

PERSPECTIVES ON PROCESSES OF CULTURE CHANGE AND CULTURAL EVOLUTION SOME REFLECTIONS ON MARK KOWTA'S INFLUENCE

JOSEPH L. CHARTKOFF

Mark Kowta, as one of my senior classmates and mentors in the Department of Anthropology at UCLA, had a very significant influence on the intellectual climate of our community and its development. His influence on my own theoretical approaches to culture change and cultural evolution in California archaeology can be seen in many of the themes he developed as early as his report on his Sayles Site excavations in San Bernardino County in the mid-1960s.

INTRODUCTION

One can have varied visions of a discipline and the factors that shape it. A popular model, and one understandably promoted at celebrations, tries to cast the one being honored as the mover and shaker of the discipline. Especially in a field's early history, one individual can occasionally make such a dramatic impact. Franz Boas defined the beginnings of American anthropology, for example, and A.V. Kidder had a dramatic founder's impact on Southwestern archaeology.

From that perspective, we rightly honor the pioneers, but in doing so we miss out on many other things that also make major contributions to the health, well-being and progress of our field. If one were an anthropologist, one could appreciate the idea of there being a community of scholars in a field. This community would thrive and prosper when it was cohesively knit together, continually stimulated intellectually, supplemented by innovation, reinforced by new recruits to a growing population, energized by research advances, and nourished by the positive affect of warm, collegial relations.

A century ago, Max Uhle and Nels C. Nelson were probing into a few shellmounds on San Francisco Bay. At that time, the entire community of California archaeologists could have gathered together in one sedan or carriage (depending on what was available at the moment). Today, more than 6,000 researchers belong to the Society for American Archaeology, and about 25% of all the practicing archaeologists in the United States live and work in California. We are long past the days of the pioneers, but we have such a

substantial community that keeping it warm, stimulated, and intellectually enriched is a serious challenge.

That is why, as we are gathered to honor one of California archaeology's genuine treasures, Mark Kowta, I think a holistic perspective of his many outstanding qualities and contributions should give us a richer appreciation of the many areas in which he has helped make our community a better and stronger one.

SOME BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVE

I was asked to talk specifically about the areas of culture change and cultural evolution in California archaeology, and Mark Kowta's contributions to them. I would like to do so in this larger context of his involvement, from the start, in academic communities of students and fellow scholars.

Mark Kowta was in the graduate program of the Department of Anthropology at UCLA in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I came into that department in 1961 as an undergraduate. The unique characteristics of the UCLA Archaeological Survey provided an unusual environment for the mingling of graduate students and undergraduates, in which Mark was among the most accessible, most tolerant and most influential leaders of that community of students. It should be noted that Mark did not view himself as part of the core of the Archaeological Survey, and to this day still does not. His job was in the Department of Anthropology, but he was still an active participant in the community that made up the

Department's graduate student archaeological research group. He was an active participant in local archaeological field research, and had a very influential presence in the cohort.

His fellow graduate students at the time included Claude Warren, Margaret Lyneis, Susia Weide, Jay W. Ruby, Emma Lou Davis, Delbert (Red) True, Mike Glassow, and Keith Johnson, among others. A very significant amount of the research and academic leadership of California archaeology's next generation came out of that group, and Mark played a very important part in its development and directions.

EARLY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURE CHANGE AND CULTURAL EVOLUTION

Mark was active in the Department when the UCLA's Archaeological Survey was first formed. The Department provided a remarkable environment for local research. A key element of that environment involved the emergence of Cultural Resources Management, then called Salvage Archaeology. Funding made available through CRM fostered graduate student research initiatives and led to many areas of innovation in methodology, theory, and data studies.

The Archaeological Survey was not Mark's primary focus, but he was very actively involved in the research environment which was then developing. Shortly before the Archaeological Survey's first year of operation, Mark co-directed excavations at the Triunfo Rockshelter (CA-VEN-15) in eastern Ventura County near Thousand Oaks (Kowta and Hurst 1960:201-230). Even at that early time, Mark's emphasis on culture change and cultural evolution was emerging, as he and Jim Hurst analyzed the evidence in the shelter's remains of resource use and adaptation, and attempted to fit the model seen there into the region's sequence of adaptive strategies. This paper has a particularly insightful discussion of the nature and development of prehistoric basketry in the region, in addition to some innovative perceptions about the relationship of ecological variation to tool-assemblage variation. Its discussion of the impact of taphonomic processes on the integrity of the site also deserves appreciation as one of the innovative considerations of that concept.

Early in the history of the Archaeological Survey, Mark was one of the main graduate students involved in a major CRM project adjacent to the U.C. Santa Barbara campus, the excavation of CA-SBA-60 at Goleta Slough. His most important responsibility for that project was the analysis of the site's lithic assemblage, a very substantial task that produced the largest segment by far of the project's site report (Kowta 1961). Apart from the detailed analysis of the tool types represented in this Late Period assemblage, his analysis undertook several very comparative discussions of the evolution of various forms of technology represented in the assemblage. This example illustrates something of the breadth of concepts that was emerging in Mark's contributions to the analysis of culture change and the evolution of culture and technology.

THE SAYLES COMPLEX PAPER AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Prior to his move to Chico State University, where Mark has spent nearly all of his career, he was hired by the Department of Anthropology at the University of California's Riverside campus. It was while at Riverside that Mark became involved in the inland prehistory of that part of southern California, partly as an element of his research and teaching activities and partly through involvement with cultural resources management in the area.

One aspect of this activity involved excavation at the Sayles Site, a Late Period seasonal camp on the southern slope leading up to Cajon Pass, to the northwest of the city of San Bernardino. A proposal by what was then the Southern California Gas Company to construct a pipeline across the site led to CRM excavations under Mark's direction. His comparative analysis of the resulting assemblage, reported in his project monograph (Kowta 1969), provides a fine reflection of Mark's developing mastery of principles of culture change and cultural evolution, and their application to the better understanding of the data he recovered. Let me draw attention to a few examples, ones that were chosen because their diversity reflects something of the depth and breadth of Mark's developing theoretical perspectives in these areas.

For example, in the Sayles Complex report, Mark discusses the tool assemblage he recovered;

he then takes up some aspects of changes in the assemblage's makeup over time so that he can address questions about causes of the changes. In doing so, he brings to bear issues of climate change and environmental change, and impacts of the addition of human exploitation on the resource base. He therefore provides an important early example of applied cultural ecology in archaeological explanation. He goes on, however, to discuss culture change in the context of changes in human behavior patterns, such as changes in differential re-use of artifacts (in this case, milling tools). His discussion puts as much emphasis on identifying relevant processes of culture change as on the patterns of culture change themselves.

Later in that report, Mark looks at the determination of the age of the assemblage, a topic in which he goes beyond the approaches of tool typology and chronometric methodology. He applies principles of environmental evolution to the understanding of micro-habitat features from a chronological perspective. This approach indicates a strength of understanding in ecology and ecological change as related to cultural change, which he applied to the solution of the question of the place of the Sayles Complex in regional prehistory. Had he stayed with traditional typological approaches, his analysis would have been much different, and less accurate or valid. As it was, he was able to demonstrate the occurrence of a tool assemblage and adaptive strategy more typically found much earlier in the coastal region to the west, thus allowing him to frame the question of why adaptive strategies emerged as they did, when and where they did.

Farther along in the Sayles Complex paper, Mark reviews the prehistory of southern California with a focus on changes in adaptive strategies over time and across different habitats. It is still the case, more than three decades later, that the linking of adaptive behavior and settlement patterns to climatic change is not all that commonly done. Mark's analysis is one of the important early examples in Southern California archaeology. The fact that it still is a distinctive contribution reflects even more on the significance of Mark's conceptual innovations. His insight and creativity helped cause a number of up-and-coming researchers, such as myself, to take much closer looks at those dynamics.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Mark's relocation to the northern Sacramento Valley brought his perspectives to a new region, and helped shape the orientations of hundreds of archaeology students at Chico State. Other papers in this symposium shed more light on those dimensions of his career. But from the perspective of Mark's early career in graduate school and as a junior faculty member, I think it is important to appreciate just how insightful and sophisticated his perspectives had already become in such areas as culture change and cultural evolution.

In one sense it also is ironic, because Mark was finishing his doctorate just when the New Archaeology movement was emerging in our department at UCLA. Given both Mark's timing and his reticence about self-promotion, he never jumped on the New Archaeology bandwagon at UCLA. However, his ideas, approaches, methods, questions, and issues were all very comfortably aligned with New Archaeology. Given his influence as model and mentor in the Archaeological Survey, it is not at all surprising that so many of the younger students were well-positioned to move into the New Archaeology perspective. Mark was obviously not the sole influence in this regard, as he would doubtless want to rush forward to declare. In intellectual terms, however, he was a very important part of the bedrock upon which this progressive movement arose, both as a reflection of the evolving climate of the times and as a particularly influential intellect.

Thus it has been with honor and respect, and not a little bit of awe, that I have remained so impressed with Mark's qualities and accomplishments, valuing him as an inspiring mentor as much as for being such an outstanding colleague.

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