

Malcolm J. Rogers As an Ethnoarchaeologist: Reflections from Santa Catarina, Baja California

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Abstract

The work of Malcolm J. Rogers on the ceramic traditions of southern California, northern Baja California, and adjacent regions of Arizona laid the foundations for the study of Yuman ceramics. In particular, his interviews with living potters enabled him to incorporate detailed ethnographic data into his seminal work, *Yuman Pottery Making*, which is recognized as an early example of ceramic ethnoarchaeology and remains essential reading for archaeologists interested in the Yuman ceramic tradition. This article takes stock of the lasting contributions of Rogers to the ethnoarchaeology of ceramic production in the region, examines some potential shortcomings of his work in light of the subsequent development of ethnoarchaeology as a particular focus in archaeological research, and relates Rogers' research to our own studies of Yuman ceramic technology in the Paipai Indian community of Santa Catarina, Baja California, where modern potters have continued the evolution of utilitarian plainwares into contemporary art forms.

Rogers as an Ethnoarchaeologist

Ethnoarchaeology simply refers to "ethnographic research for an archaeological purpose" (Schwartz 1978:vii). That is, ethnoarchaeology is the study of contemporary cultural practices for the purpose of understanding the relationships between human behavior and patterns of material culture manifested in the archaeological record. Today, ceramic ethnoarchaeology is a broad field that concerns itself not just with production techniques but also with issues of style, identity, long- and short-term change, and patterns of discard (Kramer 1985; Hegmon 2000). Explicit ethnoarchaeological research was largely an outgrowth of the New Archaeology during the 1960s and

1970s (e.g., Gould 1968; Binford 1978) and therefore postdated Rogers' field research by several decades. Nevertheless, the work of Rogers can be considered broadly ethnoarchaeological in that he gathered ethnographic data on pottery making specifically to further scholarly understanding of archaeological ceramics.

Rogers with his father's assistance conducted his main ethnographic fieldwork documenting practices of ceramic production in 1928 as part of a broader study of Native American life at the Manzanita Reservation (Hanna 1982:186, 237–238). His primary ceramic consultant was Rosa Lopez (Owas Hilmawa), a southern California Kumeyaay woman (Figure 1). Based on his research with Lopez, Rogers detailed the process of Southern Diegueño, or Kumeyaay, pottery manufacture in 10 steps. These make up the most detailed section of his 1936 monograph, *Yuman Pottery Making*. Rogers interviewed several other indigenous consultants, not all of whom were from Yuman groups. They included Northern Diegueño potters Petra Cota and Maria Nasa, Luiseño potter Petra Welmas, Cupeño potter Dominga Chaparosa, Kamia potter Santo Lopez, Yuma potter Hipa Norton, and Mohave potter Maha Cox. To complete his survey of the Yuman groups, Rogers incorporated ethnographic information collected by Richard Van Valkenburgh on the Chemehuevi and information from Laurence M. Huey on Kiliwa pottery (Rogers 1936). Conspicuously missing from the groups included in *Yuman Pottery*



Figure 1. Rosa Lopez, a Kumeyaay potter consulted by Rogers. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

Making are the Paipai, whose principal community, Santa Catarina, is today home to the only remaining indigenous potters who regularly produce Yuman-style ceramics.

Rogers used this rich ethnographic information to illuminate the complexities of the beguilingly simple pottery traditions of the region. The macroscopic differences between brown ware and buff ware pottery have long been used to draw distinctions between the general areas of ceramic production (upland versus lowland, respectively). The work of Rogers (1936) demonstrated that significant variation existed within and between these two broad categories and that the differences noted in archaeological ceramics extended beyond the source of the clay used to make a particular vessel. He also made a number of interesting observations that may now be tested with modern technology. For instance, in *Yuman Pottery Making*, he stated, “It may be possible, eventually, to identify distinguishing constituents in the inclusions of clays from specific localities, which in turn can be identified in

the pottery of that locality” (Rogers 1936:4). With the combined insights of petrographic analysis of archaeological ceramics and geochemical provenance methods such as instrumental neutron activation analysis (INAA) and x-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis (technologies that have only become available in recent decades), such studies are becoming increasingly popular in the greater southern California region and throughout the globe (Hildebrand et al. 2002; Beck and Neff 2007; Panich 2009).

Rogers was not the first to document ceramic manufacturing techniques in southern California (Schumacher 1879; Barrows 1900; Trippel 1984), but his work stands out when compared to many of his contemporaries, who by and large were not as interested in using ethnographic information about ceramic production to inform on archaeological problems (e.g., Gayton 1929; Meigs 1939, 1974). The work of Rogers was unique in that he drew upon both archaeological and ethnographic data in outlining the comparative scope of the Yuman pottery tradition (Rogers 1936:3).

Although he did not explicitly cite his ethnographic research in his later work, it appears likely that Rogers' research with indigenous consultants greatly influenced his development of ceramic typologies and ideas regarding the broader scope of Yuman prehistory (Hanna 1982:238, 253). The ethnographic information collected by Rogers from Rosa Lopez and others has also contributed significantly to the lasting influence of his research for scholars working in the Yuman culture area. Antonio Porcayo (2009, 2010), for instance, has successfully built upon the ethnographic information provided by Rogers to analyze archaeological pottery specimens from northeastern Baja California. See Kroeber and Harner (1955:11) for an early appreciation of Rogers' work.

Insights from Santa Catarina

We have also relied heavily on the work of Rogers in our collaborative studies with the indigenous artisans who continue to produce earthenware in the community of Santa Catarina in Baja California, Mexico (Wilken 1987; Panich 2009; Panich and Wilken-Robertson 2013). Today, Santa Catarina is a pluralistic community comprised of Paipai, Kumeyaay, Ko'ahl, and Kiliwa speakers and numbering roughly 250 individuals, about a dozen being potters. Research at Santa Catarina, however, brings up several issues related to the legacy of Rogers as an ethnoarchaeologist. Fenenga and Heredia (1995), for example, discussed modern pottery production at Santa Catarina and noted that tools and areas used for the acquisition of clay, pottery manufacture, firing practices, and the seasonality of ceramic production may leave distinct patterns discernible at or near archaeological sites. While Rogers (1936) noted similar practices in his ethnographic work, he did not propose direct archaeological correlates that could be systematically investigated across the region.

Modern ethnoarchaeology is also largely a cautionary tale for archaeologists (Kramer 1985), as significant

variation exists in the production of ceramics, their cultural meanings, and how knowledge of ceramics is transmitted across generations. Whereas many archaeologists have assumed that knowledge of ceramic technology is passed from mother to daughter in populations where women are primarily responsible for pottery production, this rule does not always hold. In Santa Catarina multiple potters learned from their grandmothers (e.g., Daria Mariscal, Arlette Ceseña) or from non-kin community members (Anaclea Albañez learned from her mother and a nanny, Pasquela [Fenenga and Heredia 1995]). Significant variation with regard to production techniques (for example, the use of tempers including grog or animal dung) and vessel form additionally exists within the group of artisans in Santa Catarina and even within the output of individual potters (Fenenga and Heredia 1995; Bouscaren 1999). As Rogers himself acknowledged (1936:36–37), his use of one or two informants to characterize the pottery traditions of particular ethnolinguistic groups may not accurately capture the range of variation inherent in the ceramic practices of a particular group or place. As with other ethnoarchaeological work around the world, the situation in Santa Catarina complicates rather than simplifies the task of using present conditions to understand the past. See Fenenga and Heredia (1995), Bouscaren (1999), and Hinshaw (2000) for other ethnoarchaeological insights from Santa Catarina.

Our work in Santa Catarina raises an additional issue that we feel is crucial for the productive use of the data supplied by Rogers. *Yuman Pottery Making* exhibits little direct interest in the contemporary social and cultural milieu of Rogers' informants. It is not clear whether this stems from Rogers' training in geology (as opposed to anthropology) or a more broadly "Kroeberian" approach to ethnography, the goal of which was to reconstruct generalized precontact lifeways through the "memory culture" methodology (Lightfoot 2005). In Alfred Kroeber's work among the Mohave in the early 1900s, he observed pottery

manufacturing techniques and collected contemporary ceramics, among other objects. Like Rogers, he explicitly avoided handled jugs and other introduced ceramic forms. One-half a century later, he suggested that “this was perhaps a mistake; but I was eager to impress upon the Indians generally that my interest was in native, nontourist objects” (Kroeber and Harner 1955:2).

Indeed, for many researchers in the early twentieth century, the particulars of contemporary indigenous pottery making merely represented a troublesome filter that obscured the region’s prehistoric pottery traditions. Rogers stated that the purpose of his work was “to present the subject of Yuman ceramic technique in its aboriginal form, deleting recent intrusive practices where they could be proved to be such” (Rogers 1936:v). This theme pervades the monograph, and he later dismissed introduced vessel forms entirely: “I shall not consider the many bastard forms which appeared in historic times, such as American cup and plate forms and loop-handled wares; for they are not native” (Rogers 1936:18).

While Rogers obviously saw much value in recording early twentieth-century ceramic production, his dismissal of introduced forms or techniques appears shortsighted in light of today’s standards and research questions. In his later work Rogers (1945) was attentive to the complex processes that resulted in the prehistoric introduction and elaboration of ceramic technology in the region. *Yuman Pottery Making*, however, glosses over the historic era cultural, social, and economic contexts of ceramic production that led to the native incorporation and elaboration of new vessel forms. Recent archaeological research into the colonial period and its aftermath demonstrates that for many scholars working today the kinds of “corruptions” identified by Rogers are just as interesting from a research standpoint as the supposedly pure precontact traditions he was trying to reconstruct

(e.g., Griset 1990; Wade 2004; Peelo 2011; Schaefer 2012). The Yuman pottery tradition is a dynamic set of practices that have been changing and evolving ever since people in the region began making pots over 1,000 years ago, and the continuing evolution of ceramic traditions in the historic era is of increasing interest to scholars today. From a twenty-first century standpoint, the early ethnographic accounts of pottery making in our region offer not simply salvage information about a dying custom, but rather another window into a long and dynamic tradition. Seen in this light, Rogers’ work with Yuman potters is a valuable contribution for its potential to further illuminate the transformation of Yuman pottery making in the historic era.

Again, Santa Catarina provides a useful illustration. There, a dozen or so female artisans continue to make pottery using the paddle-and-anvil technique and open-air firing, both of which are defining characteristics of prehistoric Tizon Brown Ware ceramics (e.g., Euler and Dobyms 1958; May 1978; Van Camp 1979) (Figures 2 and 3). Despite strong continuities of production techniques that span the prehistoric, mission, and modern periods in Santa Catarina, the pottery vessels produced today cannot be categorized as simply either “survivals” or “corruptions.” Instead, they have been shaped through indigenous negotiations of over two centuries of contact with Euro-American missionaries, miners, ranchers, merchants, and anthropologists. On a technological level, Paipai pottery production in the early twenty-first century is nearly identical to that described in the ethnographic reports from the second half of the twentieth century (Michelsen 1972; Wilken 1987) and appears to correspond closely to that of the mission and late prehistoric periods as well (McKusick and Gilman 1959; Panich 2009). The basic technique now in use is also in general alignment with the outline of Kumeyaay pottery production observed by Malcolm Rogers in 1928, as well as other anthropologists who worked in northern Baja California



Figure 2. Teresa Castro, a Paipai ceramicist, thins a vessel's walls using the paddle-and-anvil technique. Photograph by Lee M. Panich.

(Hinton and Owen 1957; Michelsen 1972; Meigs 1974; Hohenthal 2001:318) (Figure 4).

The Yuman ceramic tradition exemplified in Santa Catarina is not static, particularly with regard to the economic and cultural role of ceramic technology. Today's Santa Catarina artisans sell their pottery and other crafts at events in both Mexico and the United States as well as to visitors to Santa Catarina. Pottery production serves as a supplement to household income and has evolved into a contemporary art form that buttresses community-wide efforts at cultural revitalization (Figure 5). Accordingly, most pots produced in Santa Catarina today are not the largely utilitarian wares of the prehistoric and early historic periods, and this is reflected in an expanded range of vessel forms and an attention to the aesthetic qualities of fire clouds that occur during the firing process.

These changes in vessel form and decoration are directly linked to the broader context of ceramic production, particularly the incorporation of pottery into



Figure 3. A Paipai family prepares to fire a group of pottery vessels for commercial sale. Photograph by Lee M. Panich.



Figure 4. A Paipai ceramicist grinds clods to a fine powder, a step in the traditional process of clay production. Photograph by Ralph Michelsen. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.



Figure 5. Paipai potters Tirsia Flores (right) and her sister Celia Flores exhibit their wares and demonstrate their paddle-and-anvil technique at the Gathering of the Pais in Prescott, Arizona, 2002. Photograph by Michael Wilken-Robertson.

the local cash economy. Like the work of Rogers in southern California, early ethnographic documentation from northern Baja California illuminates these inter-related processes. During his fieldwork in 1928, Meigs (1939) noted that “peddlers who buy pots for 25 cents each for the Ensenada tourist market complain that the Indians are so conservative that they won’t make decorations to enhance the salability of their wares.”

As the pottery became better known, the artisans of Santa Catarina incorporated new vessel forms in response to the demand from tourists, collectors, and researchers, including Roger Owen, Thomas Hinton, and Ralph Michelsen. This demand in turn led to a change in the function of ceramic technology and the social role of ceramic production within the community (Wade 2004). These changes continue today with

increased production capacities (Figure 3) and a profusion of vessel forms.

Whereas some collectors select pots, often with innovative designs such as the double-spouted olla or with flat bottoms and beautiful fire clouds, as art objects to be displayed on a shelf or table (Figure 6), others are attracted to only the most traditional vessel forms. Indeed, consumers of indigenous pottery often value its perceived authenticity. Potter Daria Mariscal, for example, uses a metate and mano to process clay to teach nonnative students participating in pottery workshops, while at home she employs a mechanical grinder that her late husband created using an old washing machine motor. The changes in the technological and social practices of ceramic production documented for Santa Catarina certainly have archaeological correlates that could be fruitfully investigated in other historic era indigenous communities on both sides of the border (see Fenenga and Heredia 1995).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the pioneering work of Rogers through his use of ethnographic techniques and information for archaeological purposes laid the

foundation for our understanding of archaeological ceramics in this region. While the benefit of hindsight allows us to point out shortcomings in his ethnoarchaeological approach (some four decades before the concept became widely employed), his work is nonetheless an enduring contribution that continues to be cited by researchers looking to contextualize the material culture patterns they identify in the archaeological record. We suggest, however, that rather than simply using his work as he did to understand prehistoric technology, the data he collected also offer a vivid picture of ceramic technology in the early twentieth century. This information may be used to generate hypotheses about the nature of social and technological change in the historic period that could also be tested archaeologically. In this way, Rogers' work provides an important window that can be used in conjunction with prehistoric archaeology and historical archaeological investigations of colonial missions and historic era indigenous villages as well as contemporary studies in places like Santa Catarina. Together, these diverse lines of evidence will allow us to better understand the dynamic Yuman pottery tradition and the cultures for which it continues to hold economic and symbolic importance (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Variations in shape, texture, and style mark the works of contemporary Paipai ceramicists. Photograph by Michael Wilken-Robertson.



Figure 7. Paipai artist Daria Mariscal exhibits her wares and demonstrates Yuman paddle-and-anvil technique at the Gathering of the Pais in Prescott, Arizona, 2007. Photograph by Michael Wilken-Robertson.

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