

ARTICLE

# Reading Colonial Transitions: Archival Evidence and the Archaeology of Indigenous Action in Nineteenth-Century California

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Archaeologists in North America and elsewhere are increasingly examining long-term Indigenous presence across multiple colonial systems, despite lingering conceptual and methodological challenges. We examine this issue in California, where archaeologists and others have traditionally overlooked Native persistence in the years between the official closing of the region's Franciscan missions in the 1830s and the onset of US settler colonialism in the late 1840s. In particular, we advocate for the judicious use of the documentary record to ask new questions of Indigenous life during this short but critical period, when many Native Californians were freed from the missions and sought new lives in their homelands or in emerging urban areas. We offer examples from our individual and collective research—undertaken in collaboration with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe—regarding long-term Native persistence in the San Francisco Bay Area to demonstrate how archival evidence can illuminate four interrelated areas of daily life that could be investigated archaeologically, including resistance, freedom, servitude, and personal adornment. By using the written record to regain a sense of subjective time, these topics and others could stimulate new, interdisciplinary, and collaborative research that more firmly accounts for Indigenous people's enduring presence across successive waves of Euro-American colonialism.

Los arqueólogos en América del Norte y en otros lugares están examinando cada vez más la presencia indígena a largo plazo en múltiples sistemas coloniales, a pesar de los persistentes desafíos conceptuales y metodológicos. Examinamos este tema en California, donde los arqueólogos y otros han pasado por alto tradicionalmente la persistencia de los nativos en los años entre el cierre oficial de las misiones franciscanas de la región en la década de 1830 y el inicio del colonialismo de los Estados Unidos a fines de la década de 1840. En particular, abogamos por el uso juicioso del registro documental para hacer nuevas preguntas sobre la vida indígena durante este corto pero crítico período, cuando muchos nativos californianos fueron liberados de las misiones y buscaron una nueva vida en sus tierras natales o en áreas urbanas emergentes. Ofrecemos ejemplos de nuestra investigación individual y colectiva, realizada en colaboración con la tribu Muwekma Ohlone, sobre la persistencia nativa a largo plazo en el Área de la Bahía de San Francisco para demostrar cómo la evidencia de archivo puede iluminar cuatro áreas interrelacionadas de la vida cotidiana que podrían investigarse arqueológicamente, incluida la resistencia, la libertad, la servidumbre y el adorno personal. Al utilizar el registro escrito para recuperar un sentido del tiempo subjetivo, estos y otros temas podrían estimular una investigación nueva, interdisciplinaria y colaborativa que explique con mayor firmeza la presencia duradera de los pueblos indígenas a través de las sucesivas oleadas de colonialismo euroamericano.

**Keywords:** archival evidence; Indigenous persistence; colonialism; California missions; Native Californians; Ohlone

**Palabras clave:** evidencia documental; persistencia indígena; colonialismo; misiones de California; Indígenas Californianos; Ohlone

In recent decades, archaeologists in North America have radically shifted their approach to Indigenous histories, helping to undermine “terminal narratives” that either subtly or explicitly reinforce the fiction of Indigenous extinction in the colonial period (Wilcox 2009). A critical first step has been the reevaluation of the concept of prehistory to leverage archaeology’s time depth for the examination of how Indigenous cultural knowledge, traditions, and landscape stewardship practices structured colonial entanglements (Ferris 2009; Lightfoot 1995; Lightfoot et al. 2013; Mackenthun and Mucher 2021; Oland et al. 2012). A second conceptual move involves moving forward in time beyond the early decades of “first contact” to consider how Native people across the continent have negotiated the imposition of settler colonialism in various ways, particularly in contexts where Indigenous communities are not well represented in the documentary record (Cipolla et al. 2019; Gould et al. 2020; Law Pezzarossi and Sheptak 2019; Lightfoot and Gonzalez 2018; Schneider and Panich 2022). Together, these advances have allowed archaeologists to use material evidence to better account for enduring Indigenous persistence in North America.

This multifaceted reorientation, however, also presents several interrelated challenges. One is methodological, given that the introduction of mass-produced material culture to North America has at times served to obscure the presence and participation of Native people in later colonial contexts—particularly in instances where introduced material culture is a priori assumed to represent non-Native people (Beaudoin 2016; Schneider and Panich 2022; Silliman 2010; Watkins 2017; and for an Australian perspective, see Russell 2016). Conceptually, the archaeology of Native presence in more recent times can also be stymied by chronological frameworks that limit how we think about—or look for—evidence for Indigenous people’s agency and resilience. For example, the presence of Native people in many regional culture histories ends with the initial establishment of colonial institutions (Liebmann 2012). These assumptions, in turn, are often perpetuated in the background sections of cultural resource management treatment plans and reports (Beaudoin 2022; Chapman and Horton 2023; Panich and Schneider 2019). In this way, archaeological understandings of time can be a liability rather than an asset, given that our attention to broad material and historical frameworks hinders our ability to see Native people beyond the first wave of colonialism in any given area—especially when later colonial institutions differed significantly from earlier forms.

In the San Francisco Bay region, where we work, these issues have led to an under-recording of Indigenous sites dating to postcontact times (Panich and Schneider 2019). This pattern increases the vulnerability of sites of cultural significance for Native Californians and limits the ability of archaeology to contribute meaningfully to a range of issues affecting tribal communities today. Even more troubling for California, and other regions with similar colonial histories, is that the poor popular and scholarly understanding of Indigenous presence in later colonial times directly affects the sovereignty of Native American tribes. For example, the Franciscan missions of Alta California are typically seen as the final phase of Indigenous culture histories in our region, and previous research illustrates a clear geographic relationship between the extent of missionization and the distribution of federally recognized tribes in the state (Field 1999; Lightfoot 2005; Panich 2013). Importantly, these studies have shown how anthropological and governmental assumptions worked together to erase Native people from the landscape after California joined the United States. With the general inattention to Indigenous agency across the critical colonial transition from missionary to settler colonialism, archaeology tacitly supports these inequities.

Here, we examine the potential for the documentary record to aid in overcoming the methodological and conceptual challenges to seeing Native action in the recent past through archaeology. Particularly in light of dramatic shifts in colonial systems, written evidence may offer critical insight into the material dimensions of Native life as it was experienced by people at the time. These understandings, in turn, invite a reconsideration of regional archaeological patterns. Using the uneven

transition from Spanish to Mexican to US colonialism in the southern San Francisco Bay region as our case study, we focus on the documentary record related to Native Californians—the ancestors of today’s Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and other tribal communities—who had been formerly associated with Mission Santa Clara and Mission San José. Though the specificity of the documentary record allows us to tie our discussion to known individuals, the broader implications are relevant to other areas of California and even global contexts where the archaeology of Indigenous people’s lived experiences are overshadowed by colonial transformations.

### Texts and California Mission Archaeology

The Franciscan missions that operated in California affected the lives of tens of thousands of Native people. Intended as a cost-effective way to hold territory claimed by Spain against encroachment from other colonial powers, the Alta California mission system relied on a policy of *reducción* that sought to resettle the region’s diverse tribal communities and convert them not only to Roman Catholic Christianity but also a more sedentary, agricultural lifestyle. Baptized Native Californians were expected to reside at the missions, where they labored in a state of unfreedom—known as *neófia*—to produce crops, livestock, and other goods to support themselves and supply other Spanish colonial outposts such as the military presidios. The years of 1810 and 1821 mark the beginning of Mexico’s War of Independence and its eventual break from Spain. These transitions had very real implications for Native Californians, given the larger role of Indigenous peoples in Mexican national identity and a strong anticlerical undercurrent of contemporary political life. Under Mexican rule, the Californian missions were secularized in the 1830s, a process that converted the missions into parishes and opened up the former mission lands for private ownership, although it is important to note that sizable numbers of Native Californians remained associated with particular missions up to American annexation in the late 1840s (Haas 2014; Hackel 2005; Lightfoot 2005; Panich 2020).

In the past two decades, archaeologists have investigated a range of issues affecting Native Californians caught up in the mission system (Brown et al. 2023; Hull and Douglass 2018; Lightfoot 2005; Panich 2020; Peelo 2011; Schneider 2021). As these studies demonstrate, no single narrative can fully accommodate the varied experiences of Indigenous life under missionary colonialism, which was structured not only by the different national regimes of Spain and (later) Mexico but also the dynamic Indigenous political economies and cultural landscapes into which the missions were implanted. Yet, in popular imagination, the complexity of this time is often reduced to a simple “mission period” that begins with the founding of Alta California’s first mission establishments in 1769. This starting point glosses over the fact that other missions had existed in Baja California since the late seventeenth century and that many Franciscan missions in Alta California were founded decades later, leaving some areas of the region without a significant colonial footprint for decades. At the other end, most conventional treatments of this time terminate at the onset of secularization in 1833–1834, creating a 15-year gap between the official closing of the missions and the beginning of the “American Period” in the late 1840s—a gap in which Native Californians effectively fall through the cracks of regional archaeology, providing a convenient tabula rasa for the beginning of US settler colonialism on the Pacific Coast.

Archaeologists and others have identified the myriad problems of trying to understand Indigenous agency in the California mission system solely through the documentary record—an evidentiary corpus that is homologous with the colonial institution itself (Schneider et al. 2020). Although maps and textual descriptions have long aided in the interpretation of architectural features at mission sites (Allen 2010), documentary evidence produced in the colonial period creates more thorny interpretive challenges when it comes to understanding the lives of Native Californians in and outside of mission establishments. One of the most pernicious is the racist attitudes that many European observers held toward Indigenous people. These caricatures are endemic in the writings of the Franciscan missionaries and many other outsiders who considered Native Californians simply as a source of labor, or worse, as an obstacle to colonization (Rawls 1984). Taking such accounts largely at face value—and in combination with the staggering death rates discussed below—some scholars have used textual evidence to posit that the mission system left Native Californians broken and

“psychologically defeated” (Milliken 1995). Although we do not discount the almost uniformly negative impacts of missionization on Native communities, we also recognize that interpretations that focus solely on victimization can often reinforce terminal narratives (Tuck 2009).

The mission sacramental registers—which documented the baptisms, marriages, and deaths of tens of thousands of Native Californians—have long been important sources of information for archaeologists attempting to link mission deposits to known ethnolinguistic groups and even specific individuals (Brown and Liguori 2023; Farris and Johnson 1999; Peelo et al. 2018). The Franciscan missionaries often noted Native individuals’ ancestral communities in these records, allowing scholars to understand the diversity of mission populations and also to track the chronological dimensions of Indigenous recruitment into the mission system (Byrd et al. 2018). A continuing challenge, however, is that the sacramental records themselves tend to reinforce terminal narratives in various ways: for instance, the overwhelming numbers of deaths that were recorded at the Franciscan missions—more than 72,000 between 1769 and 1834, when secularization began. Many scholars have assumed, moreover, that particular named Native Californian communities ceased to exist once members of those polities stopped appearing in the baptismal records. This notion has structured much of the foundational research into the sacramental registers of the San Francisco Bay Area missions (e.g., Milliken 1995; Milliken et al. 2009).

When combined with archaeological data, however, the mission sacramental records can be used to undermine the notion of a unidirectional movement from ancestral communities to mission sites—and more broadly, to combat terminal narratives. For example, Tsim Schneider (2015) has employed the sacramental records alongside isotopic studies of shellfish from potential mission-era refuge sites to infer that Coast Miwok people north of San Francisco embedded their participation in the mission system within existing seasonal movements between inland areas and the coast. At Mission Santa Clara, archaeologists have parsed the death records for details about how Native people continued to access ancestral sites and other places in the broader landscape. This research indicates that hundreds of Native people left the missions to die and be mourned in culturally meaningful ways, opening up new interpretations about mobility and mortuary practices in the colonial period (Panich 2015; Peelo et al. 2018). As these examples show, there is great potential in using documentary evidence to expand the possibilities of mission archaeology.

Despite the wealth of information that archaeology has provided to counter terminal narratives associated with the California missions, the field has seen comparatively less success when it comes to tracking Native people through the closing of the mission system under Mexico and into the early years of US rule (Panich 2019; Schneider 2019). Here, two issues are of paramount importance. One is the enduring impact of periodization. In most treatments, California’s “mission period” lasts until the mid-1830s, which is when secularization was initiated at most Alta California mission establishments. In contrast, the “American period” does not begin until the late 1840s—either with the annexation of California by the United States in 1846 or the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The other is that the importation of mass-produced goods into California—beginning largely in the 1840s—led to dramatic changes in the regional archaeological record. Operating under the (faulty) assumption that Native people abandoned most traditional technologies and subsistence practices in the missions, archaeologists are often at a loss to find evidence of Native people amid growing quantities of improved earthenware sherds, metal tools, fragments of bottle glass, and the remains of domesticated animals (Silliman 2010). Accordingly, the 1830s and 1840s mark the beginning of the erasure of Native people from the archaeological record in much of California’s missionized zone (Lightfoot 2006; Panich 2019; Panich and Schneider 2019).

### Reading the Collapse of the Missions as a Venue for Native Action

To begin to counter the invisibility of Native Californians during and after the secularization of the missions, we offer select examples from our individual and collective research—undertaken in collaboration with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area—regarding long-term Native persistence in central California (Figure 1). This work directly ties into the goal of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe to counter what it calls the “politics of erasure” that have served to remove Ohlone

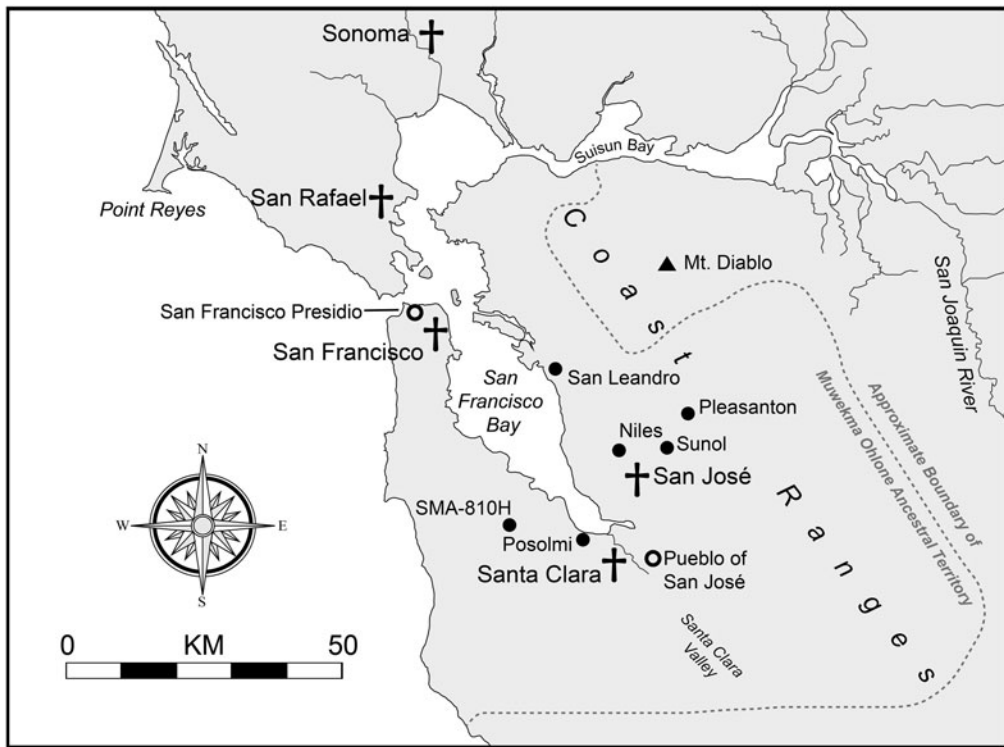


Figure 1. Map of southern San Francisco Bay Area, with places discussed in the text.

people from both the past and present of their ancestral territory (Field et al. 2013). The following examples specifically situate California's brief Mexican period as a potential venue for Indigenous agency and autonomy in central California, though we are not so much concerned with refining chronologies based on colonial powers as we are with the broader goal of re-centering Native people in the region's past, present, and future. Beyond our particular case study, we argue that a reevaluation of colonial transitions may reveal similar moments of possibility elsewhere in Native North America.

The members of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe trace their ancestry through three Bay Area missions: San José, Santa Clara, and San Francisco. Traditional histories suggest that Native people disappeared in the mid-1830s as each mission went through its own process of secularization. Although it is true that many did leave the Bay Area missions—especially Yokuts and Miwok speakers who returned to their homelands in California's interior—the documentary record reveals important details about how Native people remained connected to mission sites and the broader landscape despite changes at the national and administrative level. Methodologically, the mission sacramental registers remain valuable resources in this regard. At Missions Santa Clara and San José in particular, such records include large numbers of Native people who continued to be baptized, married, and laid to rest at both missions well into the 1840s and beyond.

These records hold crucial information about the direct ancestors of the present-day Muwekma Ohlone Tribe. Two well-known Muwekma ancestors are María de los Angeles Colos (better known as Angela Colos) and José Guzman. Both worked with anthropologists in the early twentieth century, including linguist John Peabody Harrington with whom they shared crucial information about language and traditional cultural knowledge (Harrington 1984). Their family histories exemplify the broad parameters of Native life in the late mission period. Angela Colos's parents, Zenon Patcha and Joaquina, were married at Mission Santa Clara in the autumn of 1838 (Santa Clara marriage #2711).<sup>1</sup> At little more than a year later, Angela was born on a local ranch, and her baptism was recorded in the sacramental records for Mission San José (San José baptism #7774). For his part,



José Guzman was born in the early 1850s but does not appear in the records of either mission. His older brother had been baptized at Mission Santa Clara in 1848 (Santa Clara baptism #10828), although José's parents were more closely associated with Mission San José where they were originally baptized.

As in earlier times, the mission sacramental records offer important information about particular life events for Native Californians. And in the context of secularization, they provide evidence of their continued presence on the landscape and of social bonds that connected mission survivors from different lineages. Other regional archives—including those for the Pueblo of San José as well as early US court cases regarding Spanish and Mexican land grants in California—can add crucial details that illuminate daily life as it was experienced by Ohlone ancestors and other Native Californians. Below, we detail how the sacramental records and other historical documents can open up new questions about the archaeology of Native life in the transition from missionary to settler colonialism.

### *Archaeologies of Missions and Resistance*

At the time of their marriage at Mission Santa Clara in 1838, Angela's parents Zenon Patcha and Joaquina were part of a dynamic regional network of Native people that included individuals and families from Ohlone, Yokuts, and Miwok tribal communities. Some, but not all, still lived in the Native neighborhoods, or *rancherías*, at Missions Santa Clara and San José. But what do we know about material life in the mission *rancherías* in the final decades of the mission system?

A letter from 1841 between officials at Mission Santa Clara and the Pueblo of San José provides an intriguing example. It highlights an incident in which a Native man originally baptized at Mission San Juan Bautista attempted to purchase arrows from Native youths who were guarding the horses at the Santa Clara corral; having failed to do so, he instead stole the arrows and shot at the young men (I. Alviso to T. Pacheco, 10 July 1841, History San José [HSJ], San Jose, California, Pueblo Papers [PP] 1979-861-1576). This brief letter alerts us to the fact that as late as 1841, arrows and bows were still part of the everyday tool kit of Native people associated with the mission system. That the older man came to Santa Clara specifically to acquire arrows, moreover, suggests that the missions—rather than bastions of acculturation—may have supported the perpetuation of certain Native technologies. Indeed, a narrative penned by British naval officer Edward Belcher in 1826–1827 indicates that Bay Area missions likely had stockpiles of bows and arrows for the use of Native auxiliaries (Farris et al. 2004:53). And an account book from Mission San José, dating to 1837, demonstrates that the remaining Native people there were supplied with quantities of bows and arrows, among other items discussed in more detail below (Libro Anual de la Misión de San José, 1837, Santa Clara University [SCU] Archives and Special Collections, Santa Clara, California).

With the knowledge that Native people at Santa Clara and other missions continued to produce arrows into the 1830s and 1840s, we can look anew at the archaeological record for projectile points and associated lithic technologies in the mission *rancherías*. Inspired in part by the repeated mention of arrows in colonial documents, a recent reappraisal of archaeological projectile points from California mission settings found strong evidence for the persistence of arrow points throughout the colonial period. At Mission Santa Clara, in particular, the prevalence of projectile points even seems to increase over time as Native artisans incorporated the cast-offs of the colonial project, such as bottle glass and porcelain, into their material repertoire (Panich et al. 2021). Part of the broader study additionally revealed that a particular form of serrated arrow point was developed late in the colonial period and was in relatively wide use in central California by the early 1840s (Figure 2; Panich and Hylkema 2021). Although these patterns run directly counter to the expectations of acculturation frameworks—in which Indigenous technologies were thought to give way to ostensibly superior materials introduced by Euro-American colonists (Rubertone 2000)—we must also be careful not to equate lithic technologies with essentialist ideas about Indigenous identity. Rather, the continued use of arrow points may set the stage for asking new questions of the archaeological data for Native Californians' use of various technologies across the mission system.

These textual descriptions and archaeological evidence also speak to the potentials of Indigenous resistance. Although the stockpiles mentioned by Belcher and the weapons distributed by Mission



**Figure 2.** Serrated projectile points from Mission Santa Clara. These points are thought to date from the 1820s onward.

San José were likely intended for Native auxiliaries who would help defend the missions, the same weapons could easily be turned against the colonial system—and indeed, Ohlone people and their neighbors had a long tradition of resisting the missions prior to secularization (Phillips 1993; Rizzo-Martinez 2022; Shoup and Milliken 1999). One of the best-known revolts against Mission Santa Clara in later years was led by a man named Yozcolo. His exact identity is uncertain, but by 1839, he and his followers were in open revolt against the mission system. Two separate accounts—one contemporaneous and one drawn from recollections decades later—describe a battle against Yozcolo’s rebel band in the Santa Cruz Mountains south of Mission Santa Clara. Though some details differ, both accounts agree that Yozcolo was killed and that his head was placed on a stake outside the Santa Clara mission church as a warning to other would-be insurgents (Memorias de José Francisco Palomares, 1877, Bancroft Library [BL], University of California, Berkeley, MSS C-D 135, p. 26–31; J.J. Vallejo to M.G. Vallejo, 16 August 1839, BL MSS C-B 8, No. 41-1). Despite this grisly outcome, Yozcolo’s rebellion is perhaps best seen as evidence of Native Californians’ continued dissatisfaction with the mission system as well as the material capacity to translate those attitudes into action.

To date, no archaeological evidence has been definitively linked to Yozcolo’s exploits, but this is largely because few archaeologists in our area have explicitly looked for outlying sites dating to the later years of the mission period. One exception is the testing and recordation of CA-SMA-810H, roughly 30 km northwest of the area where Yozcolo is thought to have been killed. This site borders a land grant to Mexican colonists dating to the 1830s, the Rancho Cañada del Corte de Madera. Minimally invasive field reconnaissance by two of us revealed a mix of material culture, including obsidian tools, flaked glass, glass beads, and evidence of firearms. Radiocarbon dates span the entire colonial period, but the location and assemblage point toward likely (re)occupation by Native people during the mid-nineteenth century (Wilcox and Flores 2018). These findings resonate with recent archaeological research in other parts of Alta and Baja California that has identified a range of refuge sites and post-mission communities that are not well accounted for in the archival record (Acebo 2020; Bernard and Robinson 2018; Porcayo-Michelini 2022; Price 2023; Schneider 2021). Taken as a whole, this research demonstrates the reciprocal potential of working with both archival and archaeological sources.

### *Archaeologies of Freedom*

The periodization of colonial-era California not only glosses over the lives of those Native people who continued to fight against the missions into the late 1830s and 1840s but also ignores those who were legally emancipated from the mission system. The possibilities for emancipation first emerged in the late 1820s, with Governor José María de Echeandía’s “Decree of Emancipation in Favor of the Neophytes,” and continued with additional promulgations regarding the secularization of the missions throughout the next two decades (Haas 2014:140–147; Hackel 2005:376–387). In most instances, formal emancipation was limited to individuals who had spent significant time in the missions and

who could demonstrate self-sufficiency through their knowledge of agriculture or a trade. In the southern San Francisco Bay region, this meant that those who qualified were primarily of Ohlone descent. These individuals and their family members were given license to leave the missions and live as they wished, whereas others remained in the condition of *neófita* or simply abandoned the missions without formal permission.

Although few emancipation petitions have survived in central California, the sacramental records provide additional information about individuals and families who secured the right to leave the mission estates. For example, the baptismal record for a child named María Antonia, from 1836, notes that her parents—Antonio de Padua and Eustolia—had left the mission and were considered *licenciados*, a term for Native people with licenses granting them freedom from the mission system (Santa Clara baptism #8893). Antonio de Padua and Eustolia hailed from the same Ohlone community and were baptized as young children in the 1790s (Santa Clara baptisms #1911 and 3470, respectively). But by the time of María Antonia's baptism decades later they were living in the Pueblo of San José, where they appear in lists of free Native residents dating to 1836 and 1843 (Padrón of the Pueblo de San José, 1836, BL MSS C-B 23, no. 22-23; Lista de los Ynidos Becinos, 1 March 1843, HSJ, PP 1979-861-2176). Elsewhere in the documentary record, Antonio de Padua is referred to as the *alcalde* (mayor) of the emancipated Indians living in the pueblo. Several of these same records mention Antonio de Padua's house, which is said to have been next to that of a colonist named Cruz Chabolla, demonstrating how emancipated Native Californians were integral members of the emerging urban community in San José (Criminal case against Bentura Quinto, 26 December 1841, Monterey County Historical Society, Spanish and Mexican Archives of Monterey County, Vol. 3, 591–620; Testimonies of witnesses, 3 March 1839, HSJ, PP 1979-861-1355).

A small number of Ohlone men even received sizable land grants from the Mexican government. The list includes Inigo, of Mission Santa Clara, who petitioned for his ancestral village on the lands of Rancho Posolmi y Posita de las Animas where he lived with members of his family into the 1860s (Shoup and Milliken 1999). At Mission San José, Ohlone men were less successful in securing title to ancestral territories, but colonial administrators did allow some to reside on and cultivate the former mission lands. An important example of this type of arrangement involved the Ohlone brothers Aniceto and Silvestre, who were among the first children to be baptized at Mission San José at the turn of the nineteenth century (San José baptisms #37 and 292). Decades later, the two received permission to cultivate portions of their ancestral homelands on what became Rancho San Leandro (Figure 3; San Leandro, 234 ND, 1857, BL MSS Land Case Files). Importantly, both men have direct links to the contemporary Ohlone community. Silvestre is a key ancestor of one of the lineages that makes up the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, and in 1840, Aniceto performed the baptism of Angela Colos, the Ohlone elder introduced above.

How might the documentary record associated with Native emancipation in central California encourage us to rethink the archaeological record of the mid-nineteenth century? Spatially, we might consider how to account for emancipated families like that of Antonio de Padua and Eustolia, who lived in the region's growing cities and towns—an archaeology that is in its infancy despite the known presence of Native Californians in all of the urban areas that were emerging in the region (e.g., Farris 2018). For others, the early US court cases involving land grants—like that regarding the lands of Rancho San Leandro occupied by Silvestre and Aniceto—often provide fine-grained detail about material culture. According to witnesses who gave depositions in the 1850s, Silvestre and Aniceto lived on the former mission lands with other Native people from the 1830s into the 1840s. Although some of their compatriots constructed houses out of “boughs and grass,” Silvestre and Aniceto built an adobe home and cultivated corn, beans, pumpkins, and wheat. They also had a corral for their horses and cattle (San Leandro, 234 ND, 1857, BL MSS Land Case Files). In contrast to the example of projectile points described above, these are exactly the places (urban areas, such as the Pueblo of San José) and materials (adobe bricks or introduced foods such as beef and wheat) that typically mark contemporary archaeological deposits as non-Native in this region. Though ultimately short-lived, the possibilities of Native freedom in the 1830s and 1840s compel us to rethink regional archaeologies.





**Figure 3.** Undated *diseño* of Rancho San Leandro, likely 1840s, showing “Casa de los Yndios” (meaning the home of Silvestre and Aniceto) in upper left. Mission San José is in upper right. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley. (Color online)

### Archaeologies of Servitude

Not all of the Indigenous residents of the Pueblo of San José were free. The documentary record includes many examples of Native Californians who labored in the homes of colonists, including several dozen men, women, and children listed in a census of the pueblo dating to the early 1840s. Enumerated in the census were two young girls—María del Carmen and Visenta—who were among nine Native Californians in the home of Antonio Suñol, a local colonial official (*Padrón del Pueblo de San José*, undated, HSJ, PP 1979-861-2026). María del Carmen was six or seven years old when she was baptized at Mission Santa Clara in 1839. She had been separated from her parents, who were never associated with the mission system. Instead, she was said to be “in the charge of Antonio Suñol” (Santa Clara baptism #9936). María del Carmen was likely abducted from California’s interior, given that pressing Native “orphans” into servitude was a relatively common practice during the 1830s and 1840s (Phillips 1993:109; Rizzo-Martinez 2022:181–182). Visenta, for her part, appears to have been born at Mission San José to parents who were originally associated with Mission San Francisco de Asís. However, she too was separated from her family. When Visenta died at age nine in 1845, she was described as a “*sirvienta de Suñol*” (servant of Suñol; San José baptism #7443 and death #6805). The tragic lives of María del Carmen and Visenta highlight the continuing challenges for Native Californians despite the gradual closing of the Franciscan mission system.

As a young person living in the southern San Francisco Bay area during the 1840s, Ohlone elder Angela Colos likely knew of many girls like Visenta and María del Carmen. In fact, during the early twentieth century, Angela described to the linguist Harrington how Native children were forced into servitude during the mid-nineteenth century. One episode in particular stuck with her some seven decades later. In the early twentieth century, she told Harrington about seeing “a wagon filled with Indian children coming down from Martinez. . . . They were bringing them *como animal* [like an animal] to be brought up by Spanish Californians. After they got out of the wagon, [Angela] was watching and listening carefully to overhear what they would say. . . . They wanted some water to drink. They were naked” (Harrington 1984:Reel 37:488). It is easy to understand why Angela and other Native Californians remembered such events for so long, and Angela’s story is a poignant example of how the archival record dovetails not just with archaeology but also with Native oral narratives. Furthermore, these examples are a crucial acknowledgment of the deep roots of Native servitude and the effects it had on those who witnessed and experienced it, even as the enslavement of Native children intensified in California after annexation by the United States in the late 1840s (e.g., Magliari 2022).

The archaeology of the Pueblo of San José has not yet revealed material evidence directly attributed to Native servitude, but a close tacking between documentary and archaeological sources has found success elsewhere in the broader region. For example, the Pueblo of San Diego grew after Mexican independence from its origins as a small secular community of retired colonial soldiers and their families. Archaeological research there has revealed large quantities of belongings—including lithics and locally manufactured ceramics—related to Native Californians, prompting archival research into the presence of Indigenous people in the settlement. As in the Pueblo of San José, Native Californians from an array of backgrounds were listed in census records as living as servants in the homes of colonists (Farris 2018). Although certain classes of materials alerted archaeologists to the presence of Native people living in the Pueblo of San Diego, their status as servants opens a broader question about what constitutes “Native” material culture. Following Silliman (2010), we argue that the archaeology of Native servitude should also include the imported ceramics, household utensils, and other objects that colonists owned but that were used by Indigenous laborers in their daily practice. In this way, material evidence can help bring texture to the lives of Native people for whom the end of the missions did not mean an end to servitude.

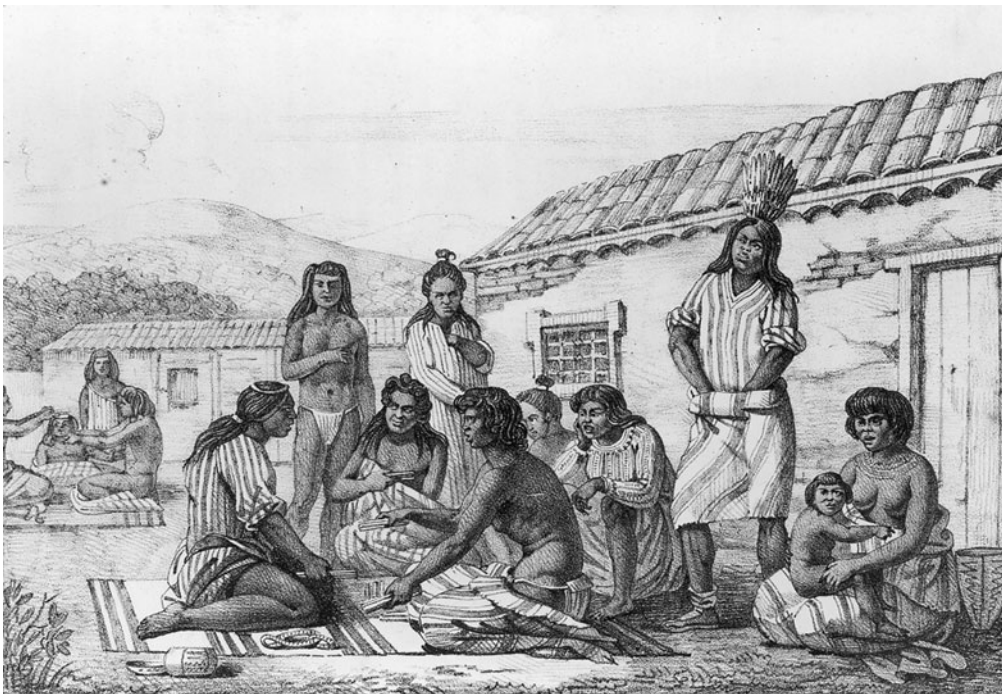
### *Archaeologies of Personal Adornment*

As Native Californians strove to create new futures for themselves in the colonial hinterlands or in secular towns such as San José—where some lived freely as citizens, whereas others remained enmeshed in unfree labor conditions—they navigated their place in the emerging post-mission social order through daily practice. In this regard, items of personal adornment likely played a crucial role, given that the body provided an arena to renegotiate differences in ethnicity, gender, and class within shifting colonial circumstances (Loren 2010). Certain items—glass beads in particular—have clear antecedents in precontact times. Beads have long been an important aspect of material culture for Native Californians, who for millennia incorporated beads fashioned from shell, stone, bone, and (later) glass into a variety of practices including personal adornment. These long-standing patterns offer possibilities but also challenges in the archaeology of later colonial times. As in the examples above, some information from the documentary record for this period points toward material culture usage that does not fit as easily into conventional wisdom for what the archaeology of Native California should look like.

The 1837 account book from Mission San José, for example, includes a long list of items of personal adornment. In particular, a section titled “Account of what is supplied to the Indians of the ex-mission of San José” enumerates various kinds of cloth, thread, buttons, shoes, serapes, and hats that the mission’s remaining Native residents received in that year (Libro Anual de la Misión de San José, 1837, SCU Archives and Special Collections). These materials hint at the sartorial choices available to Native people still associated with the mission system. In aggregate, they appear to be more elaborate than the typical garments—simple shirts, breechcloths, and blankets—given to mission residents in the early years of colonization. Hats, in particular, are virtually absent in the few visual representations of

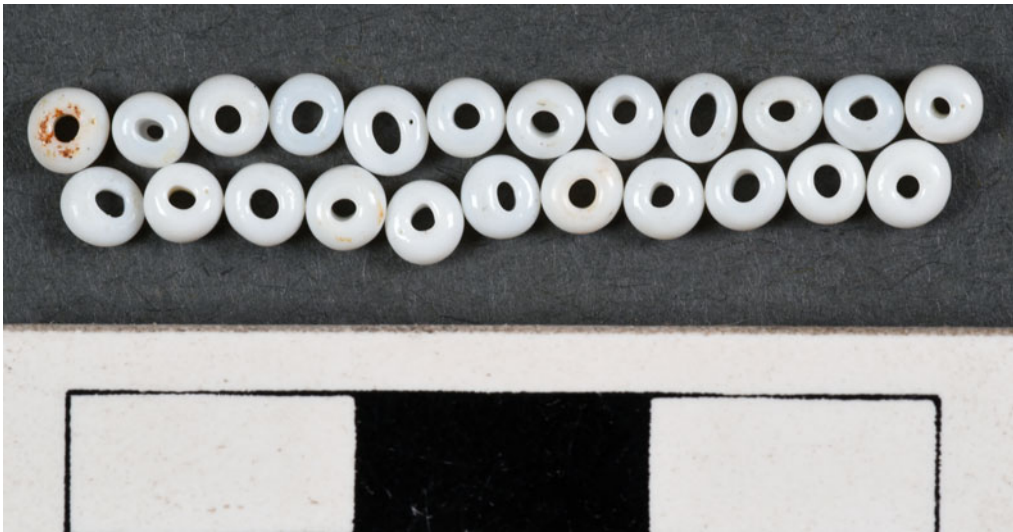
Native Californians in the Franciscan mission system (Figure 4). Yet, hats show up in surprising places in the documentary record for the secularization period. In one set of documents, a Native man from Mission San José named Liberato—another ancestor of many in the Ohlone community—is said to have traded four cow hides for a single hat in 1841, in addition to other clothes (Accusations against Indígenas licenciados, 26 October 1841, HSJ, PP 1979-861-1680). Liberato was no doubt aware that Native Californians throughout the region were losing access to the fruits of their labor, including the missions' vast cattle herds, and was eager to liquidate what he could before it was lost forever. In turn, the goods he received could help him and his family position themselves in the new social order, in which they were no longer tied to the mission system.

At the same time, however, the account books from Mission San José demonstrate that glass beads—*abalorio*—were still being actively imported to the region into the late 1830s (Libro Anual de la Misión de San José, 1837, SCU Archives and Special Collections; Libro de Cuenta Pertenecientes a la Misión de S.S. José, 1834–1839, BL MSS 91/14 C; and see Silliman 2004:143–148). A recognition of the continued circulation of beads during the mid-nineteenth century may prompt new questions about possible differences in personal adornment and how it related to Native identity during the collapse of the mission system. And though there is a tendency for archaeologists to rely on beads as a material correlate for postcontact Indigenous presence (Panich and Schneider 2019), the use of glass beads in the secularization period may offer innovative ways of investigating later colonial times. For example, some well-documented glass bead types, such as red-on-white “cornaline d’Aleppo” beads, entered California no earlier than the late 1830s (Billeck 2008). Moreover, recent geochemical analyses of common white glass beads (Figure 5) from a variety of contexts in central California demonstrate a shift in chemical composition—tied to opacifiers—that occurred in the 1830s or early 1840s (Dadiego et al. 2021; Panich et al. 2022). Using this knowledge, archaeologists may be able to date deposits from post-mission contexts more precisely, leading to novel examinations of how Native Californians negotiated aspects of individual and group identity during a time of political transition.



**Figure 4.** Native Californians at Mission San Francisco, circa 1816, as depicted by Louis Choris. Note the simple clothing and lack of hats. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.





**Figure 5.** Drawn white glass beads from Mission Santa Clara. Scale is in cm. Note that these specific beads are for illustration only and were not part of the referenced geochemical studies.

Given the upheavals of the time, archaeological investigations into personal adornment and identity making illustrate how Native people worked both against and within colonial ideas about racial and gendered identities. In our region, such research could expand the foundational work of Barbara Voss (2008), who explored the role of material culture in the formation of a distinct *Californio* identity among the Euro-American settlers who came to California prior to its annexation by the United States. Archaeologists examining how Native people used personal adornment during colonial transitions could also draw inspiration from studies of how African Americans used similar kinds of materials to navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender in the post-emancipation period in the American South (Flewellen 2022). Here again, the intersection of archival and archaeological research allows for new and more nuanced questions about the lived experience of Native people in California and elsewhere.

## Discussion

Taken together, these examples and others that could be found in the archival record compel archaeologists to reconsider how we interpret the material evidence for Indigenous agency—and that of other groups left out of mainstream narratives—during colonial transitions. Based on archaeological materials alone, this task is hampered by decades of assumptions about where to look for such evidence as well as by increasing uniformity of material culture that was used not just by Native people but also by a wide range of newcomers to Indigenous lands. The documentary record, in contrast, offers new ideas for archaeologies of Native people's lives as they themselves understood them. An important first step in this direction is to suspend our knowledge of the outcomes of colonial transitions and instead forefront the possibilities that Native people would have seen for themselves and their families.

These questions intersect debates in archaeology about time perspectivism, which posit a distinction between analytical time and experiential time—or in other words, between objective and subjective time. Many interested in time perspectivism focus on analytical time, such as the idea that the diachronic nature of archaeological data can illuminate long-term processes that might not have been observable to living people or that would not be visible using shorter-term datasets (Bailey 2007:199). In our case, however, we are interested in the opposite situation, in which apparent breaks in the archaeological record may in fact obscure important continuities in lived experience and possibilities for individual and collective agency. As suggested by Hull (2005), what is needed in such instances is to begin with experiential, subjective time and build our archaeological frameworks out

from there. In the archaeological study of the end of empires, our knowledge of the future—and the interrelated imposition of analytical time, not to mention essentialisms of material culture in colonial settings—can inadvertently blind us to the possibilities of lived experience.

Broadening the scope beyond archaeology, we can also draw inspiration from scholarship in Native American and Indigenous studies that brings different perspectives on the issues of time, sovereignty, and authenticity (e.g., Coulthard 2014; Lyons 2010; O'Brien 2010; Rifkin 2017; Simpson 2014; Vizenor 1999). Of particular relevance for our case studies, these discussions encourage us to work with community partners to hold up what Ora Marek-Martinez (2021:510) refers to as “assertions of Indigenous sovereignty” that are “not derived from settler-colonial systems but which predates these systems” (see also Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2014). Although the Ohlone community has long navigated the colonial logics of recognition—from emancipation petitions during the Mexican era to the politics surrounding US federal acknowledgment—the documentary and archaeological record can also illustrate how Native Californians have always imagined their own futures outside of these structures. Indeed, archaeologists are increasingly attentive to the possibilities that Native people in the past saw for themselves and also the futures that research in the present may call into being (Acebo 2021; Bloch 2020; Gould et al. 2020; Laluk et al. 2022; Marek-Martinez 2021; Montgomery and Supernant 2022; see also Black Trowel Collective et al. 2024).

Here, we advocate for the use of documentary evidence to help us escape analytical time and regain a sense of subjective time and, by extension, contexts for Native futures. In California, there is no doubt that the period between mission secularization and US statehood remained dangerous and exploitative for Native Californians. But instead of seeing it solely as the natural precursor to the even more bloody and oppressive years after annexation by the United States, we would do well to consider the 1830s and 1840s from the vantage point of Native Californians' lived experience. As the secularization decrees opened up avenues for legal emancipation, many Native people left the missions behind to seek new futures as citizens of a newly independent Mexico. Others rightfully recognized the continuation of unfree labor conditions—both inside and outside of the missions—and continued to resist the colonial order in various ways. Native Californians, in other words, were aware of the broader contexts in which they lived and actively sought to secure viable futures for their families and communities. Although many aspirations may have gone unrealized, they nevertheless remain part of critical historical moments—events that archaeology may be able to illuminate in new ways if only we were asking the right questions.

## Conclusion

Building from our shared experience investigating long-term Indigenous histories in the San Francisco Bay region of California, we advocate for the judicious rereading of the documentary record. This is not a call for a return to the days of archaeology as a “handmaiden to history” (Noël Hume 1964). Rather, parallel developments in the fields of archaeology, history, and Native American and Indigenous studies invite us to look anew at the varied archives for Native experience in colonial North America. Although scholars of all disciplines should be rightfully cautious about the biases of the written record regarding Native people in colonial contexts, a careful bridging of archival and material evidence can invite new ways of looking at the archaeology of later colonialism (Kretzler and Gonzalez 2023:313–314). During a time when Native people across Alta California were abandoning the missions, the documentary record demonstrates their continued presence on the landscape—as attested through church records, censuses, court cases, and petitions—offering great potential to use archaeology to say something different about their lives and the futures they sought to create.

These glimpses of autonomy and resistance seen in the documentary and archaeological records for the 1830s and 1840s suggest the need to reevaluate the received wisdom about the fate of Native people in the San Francisco Bay Area and California more broadly. Although the immediate years after statehood were marked by violence and dispossession, the survivors of Missions San José, Santa Clara, and San Francisco found refuge in the hills beyond the southeastern extent of San Francisco Bay. There, in the interrelated communities of Alisal, Niles, and Sunol, the ancestors of today's Muwekma Ohlone



Tribe enjoyed a period of cultural revitalization in the late nineteenth century, characterized by a resurgence of Native religion, continuation of the relationship to the land, and a strengthening of social ties. Certainly, the antecedents of those developments are visible decades earlier when Native people—some of whom were only a generation removed—maintained their traditions and fought for their rights as the missions fell apart around them. Yet, by the 1920s, the pressures of urbanization again challenged the Bay Area Ohlone community, which was written off by anthropology and the US government alike in the 1920s (Field 1999; Leventhal et al. 1994; Panich 2020).

Many observers would—and do—end the story there. Inspired by our collaborations with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, we are thinking more broadly and using the archival record to find physical traces of a future that is still unfolding. Today, the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe is actively seeking the restoration of federal acknowledgment, and tribal members are simultaneously reinvigorating their connection to the lands of the San Francisco Bay Area through a wide variety of cultural activities and educational programs. Archaeology can contribute to these efforts and others like them in meaningful ways, but to do so, we need to push archaeology in new directions. This means continuing the decades-long efforts to dissolve the artificial boundary between “prehistory” and more recent times as well as exploring newer approaches that consider how Indigenous people navigated the sustained colonialism of settler nations such as the United States. And in many contexts, such as in the uneven transitions between colonial systems, this reinvisioning may also require suspending our knowledge of what seem to be given historical outcomes to regain a sense of what was—and might still be—possible.

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**Competing Interests.** The authors declare none.

## Note

1. The Alta California sacramental records are most easily accessed via the Early California Population Project (2022) online database. Here, we employed a combination of the ECPP and original and microfilm records held in the Archives and Special Collections at Santa Clara University.

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