

Malcolm J. Rogers' Career and Context

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Abstract

The personal history of Malcolm Rogers helps explain the origins of his thinking and how it changed through time. Some little known context illuminates his approach to excavation and survey and throws new light on confusion stemming from *Ancient Hunters of the Far West* (Rogers 1966). Behind the works lies a human face. Background on Malcolm Rogers as a person and practitioner of science is abstracted from my Master's thesis, *Malcolm J. Rogers: The Biography of a Paradigm* (Hanna 1982).

Early Years

Malcolm Jennings Rogers was born on September 7, 1890, in Fulton, New York, and died on September 11, 1960, in San Diego, California. Raised in a prosperous, socially prominent, broadly educated, intellectual family of engineers, inventors, and captains of industry, he was no doubt expected to continue in their pragmatic mold. However, from an early age he was interested in art, literature, music, and history, and he was heir to nineteenth-century German thought, thanks largely to private instruction from his German tutor.

During his teens, Rogers was acquainted with Raphael Pumpelly (1905, 1908), a colorful figure who was trained in Europe as a geologist, mined Arizona gold during Apache raids in the 1860s, served as mining consultant to the Japanese Imperial government, conducted explorations throughout China, Central Asia, and Russia, undertook iron and timber surveys in the Great Lakes region, and in 1903–1904 led an interdisciplinary archaeological exploration in Turkestan. Rogers had full access to Pumpelly's large

private library, which reflected the geologist's intimate contacts with leading figures in numerous sciences throughout the world. Pumpelly served as a role model for youth during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and several condensed versions of his *Reminiscences* (Pumpelly 1918) were produced for the edification of young readers. Pumpelly's influence played a role in Rogers' decision to study for a degree in geology, a profession placed midway between his family's scientific pragmatism and his own bent for things artistic, historical, and adventurous.

When Malcolm was about 10 years old, he found and studied a stratified archaeological site on the banks of the Hudson River, where he identified two cultures. Rogers later mentioned the site to William Ritchie. This future State Archaeologist of New York excavated the site for his Ph.D. research.

Stratigraphic archaeological studies were rare in the New World during the early 1900s when Nels C. Nelson (1909, 1910, 1914) was doing pioneering stratigraphic work in San Francisco Bay and elsewhere. From age 14, Rogers was reading seriously in archaeology, principally about Maya archaeology but also about excavations in Florida and elsewhere within the United States.

Rogers enrolled in Syracuse University to pursue a career in geology. His course work focused heavily on geological and chemical subjects but included instruction in French and Spanish. After six years of study,

Rogers dropped out, never receiving a degree. Then he worked for a few months in 1917 as an assayer and mining geologist in northeastern Washington State. In 1917 and 1918 he supervised a crew of riggers and fasteners for a ship-building firm before joining the U.S. Marine Corps, serving in Washington, D.C. Mustered out in 1919, Rogers moved west to take up citrus farming in Escondido, where a year later he was joined by his father, Frederick. As a hobby, Rogers began walking the landscape to trace out the archaeological manifestations of past cultures.

The Archaeologist, 1920–1948

From 1919 until 1945, Rogers was affiliated with the San Diego Museum of Man, first as a volunteer field archaeologist, then as a staff archaeologist, then as Curator, and twice as Acting Director of the Museum. Throughout this period, he kept three kinds of records, all apparently started in or about 1920:

- General information was collected in notebooks titled "Ethnological, Anthropological and Archaeological Data of Malcolm J. Rogers Gathered between 1919 and 1945" and "Miscellaneous Ethnographic and Archaeological Notes Compiled by Malcolm J. Rogers."
- Site inventory records were entered in ruled essay folders which were labeled with a coding system to designate geographic area: "W" for southern California west of the deserts, "C" for the Colorado Desert, "M" for the Mojave Desert, "A" for Arizona, "N" for Nevada, "U" for Utah, and "LC" for Lower California.
- Field notebooks were organized in a site-by-site and/or daily journal format. There are eight of these, which were titled: "Colorado Desert Region," "Arizona," "Mojave Desert Region," "1929 San Diego-Smithsonian Expedition," "1930

Expedition to San Nicholas Island," "Lower California," "Western Region," and "Nevada and Utah."

In these records, in Rogers' publications and working drafts, in the manuscripts of his unpublished works, in his correspondence files, and in others' publications that attribute contributions by him, one can trace the development of Rogers' thinking. With reference to Willey and Sabloff's (1974) terminology, Rogers' intellectual development took root in the Classificatory-Descriptive period (1840–1914) and subsequently became lodged for the most part in the Classificatory-Historical (1914–1949) perspective with its emphasis on chronologies and the construction of areal syntheses. His methods were both inductive and deductive. His explanations focused on historical geology but employed cultural evolution and processes of population displacement, migration, assimilation, and acculturation. Rogers' writing was true to the tradition of his time, providing data and discussing historical particulars while eschewing any overt consideration of theory.

His primary mode of explanation was historical description of culture-phase sequences and their distribution, expressed as phases, industries, and complexes. Because he could not or would not go directly from material evidence to a depiction of social process and cultural pattern, Rogers avoided explicit use of theory to "explain" his artifact assemblages. Lacking conceptual tools to make material evidence account for continuity, he highlighted discontinuities in the archaeological record, relying on migration to account for cultural similarity in spatially separate areas. This closed explanatory system was a direct result of the paradigms informing Rogers' science. He was interested in patterns of man-land or society-resource interaction and adaptation, which later gained disciplinary vogue in the Contextual/Functional period (1940–1960) and became formalized in the Explanatory period (1960 and after). With

his geological background, Rogers appears to have perceived environmental change as a driving force in historical processes.

It is widely understood that Rogers based much of his 1919–1945 work throughout coastal southern California, the Channel Islands, and adjacent regions in the western United States and northern Mexico on survey data and horizontal geostratigraphy, but he also employed targeted stratigraphic excavation to a greater extent than is commonly realized. His interest in excavation extended to include work at the C. W. Harris Site near Escondido and Emil Haury's (1950) work at Ventana Cave in Arizona, among other examples. Rogers would probably have done more excavation work were it not for limitations in staff, funding, and time.

Another point to emphasize is that as the geographical extent of Rogers' work expanded so too did his concept of mission. Until some point in the middle to late 1930s, he seemed fairly content to identify recurrent cultural patterns sequenced progressively through time, but then and lasting until 1945, Rogers focused on defining the geographical expansion and contraction of archaeologically and sometimes ethnographically defined cultures through time. Such definition was often made with regard to a core area, echoing the German cultural circle or sphere of influence school (Ratzel 1896; Schmidt 1939), and frequently with regard to interactions among neighboring cultures. For instance, a Culture A might expand into the territory of a Culture B, which might later expand back into the territory of Culture A, so that sequencing in the archaeological record could appear quite different at spatially separated locations. In other words, "gaps" in a culture's total archaeological record at a given spot might represent periods during which its members had been displaced or assimilated.

When Rogers began his archaeological career, there was a general perception of southern California prehistory as lacking significant temporal depth. Rogers

changed this with his definition of the "Scraper Maker" (San Dieguito) and "Shell Midden" (La Jolla) assemblages, which he initially termed "people" in reference to sociocultural entities with spatio-temporal spans, and with his cross-correlations between archaeological strata and geological strata to suggest historical roots as far back as 2,000 or 3,000 years. Note that where Rogers initially believed the Shell Midden People to be the earliest culture, excavations led him subsequently to posit them as later than the "Scraper Makers."

Rogers missed much of the intellectual ferment that made up the Contextual/Functional period (1940–1960). When the San Diego Museum of Man became a U.S. Navy hospital adjunct facility throughout World War II, the various displays and collections, including all Rogers' materials, were put into condensed storage. Near the war's end and faced with unscrambling the collections with inadequate funds and scant staff, Rogers resigned his post as Acting Director. He maintained partial connection as a Research Associate until 1948, when he assigned his materials to the Museum in his will and moved to a small ranch in Hi Pass, California, with his second wife, Frances, with whom he had four children.

Reemergence

Rogers seems to have disappeared for a few years until seen by an acquaintance driving past a ditch-digging crew in Arizona. This news was taken to Rogers' friend, Julian Hayden, who fetched him to the Hayden home. Julian and his wife, Helen, nursed Rogers back to physical and spiritual health, gradually reawakening his interest in archaeology through exposure to the emerging postwar archaeological literature that was becoming so magnificently empowered by the new radiocarbon dating technology.

Rogers accepted many tenets of the new Contextual/Functional outlook. He also came to accept

radiocarbon dating evidence for a human presence in the New World at least as early as 10,000 years ago. In 1958 he returned to the San Diego Museum of Man to reorganize his materials, reevaluate his ideas in light of the new “long chronology” dates, and attempt reconciliation with his earlier thinking.

Ancient Hunters of the Far West

Rogers is best known for *Ancient Hunters of the Far West* (Rogers 1966), published by the Union-Tribune Publishing Company as an edited and revised version of his final manuscript, “The San Dieguito Complex” (Rogers 1960), which was in preparation at the time of his death. Successive versions of this manuscript were typed by Helen Hayden, with Rogers noting changes by hand on typescript copy during his final years in San Diego. Having already designated Julian Hayden as executor of his estate, Rogers clearly expected the Haydens to preserve his papers and notes in their possession and to continue assisting with his magnum opus, the latest known copy of which remains in rough manuscript form at the San Diego Museum of Man.

After being injured in a traffic accident in 1960, Rogers spoke with Hayden as colleague, friend, and executor. Because the X-ray technology of that time could not detect most kinds of soft tissue damage, Hayden was told by Rogers and his doctor to expect full recovery and discharge from the hospital in another day or two. When Rogers died instead, Hayden asked the Museum of Man for Malcolm’s most recent draft of “The San Dieguito Complex,” with an intention of taking it to print. However, the museum considered the manuscript as its own property, arranged with the Union-Tribune Publishing Company for its publication as *Ancient Hunters of the Far West*, and had their own and the publisher’s legal counsel press a claim of exclusive rights.

Ancient Hunters of the Far West did not clearly acknowledge Malcolm’s adoption of the “long

chronology” or explain his own emerging revisions of his earlier work. It has served, therefore, to reinforce the by then antiquated thinking that Rogers was himself abandoning in light of Contextual/Functional and seminal Explanatory period understandings.

Some sense of this is revealed by the following quote from “A Note about the Editing” by Clark C. Evernham, Managing Director of the San Diego Museum of Man, dated March 1966—a statement that was intended for, but not fully incorporated into, *Ancient Hunters of the Far West*:

This work was far from finished at the time of his [Rogers’] death, but he had completed the first draft of the text, several maps, and about thirty plates. In 1965, James S. Copley offered to publish the book in a form that would be both a valuable contribution to knowledge and a suitable memorial for Malcolm Rogers.

The editorial work had to take several forms. Although Helen Hayden had done a commendable job of manuscript typing and compiling, the text itself needed journalistic refinement. This task was tackled by Dr. Spencer Rogers, scientific director of the Museum of Man.

One serious problem arose, involving Malcolm Rogers’ opinions on the geological ages of the San Dieguito, Amargosa, and La Jolla cultures. It was discovered he had revised his dating shortly before his death. The revision developed as a result of several Carbon-14 dates, and he had not had time to reflect the changes in his manuscript.

Malcolm Rogers’ final written statement on chronology was: “I first began to feel insecure in my position as an advocate of

the 'short chronology' after the stratigraphy of Ventana Cave had been thoroughly mulled over. The correlated evidence from the Southwestern Aspect area, however, is so overwhelmingly in favor of the 'long chronology' that I am compelled to recant and declare that the short chronology is untenable."

The editors agreed that it would be a disservice to the reader as well as to Malcolm Rogers to leave his earlier opinions, unaltered, in the text, especially since all the recent evidence tends to substantiate the revision. It was decided to extract those paragraphs which involved the geological dating controversy, since they no longer reflected his final thoughts on the matter. Places where paragraphs or phrases were deleted are marked with three asterisks (***). Malcolm Rogers' final opinions on dating, and the burden of discussing the dating problem, were turned over to Dr. Emma Lou Davis. She covers the subject in her chapter "Dating Ancient Man in the Far West" [Evernham 1966].

So, the corpus of Rogers' work was left incomplete by the missing piece that his "The San Dieguito Complex" might have become.

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