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Crosby: *The Cave Paintings of Baja California*

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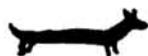
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fornia Indians were human beings, not ethereal Noble Savages. They had their ecological failings: they probably exterminated the giant ground sloths and perhaps other late Pleistocene game; they left the huge garbage dumps that now delight archeologists; they did so much burning that Cabrillo named Santa Monica the Bay of Smokes, thus introducing smog to California history right at the beginning. They had their ecological virtues too, and more to the point they left a beautiful and intensely personal vision of the world in their mythology and art (little mentioned in this book). Treating "the Indian" as a noble savage, in tune with nature, is a way of shoving him off into a world we can romantically yearn for but regard as past. It is no way to create a framework for dealing with contemporary Indians as people.

I wish I could be more positive about this book. I like the idea; I like the parts that do not deal with the Indians. Unfortunately, my charge here is to deal with the parts that do so deal, and those parts too often are flawed by uncritical reading of poor sources and by use of out-of-date information (e.g., Kroeber's population estimates and many other Kroeberian positions now long superseded). The result is that California's students who use this book will not only absorb the old errors about the primitive and undifferentiated "diggers" and the wise, fatherly missionaries, they will have these errors from a modern, apparently authoritative, and above all openly pro-minority source! No doubt many will assume that the truth is even worse than Nava and Barger tell it, since the authors are openly supportive of (and somewhat apologists for) minority groups. Since anthropologists seem never to be consulted, nor the Indians either, by historians writing books of this kind, we can only drown our sorrows in whatever wine we can make from pine nuts and willow fruits.



The Cave Paintings of Baja California: The Great Murals of an Unknown People. Harry Crosby. San Diego: A Copley Book, 1975. 174 pp. \$18.50 (cloth).

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Although much has been heard during the past fifteen years about the so-called "great mural" or "giant figure" art of Baja California, Harry Crosby must here be credited with defining its limits for the first time in a comprehensive way. These larger-than-life rock paintings, first noted historically by several Jesuit missionaries in the 18th century who traveled through the isolated mountain ranges or sierras of central Baja California, were described in some detail by Leon Diguët in 1895. However, they received little more attention until Erle Stanley Gardner "rediscovered" them around 1962. Since then, there have appeared good descriptions of several of the sites, together with some initial attempts at analysis of the human and other animal figures like deer and bighorn sheep which make up the series.

The present book is really a report of an extensive survey undertaken at various times since about 1971. It includes about 40 splendid photographic plates in color, a few excellent colored drawings of some of the murals, and a great number of attractive small black and white drawings, mostly of unusual elements particularly interesting to the author. More than 80 "painted caves" are reported upon, as well as a number of lesser sites.

Surely a great part of the success of this book is based upon Crosby's apparently special talent at enlisting the help of livestock ranchers and others in the three sierras. The reader gets the impression that many of the residents in or around the three locales were

related to each other or at least knew the occupants even of the most isolated sectors of the ranges. In any case, it is difficult to imagine how any such survey could have been carried out without a great deal of personal (and infectious) enthusiasm as well as sheer two-legged hiking beyond horse or mule trails. The maps accompanying each section are presented without kilometer scales, but such devices would be almost superfluous anyway, judging from the incredible roughness of the terrain pictured and described. There are no formal scales shown in the photographs either, although enough living human beings are pictured in many of them to make tape measures or the like unnecessary. In all, one gets a clear picture of the routes of the survey and what was encountered in the way of rock paintings and engravings along the way.

Crosby's engaging narrative style plus the illustrations are surely adequate in establishing his main point, that the Great Mural art seems to have centered upon the Sierra San Francisco and then to have lessened in intensity and presentation of characteristic motifs in the sierras to the north and south.

Considerations of rock engravings, both representative and abstract, and their temporal or other relationships to painted works are given little space, and no statistical analyses are essayed throughout the book. Probably if the latter were ever attempted, they would need months of further investigation, including the tremendous chore of interpreting the outlines of faded or almost obliterated drawings, as well as the forms of many original drawings which have been painted over again and again.

If this staggering task is ever carried to completion, possibly additional sites will be discovered (though I really doubt that the number of such will be impressive). Perhaps even stylistic interpretations different from Crosby's, along with expanded data for estimating the age of this art, will be forthcoming. None of these will reduce the impor-

tance of Crosby's present magnificent overview. He has forcefully put on record one of the great attainments of pre-Contact New World peoples—in his own words, "Much of what we see and feel in the lofty aspirations and esthetic accomplishments of the Painters' art seems at odds with the poverty of their other material remains. No doubt this is due in part to our own technical bias. Western man has always tended to evaluate cultures on the basis of their material achievements. The Great Murals perhaps remind us that man at his simplest is a complex proposition."



Some Last Century Accounts of the Indians of Southern California. *Robert F. Heizer* (editor). Ramona, California: Ballena Press, *Publications in Archaeology, Ethnology, and History* No. 6. 1976. 92 pp. \$4.95 (paper).

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These accounts from various journalistic sources or government documents all refer to conditions of groups like the Cahuilla, on or off the reservations, mostly in the last decade of the nineteenth century. There are good glimpses of government agents or bureaucrats in actions concerning the acquiring of land, and in shifting of Indians from one reservation to another in such a way as to satisfy both the Indians and the land-greedy White farmers. Needless to say, the latter were more satisfied than the former.

A gossipy article (with anonymous author) from the S.F. Chronicle in 1892 about the questionable way in which the U.S. Indian Agent H.N. Rust acquired a large collection of Indian artifacts from his charges is of great