan

Capistrano. His study was pieced together over a number of years from a patchwork of observations within native communities that extended from mission San Diego de Alcalá in the south to La Purísima Concepción in the north (see Fig. 2), although the bulk of his data relate specifically to the people residing in the valleys and mountains to the north and east of San Juan Capistrano (i.e., Juaneño [Ajáhmeyam] and Gabrielino/Tongva [Kroeber 1925:636]). Boscana's work is therefore especially relevant to the greater Los Angeles basin, although we must be attentive to the fact that data from ethnolinguistic groups to both the north and south (i.e., Chumash and Diegueño) may have been incorporated into Boscana's descriptions. Information relevant to the Los Angeles basin, at least, came from both direct observations of ongoing ritual practice in traditional settings and from information provided by elders with apparent authority in such matters.

The use of Boscana's work in contemporary studies is complicated somewhat by our reliance on a translation prepared by Alfred Robinson in 1846 (Bright 1978:iii). On the other hand, annotations on Juaneño/Ajáhmeyam and Luiseño (Qechyam) lifeways and language added to Boscana's treatise by ethnographer John Peabody Harrington in 1933 provide additional context and information that enhances the English translation upon which Harrington also relied (Bright 1978:v–iv; cf.

Kroeber 1959). However, Harrington (1934:3) also had access to a “very literal and careful [English] translation” of a slightly earlier version of Boscana’s manuscript, and his annotations may reflect his knowledge of both records, since he noted “each version...[contains] certain important data that the other omits” (Harrington 1934:1).

Funerary Practices

Among other things, Boscana (1978:73) described the activities and roles of community members upon the death of an individual, activities which seemed to primarily involve the actions of kin and — at times — an official hired to cremate the body (since Boscana [1978:73] also noted “sepulture” [i.e., burial] as another form of mortuary treatment). A few days after death, the body, the possessions of the deceased, and other “articles of value” contributed by relatives and friends were placed on a funeral pyre at “the place of sacrifice.”¹ The mourners did not witness the blaze themselves; they instead relied on the community specialist hired for the purpose of igniting and tending the pyre, and then informing the mourners when the deed was complete. Boscana made no reference to the final disposition of the cremated (or buried) remains, although following notification by the specialist, kin and friends removed themselves from the village to mourn, accompanied by one of the village *puplem* (i.e., a shaman, “one who knows all things”), who sang a song recounting the course of the fatal illness through the body of the deceased (cf. Kroeber 1925:642).

These songs were generally repeated over and over for three days and nights, and then they returned to their homes. The mode of testifying their grief by outward appearance was by shortening the hair of their heads; and in conformity to the kin of the deceased, they regulated the custom.... The same custom is now in use and not only applied to deaths, but to their disappointments and adversities in life, thus making public demonstration of their sorrow [Boscana 1978:73].

This passage attests to a bodily expression of individual mourning—that is, the intimately emotional experience of grief, as well as a public demonstration of liminal social status following a death—of kin, that was distinct from the collective expressions of loss or remembrance that were demonstrated in other ways through objects, place, and performance (see below).

There may also have been public or private rites of remembrance of the deceased near the anniversary of his or her death (see Boscana 1978:67), although it is unclear if this pertained to all, or just some, community members.

While noting variations in oral traditions (Boscana 1978:27) between groups in the San Juan Capistrano area—perhaps reflecting differences between ethno-linguistic groups that were later recognized by ethnographers—Boscana’s further study of world-origin narratives suggests that the practice of cremation had deep roots within native communities in this region. In recounting the origin story told by people of the mountainous area to the east of San Juan Capistrano, Boscana (1978:28) related how the elder descendants of Ouiot, the primordial being created through the union of the worlds above (brother) and below (sister), decided to cremate rather than inter the body upon his death: “The fire was prepared, the body placed upon a pile erected for the occasion.” All of the body was consumed by flames save for a “large piece of flesh” removed from the abdomen² by Coyote and eaten by him while the corpse was burning. In the days following the cremation, the specter of the new law-giver and god Chinigchinich appeared, endowing each of those gathered with particular powers to bring forth the natural resources necessary for human survival. Thus, collectively, Ouiot’s descendants had the means to support themselves, with Boscana noting that

[e]ven now, such as claim to be descendants of this people [i.e., *puplem*] pretend to be endowed with the same powers and are frequently consulted as to their harvests, and receive in return for their advice, a gift of some kind, either in money or clothing. In fact, the result of their harvest depends entirely upon the maintenance given to these sorcerers, and the supplying all their necessities [1978:29].

On this occasion, Chinigchinich also created human beings, the descendants of whom are “the Indians of the present day,” and “he taught them the laws they were to observe for the future, as well as their rites and ceremonies. His first commandment was to build a temple [*vanquech* (Juaneño/Ajáchmeyam, Luiseño/Qechyam) or *yoba* (Gabrielino/Tongva) [Kroeber 1925:628], where they might pay to him adoration, offer up sacrifices, and have religious worship” (Boscana 1978:29).

In contrast, the native people of the coast and valleys immediately to the north of San Juan Capistrano related that Ouiot issued from the union of Sirout (“handful of tobacco”) and Ycaiot (“above”), a man and woman descended from the first people made by Nocumo, creator of all things (Boscana 1978:31). In this rendering, Ouiot is a despotic leader whose power over many villages expands from his original base at Pubuna, located approximately 20 miles (i.e., “eight leagues”) northeast of San Juan Capistrano. After his death by poisoning at the hands of his subjects,

[couriers were sent] to all the towns and settlements which Ouiot had governed, summoning the people to the interment of their grand captain....They consulted together as to the propriety of burning or interring the body and they decided upon the former. The funeral pile was made, the deceased placed upon it, the pile was fired, and during the time of its burning, they danced and sang songs of rejoicing [Boscana 1978:32–33].

In this narrative, a man (Attajen) then appeared among the representatives of the far-flung towns who “had met together to assist at the funeral ceremonies,” and in turn bestowed upon these individuals the power to provide resources for the survival of the whole. Many years or generations later, the god Ouiamot (Chinigchinich) arrived at Pubuna to teach, through performance and exhortation, “the laws, and establishing the rites and ceremonies necessary to the preservation of life” (Boscana 1978:33), including the proper construction of the *vanquech*, the performance of dances, the vesture of regalia, and access to ceremonial knowledge. Consulting with Chinigchinich regarding the appropriate mortuary treatment to be employed upon his death, the people “offered to bury him, placing him under the earth, but he said no, that they would walk upon him, and he would have to chastise them. ‘No!’ said Chinigchinich, ‘when I die, I shall ascend above, to the stars’” (Boscana 1978:34). Hudson and Blackburn (1978:247; see also Strong 1929:339) concluded that the “Chinigchinich complex” itself was a colonial-era development in coastal southern California either inspired by or a reaction to Catholicism, although they also determined that many practices linked to Chinigchinich historically had deeper roots shared by the Gabrielino/Tongva, Fernandeano, and Chumash peoples (and possibly other southern California groups as well).

The narrative and ethnographic data collected by Boscana clearly indicate an understanding of—and perhaps the practical or symbolic significance attached to—different mortuary treatments. While cremation is more thoroughly discussed, Boscana’s account indicates that both cremation and burial were practiced. These observations are also supported by regional archaeological evidence that both types of funerary treatments were present even before the arrival of the Spanish (Earle 2003; Kroeber 1925:633; see also Corbett 2010:2–3). Boscana (1978:17) noted, however, that the “signification of [religious] usages and customs” was tightly held by individuals of either political or religious authority within groups, and he was thus unable to offer an explanation for the specific practices observed in these (and many other) instances. He concluded that “[a]ll their knowledge is from tradition, which they preserve in songs for their dances, and these are introduced by the chief at their festivities in a language distinct from that in common use. Others unite with them [i.e., with the chief or *puplem*] but without understanding the meaning of what they do or articulate” (Boscana 1978:17). Still, Boscana’s observations suggest that none of the mortuary or individual mourning activities incorporated or responded to the concept of a soul, although there was a belief in an afterlife (Boscana 1978:76). Instead, people believed that *piuts* (breath) animated the body in life and simply left upon death, “like the wind...that goes and comes....Thus they were materialists, for they said that when the body died and was burnt, all was consumed and naught remained” (Boscana 1978:75; see also Kroeber 1925:644; cf. Reid 1968:19, 21).

At least one aspect of mortuary symbolism for distinguished personages was tied to oral tradition—the ceremonial performance that refers to Coyote’s consumption of flesh from the corpse of Ouiot. Boscana (1978:62–63; see also Davis 1921:109) reported:

Whenever a Captain, or one of the *puplem*, died, they sent for the Eno [Coyote, “thief and cannibal;” Boscana (1978:28)], who was thus called before he officiated in his duties, and afterwards [called] *tacue*, signifying “an eater.” Having arrived at the place where they had placed the dead body, he immediately cut off a large piece from the neck and the back, near the shoulder, and consumed the flesh in its raw state, in presence of the multitude assembled to witness the performance. This was always done in commemoration of the feat performed by the Coyote upon the body of the great captain, Ouiot.

Communal Mourning

For distinguished personages within the community, the anniversary of death was also marked by communal observances. This was made possible by the *pul* (astrologer), who noted the “moon’s aspect, also the month in which the death occurred. In the following year, in the same month, when the moon’s aspect was the same, they celebrated the anniversary” (Boscana 1978:67). Unfortunately, just as Boscana provided no data on the final disposition of cremated or buried remains or any rites pertaining to them, he offered no specific information regarding the rites or performances of the anniversary events. Boscana’s account suggests, however, that such communal rites often included acts within the *vanquech*, and he described this hallowed space of ritual performance thus:

The temples erected...were invariably erected in the centre of their towns, and contiguous to the dwelling-place of the captain, or chief; notwithstanding their houses were scattered about without any particular regard to order, still, they managed to have the location of his house as near the middle as possible. They formed an enclosure of about four or five yards in circumference, not exactly round, but inclining to an oval. This they divided, by drawing a line through the centre, and built another, consisting of the branches of trees, and mats to the height of about six feet, outside of which, in the other division, they formed another, of small stakes of wood driven into the ground. This was called the gate, or entrance, to the *vanquech*. Inside of this [oval enclosure], and close to the larger stakes, was placed a figure of their God Chinigchinich, elevated upon a kind of hurdle. This is the edifice of the *vanquech* [Boscana 1978:37].

Boscana’s notes reveal, however, that this structure may not have been a permanent fixture within the village, but instead was constructed or reconstructed upon the necessary occasions for use (see below). There may also have been more than one such structure within a village, although the relative importance of each or the activities conducted therein may have varied (see Boscana 1978:58).

Drawing on ethnographic and linguistic data from the Juaneño/Ajáchmeyam and Luiseño/Qechyam, Harrington (1978:135–136) provided some additional insights regarding the “temple,” and described the “ceremonial dance ground...situated near the chief’s house in each village, about which a brush fence 4 or 5 feet high was built on festive occasions, the ground being

at times dismantled of its fence, which was renewed just before a festival.” This fence was made of “green twigs and boughs” and “was constructed by setting posts... at not too frequent intervals, lashing horizontal poles to these using...willow bast...or other tying materials... and filling in with some suitable kind of...green boughs, always using the best material near at hand” (Harrington 1978:136). A “mere hole in the ground with two or three or more potrest stones” was placed in the center of the space for a hearth, while “formerly a...ceremonial pole was [also] erected for some festive occasions” inside the structure (Harrington 1978:136). Finally, Harrington (1978:136) noted that “in ancient times some of the wamkic [*vanquech*] doubtless had a second enclosure inside the ground-enclosing fence, as Boscana clearly describes..., but the informants have remembered little about this.... [The] couplet mentioned in the songs, means leveled ground...and refers to the ceremonial leveling of the ground in making [the structure].”

Since Robinson’s translation of Boscana’s description is both confusing and apparently inaccurate (i.e., he described it as having a small circumference impractical for communal ritual performances), the only known Spanish version of Boscana’s account (Reichlen and Reichlen 1971) was consulted in an effort to clarify various elements of *vanquech* construction. Although both the organization and content of this version differ somewhat from the version evidently relied upon by Robinson (see Harrington 1934), a translation of the relevant passage from Reichlen and Reichlen (1971:256) is as follows:

...they built the Uanquex adjacent to the house [of the Captain], in the following manner: they traced a circle of some three to four *vara*³ in diameter, though [the circle was] not round but oval-shaped; next, they took half of the circle and in it they built a fence or palisade made of branches or palm leaf⁴ two *varas* tall (or taller); in the other half of the circle, they built another smaller palisade with twigs not sticking out of the soil more than two or three fingers: inside this oval-shaped circle they kept the figure of their god Chinigchinix, on top of a *tapete*⁵...

Thus, this rendering⁶ reveals that Boscana was describing an oval space—outlined or prepared on the ground as such, although not initially enclosed in any way—of approximately 3 to 4 yards in diameter. Thereafter, the high wall of boughs and leaves was

constructed to form half of the circumference of the oval, while the lower wall of sticks (sufficiently low to allow ingress and egress as per the “gate”) formed the opposite half of the enclosure. There is no mention of a single wall encompassing the entire ceremonial space (or entire dance ground, as per Harrington [1978:136]), with smaller “high” and “low” circular enclosures therein; and, in fact, the absence of any such internal structures is consistent with what Harrington heard from his consultants. The image of Chinigchinich was located within the oval space so defined, with the greater detail of Robinson’s version suggesting it was placed closer to the high, back wall.

Harrington’s (1978:138) description of the *vanquech* depicted in a photograph of a Luiseño village (Rincon) is consistent in terms of construction with this new interpretation of Boscana, although the structure is significantly larger:

This wamkic masures [sic] 38 feet [11.5 m.] from north to south, and 58 feet [17.5 m.] from east to west. The fireplace is 4 feet [1.2 m.] across, has 3 potrests, and is at the exact center.... The fence is built about the northern half of this wamkic only, a steep rise in the ground forming the southern boundary of the wamkic, making a fence unnecessary, according to the practice of these Indians...it was apparently the custom to make them longer east to west than from north to south.

In light of Boscana’s description regarding wall height, Harrington’s reasoning about the absence of an enclosure on the south side may be in error, or the very low wall may have simply been imperceptible. Finally, Harrington (1978:137) noted that members of the Vizcaíno expedition reported seeing such a single-walled structure on Santa Catalina Island in 1602: “It was a large and level yard, and in one part of it, which was where they have the altar, there was a round circle, good sized, all surrounded by feathers of various birds...and inside the circle there was a figure painted in various colors.” Like Boscana’s account, this description suggests that the *vanquech* was a modest-sized structure adjacent to an unenclosed, leveled dance space, rather than a structure encompassing the latter (cf. Harrington 1978:136).

Boscana (1978) noted a host of beliefs and activities associated with this consecrated space, including performances related to ascension of a new leader, the

panes (bird feast), supplication for a successful hunt, and water offerings during daytime dances that were held outside the *vanquech* itself. In addition, this space was a place of fasting for “princes” (in lieu of their participation in the boys’ initiation that required physical deprivation and the ingestion of vision-inducing substances), a conference place for leaders and *puplem* prior to battle, and a refuge ground for individuals responsible for a heinous crime. Some of the rites conducted in the *vanquech* created physical features that might have been temporarily or permanently visible to the villagers, given the low wall on one side, and the remnants of these same types of features—as well as the central hearth and perhaps the walls—might be visible archaeologically. For example, with respect to the annual “bird feast,” Boscana (1978:58) noted:

The day selected for the feast was made known to the public on the evening previous to its celebration and preparations were made immediately for the erection of their *vanquech* into which, when completed, and on the opening of the festival, they carried the *panes* in solemn procession, and placed it upon the altar erected for the purpose. ...[As dancing commenced outside the structure] the *puplem*...in the meantime danced around their adored *panes*. These ceremonies being concluded, they seized upon the bird and carried it in procession to the principal *vanquech*, or temple, all the assembly uniting in the grand display—the *puplem* preceding the procession, dancing and singing. Arriving at the temple, they killed the bird without losing a particle of its blood. The skin was removed entire, and preserved with the feathers, as a relic, or for the purpose of making their festival garment, the *paelt*. The carcass they interred within the temple, in a hole prepared previously, around which all the old women soon collected. While weeping and moaning most bitterly, the latter kept throwing upon it various kinds of seeds, or particles of food....

Similarly, Harrington (1978:138) noted that “the sacred...small stone mortars which were used in giving the diluted juice of the Jimson Weed...to the boys in the boys’ [initiation] ceremony and also certain stones not shaped into such mortars, were sometimes buried after the ceremony in the wamkic [*vanquech*], in the times when there was no danger of anyone digging them up.” It is unclear if this practice refers to the ceremony dedicating a new ceremonial structure, to the boys’ ceremony itself, or to one or more other rituals, although the burial of items within the structure parallels the actions recorded by Boscana for the *panes*.

REID'S AND MERRIAM'S INLAND OBSERVATIONS

Originally published in 1852, letters on local native culture written by Hugo Reid, a Scotsman who settled in Los Angeles and married a Gabrielino/Tongva woman, help to further expand the picture of traditional ceremonial life in the greater Los Angeles basin. Reid's records echo many of Boscana's observations about native mortuary ritual in this region, and significantly document a connection between the native "church" and the annual mourning rituals that is absent from Boscana's account. However, Reid's observations also sometimes differ from those of Boscana, which perhaps reflects a greater influence of Catholicism by the mid-1850s, especially with respect to the prevalence of burial.⁷ Reid (1968:101) noted that the native people "have at present, two religions — one of custom, and another of faith."

Like Boscana, Reid reported a delineation of consecrated space within each community, a space that was accessible to only a few individuals with authority and knowledge about the activities that were conducted within it:

...[C]alled *Yobagnar*...[it] was circular and formed of short stakes, with twigs of willow entwined basket fashion, to the height of three feet. This church was sacred, but was consecrated nevertheless every time it was used. This took an entire day, being done by the seers in a succession of different ceremonies.... The only services performed in their churches were — asking for vengeance on their enemies; giving thanks for a victory; and *commemorating the worth of their dead relatives*. The only ones admitted into the church were the seers and captains, the adult male dancers, the boys training for that purpose, and the female singers. But on funeral [i.e., mourning?] occasions the near relatives of the deceased were allowed to enter [Reid 1968:21; emphasis added].

Reid (1968:41–42) also described the rites conducted within this structure to commemorate the dead, apparently referring to communal ceremonies in remembrance of multiple individuals. A day-long rite was performed to consecrate the "church," and on the following day the ceremony proceeded. Women seated around the perimeter sang as men and children, "governed in the operation by numerous gestures, both of hands and feet, made by the seers," danced within the space. The performers continued thus "for six days and nights.... [singing] songs in praise of the deceased, and...others to

the destruction of his enemies." On the eighth day, the *yoba* was further adorned with feathers and abundant food was prepared for both performers and spectators.

After eating, a deep hole was dug, and a fire kindled in it, then the articles reserved at the death of relatives were committed to the flames; at the same time, baskets, money, and seeds were thrown to the spectators.... During the burning process, one of the seers, reciting mystical words, kept stirring up the fire to ensure the total destruction of the things. —The hole was then filled up with earth and well trodden down. The feast was over [Reid 1968:42].

Merriam's (1955a) account of a Tongva mourning ceremony he witnessed at Tejon in the early 1900s includes the same practice of burning gifts or possessions that were either prepared or retained for this purpose. Given the significant investment necessary to provision the participants with food and to present objects at the rite, however, such ceremonies evidently occurred only once every one to four years (Merriam 1955a:77). Mourners and others invited from "the neighboring tribes and bands as are desired" gathered around a long, painted pole (Kotumut), at the base of which they stacked baskets, shells, and other goods as offerings. Based on her work with the Luiseño, Constance Dubois reported to Merriam that the pole "represents the dead man [and the four]...different colors refer to different parts of the body...one part means the knee, another the arm, etc." (Merriam 1955a:79). At the culmination of eight days of preparation, feasting, singing, and dancing, the pole was removed and relocated to the cemetery, while the offerings were gathered together within a large, decorated seal-skin bag or effigy (*Chi'evōr*).

[This effigy was then] carried to the center of the fiesta ground...[where] a large fire is now kindled, the *Chi'evōr* is placed upon it, and more wood thrown on, until the whole is consumed. Some of the hair of the dead, carefully preserved for the purpose, is burned with the effigy.... After the burning is completed the...chiefs...of the Kotumut sprinkle earth on the ashes and trample the place down hard by stamping their feet [Merriam 1955a:83].

Thus, while Boscana's account might be taken to imply that communal mourning ceremonies were largely or exclusively held for distinguished individuals, both Reid's and Merriam's observations seem to indicate a more widespread practice, especially given that ceremonies were held every one to four years.

With respect to funerary activities that were distinct from communal mourning, Reid (like Boscana) reported that the mortuary rites of individuals involved only kin, rather than the community as a whole. In this case, however, burial rather than cremation is better documented, perhaps because it had become the exclusive mode of treatment following missionization:

When a person died, all the kin collected to lament and mourn his or her loss. ...After lamenting awhile, a mourning dirge was sung.... Dancing can hardly be said to have formed a part of the rites, as it was merely a monotonous action of the foot on the ground. This was continued alternately until the body [of the deceased] showed signs of decay, when it was wrapt up in the covering used in life.... A place having been dug in their burial place, the body was deposited, with seeds, &c, according to the means of the family. If the deceased were the head of a family, or a favorite son, the hut in which he died was burned up, as likewise all of his personal effects, reserving only some article or another, or a lock of hair. This reservation was not a memento of the deceased, but to make a feast with on some future occasion, generally after the first harvest of seeds and berries [Reid 1968:30–31].

That is, one or more items belonging to the deceased was set aside by kin for later burning and deposition within the *yoba* at the close of the communal mourning ceremony, as noted by Merriam (1955a). Again, this suggests that the latter rite was not limited to the commemoration of distinguished persons only.

ADDITIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The conclusion that funerary practices and communal mourning rites had some temporal depth in the region is supported by ethnographic observations of very similar rites among several other southern California native groups, including the Luiseño, Serrano, Cahuilla, and Cupeño (Benedict 1924; Davis 1921; DuBois 1908; Kroeber 1925; Strong 1929). Moreover, Strong (1929:275, 339) concluded that the Juaneño and Gabrielino/Tongva were the source of such practices. The lack of equivalent detailed ethnographic information on the Gabrielino/Tongva and Fernandeno may reflect the difficulty ethnographers faced in locating potential consultants in the more urban environs of the Los Angeles basin in the early 1900s, or perhaps was based on the belief that any information they might gather in such contexts would

not pertain to the untainted, retrodicted “ethnographic present” they sought (cf. Merriam 1955a). In any case, the mortuary practices and communal mourning rites dedicated to the remembrance of individuals who had died in the previous year that were carried out by these other groups shared many of the elements documented in the Boscana and Reid accounts.

For example, Strong (1929; see also Davis 1921:93) concluded that cremation was the traditional mortuary practice of the Serrano, Cupeño, Luiseño, and various Cahuilla groups, with “much of the personal property of the deceased destroyed [immediately after death]” (Strong 1929:32). All belongings were not necessarily destroyed, however—in the case of the Serrano, for example, many of the possessions of the deceased were distributed among other community members (Benedict 1924:378). In addition to any rites related to such an immediate burning, the Serrano held another ceremony about a month later in which “certain possessions of the dead were burned” following a “night of singing and dancing” by kin and clanspeople brought together for the occasion. A similar incineration of both the personal property and the house of the deceased occurred within a week of death among the Cahuilla, although some groups retained at least some items for later burning in other rites (e.g., Strong 1929:122). At the time of death, the Desert Cahuilla also broke all ollas belonging to a deceased woman, although this may have occurred outside the village at the locations where these items had been cached (Strong 1929:121). Like Reid, Merriam (1955b:90) noted the practice of burial among the Luiseño, and observed that graves were

marked by a wooden cross of some kind...and almost completely covered with glass and crockery, mostly broken. Most of [the graves] have an eviscerated clock...hung from the headboard. On the middle or other end of the grave is a lamp...the rest of the grave is covered with cups and saucers, tumblers, beer bottles, teapots, pitchers, and bits of broken crockery and glass. Several had old tin cans and one had an earthenware spittoon.

Summarizing data for California more generally, Kroeber (1907:323) concluded that the burial of objects with the deceased was not “for...use in the world of the dead,” but instead denoted either the belief that “objects had been defiled by association with [the deceased]... [or] the desire to give expression to the sincerity of mourning by the destruction of valuables.”

Among the Luiseño and more southerly Diegueño, Davis (1921:98) noted that cremation took place in a specific area within a village, and any remaining bones and ashes were collected together and buried in the cremation pit after the fire had burned out (Davis 1921:96). As Strong (1929:300) noted, however, the later use of some pulverized bone and ashes in a drink consumed during the mourning ceremony that occurred up to two years following death suggests that some remains were retained rather than buried. While the disinterment of cremated remains for this ceremonial act is possible, Davis (1921:97) noted that the cremation pit was “leveled with the ground, so that all traces of the cremation were obliterated...[although] [s]ometimes a broken metate was inverted over the spot where the [remains]...have been deposited, as a marker.” Strong (1929:301) concluded that the ritual consumption of the deceased in a drink was likely a substitute for the earlier ceremonial consumption of flesh that echoed the oral tradition involving Coyote; the same may be true of the practice of drinking a liquid obtained from washing the clothes of the deceased (see below).

Strong (1929; see also Merriam 1955a, 1955c) noted that the annual or biennial mourning ceremonies among the Serrano, Cahuilla, Cupeño, and Luiseño were week-long affairs, often hosted by the oldest clan and attended by people of other clans that were invited for the occasion. A considerable preparation of food and goods was necessary during the first few days, while specific rites, dances, and songs were performed on prescribed days thereafter. This culminated in a feast and the burning of images of the dead on the last day near the “ceremonial house,” as the kin of the deceased threw gifts to the assembled spectators. By the 1900s, the ceremonial structure itself was a large, framed, roofed building, although in earlier times among the Cahuilla it may have been a semi-subterranean structure (e.g., Strong 1929:182).

Significantly, Strong (1929:120) noted that “there has been a marked tendency in the last sixty years to gather all fragments of old ceremonies, many of which were once unconnected, into a one-week period of mourning and ‘fiesta,’” so the annual mourning event in earlier times may have been a more modest affair focused just on image-burning or other acts of remembrance. Harrington (1978:191–192; see also Davis 1921) recorded

a similar series of rites among the Juaneño and Luiseño, with four sequential ceremonies conducted by specialists and beginning with a “small festival” involving washing the clothes of the deceased and drinking the resulting liquid; then a second, “sizeable ceremony” a few weeks later entailing burning of the clothes; a third, image-burning ceremony; and finally, at some time thereafter, a ceremony for one or more deceased persons so “that earth may be thrown over the memory of the dead and that the dead may go away from us in peace.... It is a feast of giving away property of the dead” (Harrington 1978:192). Kroeber (1925:627), while noting the lack of ethnographic evidence for image-burning among the Gabrielino/Tongva as a part of communal mourning (but see Merriam 1955a), nonetheless concluded that it was likely practiced, rather than inferring that image-burning was a more recent or unique practice among other Shoshonean-speaking peoples to the south and east.

Annual communal mourning was also practiced in other areas of native California, including the San Joaquin Valley, Sacramento Valley, and Sierra Nevada foothills (e.g., Heizer 1978; Merriam 1955c; Powers 1976:385–392, 437), despite the fact that native people in these areas spoke a variety of mutually unintelligible languages and had different origin stories and religious beliefs. This practice was so striking that Kroeber (1925:859–861) devoted several pages to a consideration of communal mourning in the first comparative analysis of native California Indian ethnographic data. In the same volume, Kroeber (1925:499–501) also detailed the specific practices of groups such as the Yokuts of the San Joaquin Valley, who had annual mourning ceremonies lasting several days that included dancing, offerings committed to a fire, and (in some cases) the burning of effigies. In an earlier comparative analysis, focused only on native California religion and ceremonialism, Kroeber (1907:335) noted:

...[mourning] ceremonies are usually participated in by a number of visiting communities or villages. They last for one or more nights, during which crying and wailing, some times accompanied by singing and exhortation, are indulged in, and find their climax in a great destruction of property. While those who have recently lost relatives naturally take a prominent part, the ceremony as a whole is not a personal but a tribal one.

Likewise, Kroeber (1907:323) pointed out that “immediate observances of death [by California Indians]

paled in importance before the annual communal mourning ceremony, which was...one of the most deeply rooted and spectacular acts of worship.” Kroeber’s identification of such activity with “worship” notwithstanding, these statements suggest the significance of the communal—much more than the individual—within these societies, both with respect to remembrance and to the public performances associated with it. For example, Kroeber (1925:642) and other ethnographers (e.g., Strong 1929:305–306) recognized mourning ceremonies as occasions for the singing of songs that recounted the mythic or actual history of a group, including an enumeration of enemy clans. Merriam (1955a:83) also observed that the destruction of property as a part of communal mourning was a “pathetic illustration of the intensity of their devotion to the memory of the dead,” especially given their extreme poverty. Further afield, the reinforcement of social solidarity at these occasions is also suggested by Powers’ (1976) description of the proceedings at a special mourning ceremony for a Chukchansi (Foothill Yokuts) chief’s sister that was convened in addition to the regular annual congregation that year. On that occasion, the herald called upon the villagers to contribute offerings in a repetitious command that distilled to the following:

Prepare for the dance. Let all make ready. We are all friends. We are all one people. We were a great tribe once. We are little now. All our hearts are as one. We have one heart. Make ready your offerings.... Let all mourn and weep. O, weep for the dead. Think of the dead body lying in the grave. We shall all die soon. We were a great people once. We are weak and little now. Be sorrowful in your hearts. O, let sorrow melt your heart. Let your tears flow fast. We are all one people. We are all friends. All our hearts are one heart [Powers 1976:386–387].

Significantly, Kroeber (1907:340) observed that “in southern California mourning ceremonies are everywhere the most prominent [type of ceremony].” Furthermore, because such practices were particularly elaborate and complex in the area, Kroeber concluded that communal mourning probably had its greatest antiquity on the southern California coast. However, that apparently great antiquity in coastal southern California begs the question of when and why such practices arose. Clearly, the emphasis on and grounding in community—rather than individual—remembrance suggests that the explanation lies in the social landscape of “lodge”

formation or relations at the time such practices initially developed. This may have been hinted at by Strong (1929:263), who noted

the lack of cohesion between the linguistic groups, or as they have been erroneously called “tribes,” as compared to the bonds of unity established by intermarriage and common ceremonial activities. Obviously the clan in its larger sense, ranging from the small single lineage to that composed of several ceremonially united lineages, was the political unit in the area. Between these units, each of which probably represented a village, there was a network of economic and ceremonial connections, only the faintest records of which may be obtained today.

Given the primacy of related rituals, communal mourning and remembrance likely served as an essential vehicle for forging and maintaining such bonds in native California generally (see Bean and Vane 1992:34; Blackburn 1974), and within the greater Los Angeles basin in particular.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Ethnographic and ethnohistoric evidence both point to a long tradition of annual communal mourning ceremonies among the indigenous groups inhabiting the greater Los Angeles basin that were distinct in both practice and meaning from mortuary activities at the time of death. In fact, many of the specific practices associated with communal mourning traditions likely originated in the basin and spread east and south to neighboring groups. Although some regional variation is evident and detailed ethnographic data on specific Gabrielino/Tongva performances are scant, all such ceremonies likely included the following: (1) the retention of some items—perhaps previously exposed to fire during the funerary rite—belonging to or associated with the deceased until the annual ritual; (2) the destruction of these and other objects by burning and perhaps other means before an assembled group of singers, dancers, mourners, and guests from multiple villages; and (3) the ultimate burial of the remnants of these ruined items within a consecrated ritual performance space. This space—which encompassed an area of at least 11 m.² and perhaps as much as 200 m.²—was centrally located within the village and was physically demarcated by walls of interwoven sticks and other vegetal material.

Such walls, constructed of organic remains, are unlikely to be visible archaeologically, but a large central hearth, pits filled with memorial items, and perhaps other pits containing objects related to other rituals, should render such a space archaeologically visible. A larger, level dance space may have been situated adjacent to the enclosure. Together, these observations provide us with basic archaeological expectations regarding mourning feature constituents, object condition, item placement, and intrasite location.

Since ethnographic and ethnohistoric data are equivocal regarding whether mourning ceremonies pertained to nearly all group members or only to select individuals within it, it is difficult to anticipate how common these features may be in the archaeological record. If these practices were limited to the commemoration of only certain individuals, such features may be very rare. If, on the other hand, mourning ceremonies were conducted more regularly and recognized a larger segment of the population, such features may be more common, larger, and more complex due to a reuse of consecrated space over a number of years. In both cases, however, their archaeological visibility would also be influenced by the duration of occupation at any given site.

Ethnographic and ethnohistoric data also indicate diachronic changes in practice occurred, suggesting that the archaeological signatures of communal mourning may not rigidly conform to expectations derived from ethnography. For example, the duration and elements of mourning rituals leading up to the final act of object destruction and object burial may have become more elaborate during the colonial era, when multiple ceremonies were likely merged into a single extended rite as native people had fewer opportunities to meet for such communal practices over the course of a year. Likewise, it is possible that some elements, such as image-burning, were added during the colonial era, since this practice was not observed among the progenitor Fernandeano, Gabrielino/Tongva, and Juaneño (cf. Merriam 1955a). Similarly, we might anticipate that some elements were altered or dropped, perhaps in response to pressure from Catholic missionaries, as is suggested by mortuary practices. For example, Merriam's (1955b) observation of broken objects on graves may echo earlier traditions of personal property destruction, while metaphoric performances of flesh consumption referencing native

oral tradition suggest a similar transformation in funerary rites. Therefore, archaeologists should be sensitive to the fact that the evidence for communal mourning may appear somewhat different over time.

In fact, the issue of continuity or change in practices in the deeper past can only be addressed through archaeology, and such study should also be encouraged because of the apparent meaning attached to such practices. Comparative ethnographic perspectives on native annual mourning ceremonies in California suggest that they primarily served as vehicles to reinforce community cohesion, identity, and memory, particularly given the absence of a strong central authority in these small-scale societies. Thus diachronic changes may speak to important social developments. In contrast, individual grief, mourning, and the renegotiation of kin and social relationships seem to have been addressed by kin-based funerary treatments (e.g., cremation or inhumation) and mourning practices in the immediate aftermath of death.

NOTES

¹Boscana's account is insufficient to determine if the burning of possessions also occurred when the body was buried rather than cremated.

²The 1822 version of Boscana's manuscript indicates that this flesh was removed from "the shoulder-blade and shoulder" (Harrington 1934:13) instead of the abdomen. See also Harrington (1978:126).

³A *vara* was approximately 0.84 meters in length.

⁴The text says *petates* (i.e., sleeping mats), usually made of palm (actually *palma de petate*) leaves, and is translated somewhat freely thus here.

⁵Santamaria's *Diccionario de mexicanismos* defines "tapetle" as a rural type of bed made of reeds or similar materials, resting on top of four wooden wyes driven into the ground; cf. Harrington (1978:155), who notes "hurdle, also framework of any kind."

⁶Harrington (1934:35) provides a similar translation.

⁷Kroeber (1925:633) argued that "the dead were burned by both Fernandeano and Gabrielino proper until the padres introduced interment," but he cited archaeological evidence indicating interment was practiced by Santa Catalina islanders and people inhabiting immediately adjacent areas of the coast. He concluded that "it seems, therefore, that an ancient difference of custom separated the islanders from the bulk of the Gabrielino on this point." Current archaeological understanding is that the practice of burial was more widespread in the Los Angeles area than Kroeber surmised.

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