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THE OHLONE WAY

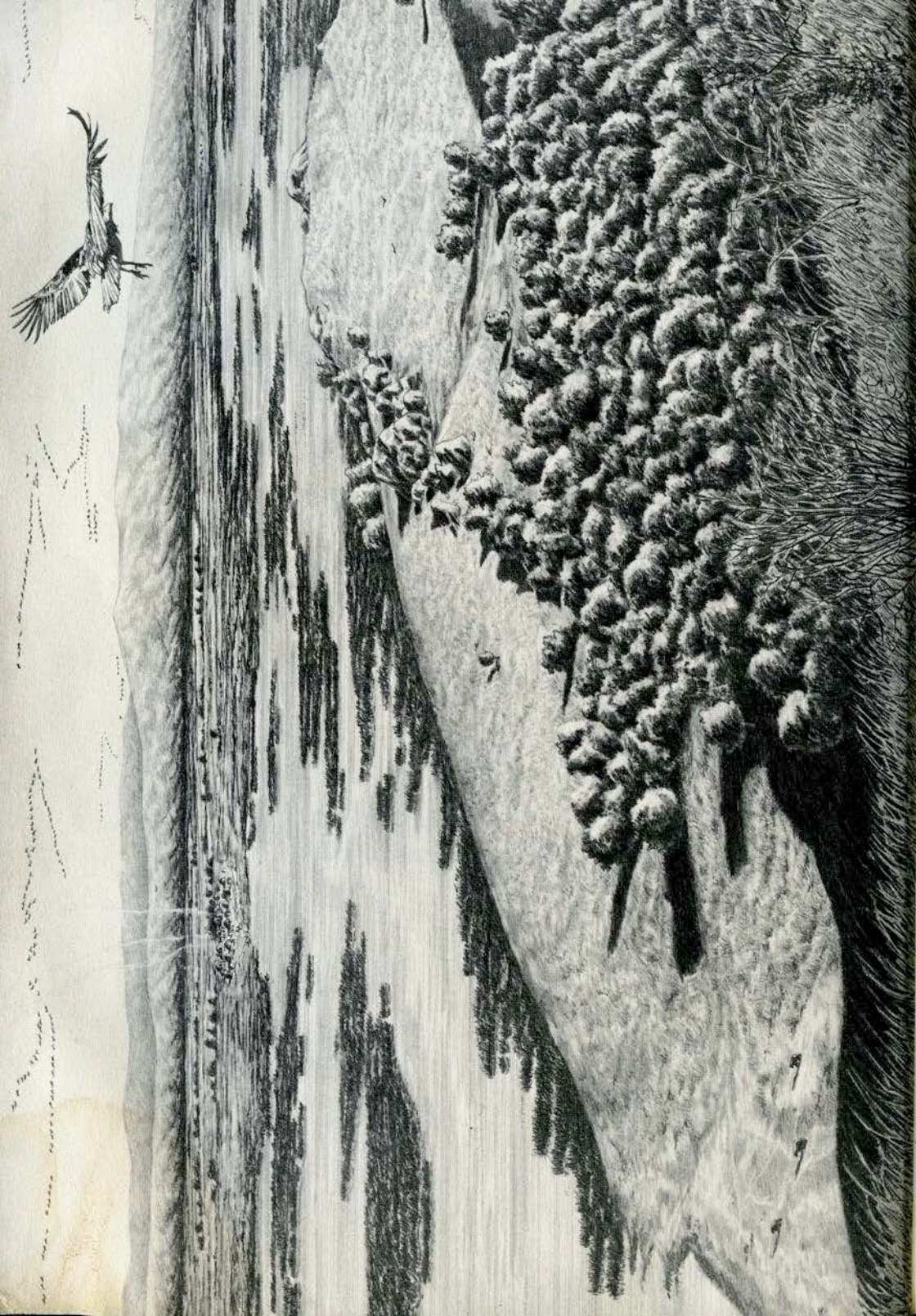
*Indian Life in the
San Francisco —
Monterey Bay Area*



BY MALCOLM MARGOLIN

Illustrated by Michael Harney

Heyday Books: Berkeley

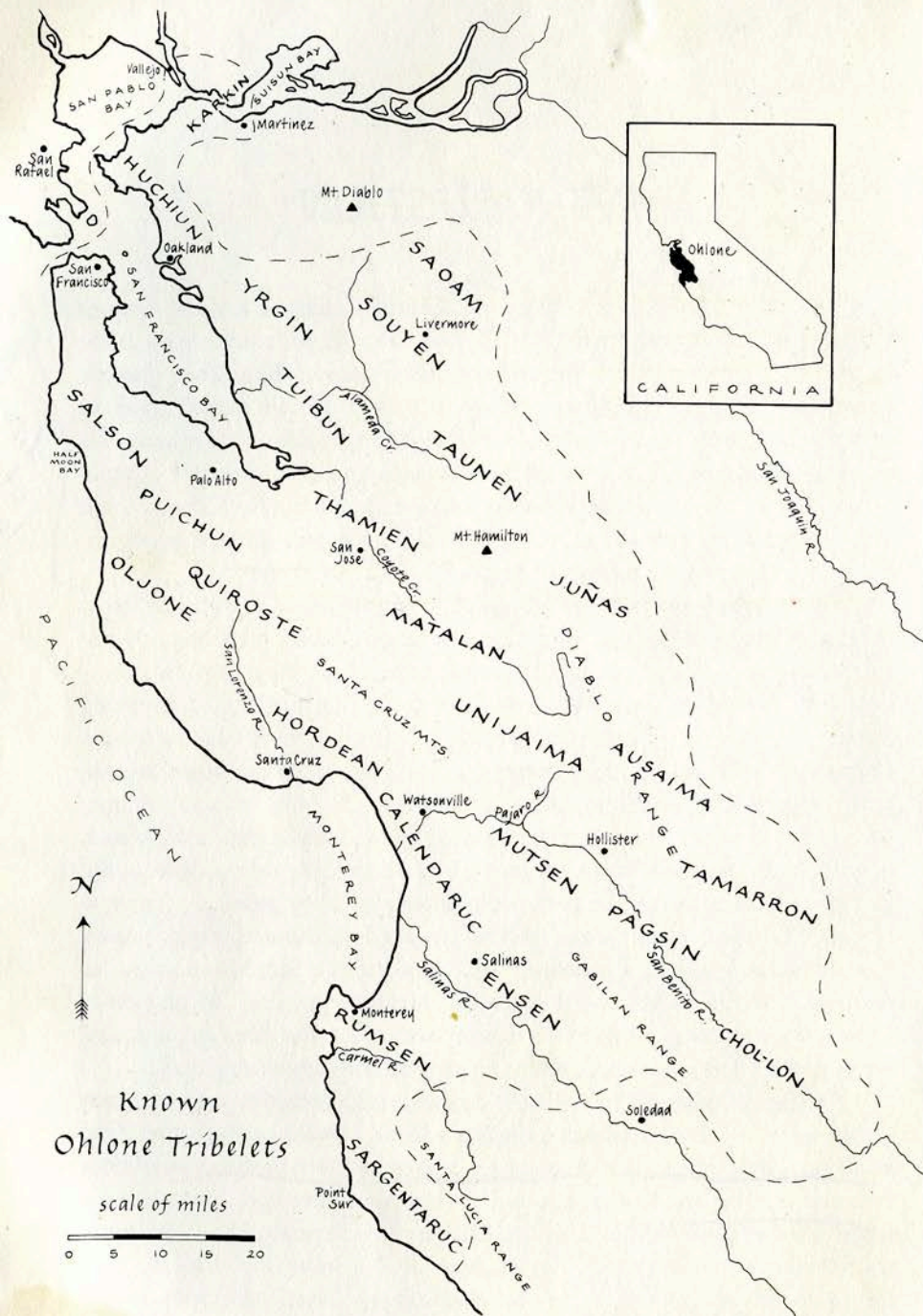


INTRODUCTION

Before the coming of the Spaniards, Central California had the densest Indian population anywhere north of Mexico. Over 10,000 people lived in the coastal area between Point Sur and the San Francisco Bay. These people belonged to about forty different groups, each with its own territory and its own chief. Among them they spoke eight to twelve different languages—languages that were closely related but still so distinct that oftentimes people living twenty miles apart could hardly understand each other. The average size of a group (or *tribelet*, as it is often called) was only about 250 people. Each language had an average of no more than 1,000 speakers.

That so many independent groups of people speaking so many different languages could be packed into such a relatively small area boggled the European mind. The Spanish sometimes referred to them as *Costenos*—people of the coast. This word was later picked up by English-speaking settlers who mispronounced it *Costanos*, and finally twisted it into *Costanoan*. In this way the Indians of the Monterey and San Francisco Bay areas became amalgamated into a single large tribe called by the ungainly name, Costanoan. But the name was never adopted by the Indians themselves, each of whom had a name for his or her own group. In fact, the descendants of the Bay Area Indians dislike the name quite intensely. They generally prefer to be called *Ohlones*, even though Ohlone is a word of disputed origin: it may have been the name of a prominent village along the San Mateo coast, or perhaps it was a Miwok word meaning “western people.” In any case, Ohlone has a pleasing sound to the descendants of the Bay Area Indians, and consequently that is the name that will be used throughout this book.

But like Costanoan, Ohlone is still a fabrication. There was no Costanoan or Ohlone tribe in the sense that there was a Sioux, Navajo, or Hopi tribe. One small Bay Area tribelet would have been loosely affiliated with its neighbors by bonds of trade and marriage, but there was never anything approaching a larger tribal organization, or even an Ohlone confederation. The Calendaruc tribelet who lived near present-day Watsonville, for example, did not feel that they were in any way allied to the Huchiun who lived near present-day Oakland—and indeed the two groups probably knew of each other's existence



Based on research of C. King and R. Millikan

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only second hand if at all. True, the people between Point Sur and the San Francisco Bay spoke languages that had a common root, and (to us) their customs appear broadly similar. But in their own minds they were not a nation, not even a "culture." They were only forty or so independent tribelets, each with its own territory and its own ways of doing things, each working through its own destiny. In short *Ohlone* was not an ancient entity; it is merely a fiction that we have invented to deal with a human situation far more complex and far richer than anything our own politically and culturally simplified world has prepared us for.

I began working on this book to answer a rather basic, and I thought simple question: what was life like in the Bay Area before the coming of the Europeans? A mere 200 years ago an Indian people lived on the very land now occupied by modern-day San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Cruz, and Monterey—a people who with terrible rapidity have almost completely dropped out of the modern consciousness. Who were these people? What did they look like, how did they act, and what did they think about? I had no clear idea. I distrusted the old stereotype of the "Diggers"—a dirty, impoverished people who ate mainly insects and roots and who lived without "culture." On the other hand I also distrusted the modern (and equally dehumanizing) image of "noble savages," a faultless people who lived lives of idyllic peace and prosperity. I rejected both stereotypes, but I had nothing to put in their places.

At the beginning, I assumed that there was very little information about the Bay Area Indians. I was wrong. The early Spanish explorers and missionaries were passionate keepers of diaries and journals, as well as prolific writers of letters and official reports. The two deAnza expeditions in the mid 1770's, for example, produced no fewer than twelve separate diaries between them. Father Junipero Serra's letters fill four thick volumes.

In addition to the Spanish writings, there are several travelogues written by early ship captains, traders, and adventurers. Many of the ship captains, like the Frenchman Jean F. G. de la Perouse or the Englishman Frederick William Beechey, were well-read, thoughtful, and observant men. Finally, we have the research of archaeologists who have probed Ohlone village sites, and (especially valuable) the reports of anthropologists who at the turn of this century were still able to interview aged descendants of the various Ohlone tribelets.

No one source of information gives a complete picture. But if we put them together they do provide many different views, like windows into an

otherwise hidden past. Where the windows are clustered together, we get bright glimpses from many perspectives into various aspects of Ohlone life. Other times, though, there are fewer windows, or the glass is clouded or distorted, and we get only partial views and tantalizing fragments. There is an Ohlone song, for example, from which only one evocative line survives: *Dancing on the brink of the world.* We know nothing more about this song, just that one haunting line.

Finally, there are areas of Ohlone life into which there are no windows whatever. We search and we peer, but we find nothing. Where vital information is lacking, both the writer and the artist of this book have turned elsewhere—to the Yokuts, the Miwoks, the Salinans, and other neighboring peoples—and we have made guesses based on what is known of their lives. Because of the element of speculation, this book is not so much about what Ohlone life was like, but rather about what Ohlone life *may* have been like. There are undoubtedly errors, nevertheless we feel that our procedures are justified; for only by examining the ways of the surrounding peoples can we hope to recapture the fullness and richness of Ohlone life.

Before the coming of the Europeans, for hundreds—perhaps thousands—of years, the Ohlones rose before dawn, stood in front of their tule houses, and facing the east shouted words of greeting and encouragement to the rising sun. The men were either naked or dressed in short capes of woven rabbit skin. Their noses and ears were pierced. The women, their faces tattooed, wore skirts made of tule reeds and deer skin. On especially cold mornings the men daubed themselves with mud to keep warm. They shouted and talked to the sun because they believed that the sun was listening to them, that it would heed their advice and their pleas. They shouted to the sun because, as one missionary later put it, they felt that the sun had a nature very much like their own.


The Ohlones were very different from us. They had different values, technologies, and ways of seeing the world. These differences are striking and instructive. Yet there is something that lies beyond differences. For as we stretch and strain to look through the various windows into the past, we do not merely see a bygone people hunting, fishing, painting their bodies, and dancing their dances. If we look long enough, if we dwell on their joy, fear, and reverence, we may in the end catch glimpses of almost forgotten aspects of our own selves.

part I

THE OHLONES AND THEIR LAND



LAND AND ANIMALS



Modern residents would hardly recognize the Bay Area as it was in the days of the Ohlones. Tall, sometimes shoulder-high stands of native bunch-grasses (now almost entirely replaced by the shorter European annuals) covered the vast meadowlands and the tree-dotted savannahs. Marshes that spread out for thousands of acres fringed the shores of the Bay. Thick oak-bay forests and redwood forests covered much of the hills.

The intermingling of grasslands, savannahs, salt- and freshwater marshes, and forests created wildlife habitats of almost unimaginable richness and variety. The early explorers and adventurers, no matter how well-travelled in other parts of the globe, were invariably struck by the plentiful animal life here. "There is not any country in the world which more abounds in fish and game of every description," noted the French sea captain, la Perouse. Flocks of geese, ducks, and seabirds were so enormous that when alarmed by a rifle shot they were said to rise "in a dense cloud with a noise like that of a hurricane." Herds of elk—"monsters with tremendous horns," as one of the early missionaries described them—grazed the meadowlands in such numbers that they were often compared with great herds of cattle. Pronghorn antelopes, in herds of one or two hundred, or even more, dotted the grassy slopes.

Packs of wolves hunted the elk, antelope, deer, rabbits, and other game. Bald eagles and giant condors glided through the air. Mountain lions, bobcats, and coyotes—now seen only rarely—were a common sight. And of course there was the grizzly bear. "He was horrible, fierce, large, and fat," wrote Father Pedro Font, an early missionary, and a most apt description it was. These enormous bears were everywhere, feeding on berries, lumbering along the beaches, congregating beneath oak trees during the acorn season, and stationed along nearly every stream and creek during the annual runs of salmon and steelhead.

It is impossible to estimate how many thousands of bears might have lived in the Bay Area at the time of the Ohlones. Early Spanish settlers captured them readily for their famous bear-and-bull fights, ranchers shot them by the dozen to protect their herds of cattle and sheep, and the early

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Californians chose the grizzly as the emblem for their flag and their statehood. The histories of many California townships tell how bears collected in troops around the slaughterhouses and sometimes wandered out onto the main streets of towns to terrorize the inhabitants. To the Ohlones the grizzly bear must have been omnipresent, yet today there is not a single wild grizzly bear left in all of California.

Life in the ocean and in the unspoiled bays of San Francisco and Monterey was likewise plentiful beyond modern conception. There were mussels, clams, oysters, abalones, seabirds, and sea otters in profusion. Sea lions blackened the rocks at the entrance to San Francisco Bay and in Monterey Bay they were so abundant that to one missionary they seemed to cover the entire surface of the water "like a pavement."

Long, wavering lines of pelicans threaded the air. Clouds of gulls, cormorants, and other shore birds rose, wheeled, and screeched at the approach of a human. Rocky islands like Alcatraz (which means *pelican* in Spanish) were white from the droppings of great colonies of birds.

In the days before the nineteenth century whaling fleets, whales were commonly sighted within the bays and along the ocean coast. An early visitor to Monterey Bay wrote: "It is impossible to conceive of the number of whales with which we were surrounded, or their familiarity; they every half minute spouted within half a pistol shot of the ships and made a prodigious stench in the air." Along the bays and ocean beaches whales were often seen washed up on shore, with grizzly bears in "countless troops"—or in many cases Indians—streaming down the beach to feast on their remains.

Nowadays, especially during the summer months, we consider most of the Bay Area to be a semi-arid country. But from the diaries of the early explorers the picture we get is of a moist, even swampy land. In the days of the Ohlones the water table was much closer to the surface, and indeed the first settlers who dug wells here regularly struck clear, fresh water within a few feet.

Water was virtually everywhere, especially where the land was flat. The explorers suffered far more from mosquitoes, spongy earth, and hard-to-ford rivers than they did from thirst—even in the heat of summer. Places that are now dry were then described as having springs, brooks, ponds—even fairly large lakes. In the days before channelizations, all the major rivers—the Carmel, Salinas, Pajaro, Coyote Creek, and Alameda Creek—as well as many minor streams, spread out each winter and spring to form wide, marshy valleys.

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The San Francisco Bay, in the days before landfill, was much larger than it is today. Rivers and streams emptying into it often fanned out into estuaries which supported extensive tule marshes. The low, salty margins of the Bay held vast pickleweed and cordgrass swamps. Cordgrass provided what many biologists now consider to be the richest wildlife habitat in all North America.

Today only Suisun Marsh and a few other smaller areas give a hint of the extraordinary bird and animal life that the fresh- and saltwater swamps of the Bay Area once supported. Ducks were so thick that an early European hunter told how "several were frequently killed with one shot." Channels crisscrossed the Bayshore swamps—channels so labyrinthian that the Russian explorer, Otto von Kotzebue, got lost in them and longed for a good pilot to help him thread his way through. The channels were alive with beavers and river otters in fresh water, sea otters in salt water. And everywhere there were thousands and thousands of herons, curlews, sandpipers, dowitchers, and other shore birds.

The geese that wintered in the Bay Area were "uncountable," according to Father Juan Crespi. An English visitor claimed that their numbers "would hardly be credited by anyone who had not seen them covering whole acres of ground, or rising in myriads with a clang that may be heard a considerable distance."

The environment of the Bay Area has changed drastically in the last 200 years. Some of the birds and animals are no longer to be found here, and many others have vastly diminished in number. Even those that have survived have (surprisingly enough) altered their habits and characters. The animals of today do not behave the same way they did two centuries ago; for when the Europeans first arrived they found, much to their amazement, that the animals of the Bay Area were relatively unafraid of people.

Foxes, which are now very secretive, were virtually underfoot. Mountain lions and bobcats were prominent and visible. Sea otters, which now spend almost their entire lives in the water, were then readily captured on land. The coyote, according to one visitor, was "so daring and dexterous, that it makes no scruple of entering human habitation in the night, and rarely fails to appropriate whatever happens to suit it."

"Animals seem to have lost their fear and become familiar with man," noted Captain Beechey. As one reads the old journals and diaries, one finds the same observation repeated by one visitor after another. Quail, said Beechey, were "so tame that they would often not start from a stone directed at them." Rabbits "can sometimes be caught with the hand," claimed a



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Spanish ship captain. Geese, according to another visitor, were "so impudent that they can scarcely be frightened away by firing upon them."

Likewise, Otto von Kotzebue, an avid hunter, found that "geese, ducks, and snipes were so tame that we might have killed great numbers with our sticks." When he and his men acquired horses from the missionaries they chased "herds of small stags, so fearless that they suffered us to ride into the midst of them."

Von Kotzebue delighted in what he called the "superfluity of game." But one of his hunting expeditions nearly ended in disaster. He had brought with him a crew of Aleutian Eskimos to help hunt sea otters for the fur trade. "They had never seen game in such abundance," he wrote, "and being passionately fond of the chase they fired away without ceasing." Then one man made the mistake of hurling a javelin at a pelican. "The rest of the flock took this so ill, that they attacked the murderer and beat him severely with their wings before other hunters could come to his assistance."

It is obvious from these early reports that in the days of the Ohlones the animal world must have been a far more immediate presence than it is today. But this closeness was not without drawbacks. Grizzly bears, for example, who in our own time have learned to keep their distance from humans, were a serious threat to a people armed only with bows and arrows. During his short stay in California in 1792, Jose Longinos Martinez saw the bodies of two men who had been killed by bears. Father Font also noticed several Indians on both sides of the San Francisco Bay who were "badly scarred by the bites and scratches of these animals."

Suddenly everything changed. Into this land of plenty, this land of "inexpressible fertility" as Captain la Perouse called it, arrived the European and the rifle. For a few years the hunting was easy—so easy (in the words of Frederick Beechey) "as soon to lessen the desire of pursuit." But the advantages of the gun were short-lived. Within a few generations some birds and animals had become totally exterminated, while others survived by greatly increasing the distance between themselves and people.

Today we are the heirs of that distance, and we take it entirely for granted that animals are naturally secretive and afraid of our presence. But for the Indians who lived here before us this was simply not the case. Animals and humans inhabited the very same world, and the distance between them was not very great.

The Ohlones depended upon animals for food and skins. As hunters they had an intense interest in animals and an intimate knowledge of their

behavior. A large part of a man's life was spent learning the ways of animals.

But their intimate knowledge of animals did not lead to conquest, nor did their familiarity breed contempt. The Ohlones lived in a world where people were few and animals were many, where the bow and arrow were the height of technology, where a deer who was not approached in the proper manner could easily escape and a bear might conceivably attack—indeed, they lived in a world where the animal kingdom had not yet fallen under the domination of the human race and where (how difficult it is for us to fully grasp the implications of this!) people did not yet see themselves as the undisputed lords of all creation. The Ohlones, like hunting people everywhere, worshipped animal spirits as gods, imitated animal motions in their dances, sought animal powers in their dreams, and even saw themselves as belonging to clans with animals as their ancestors. The powerful, graceful animal life of the Bay Area not only filled their world, but filled their minds as well.

AN OHLONE VILLAGE

Within the rich environment of the Bay Area lived a dense population of Ohlone Indians. As many as thirty or forty permanent villages rimmed the shores of the San Francisco Bay—plus several dozen temporary “camps,” visited for a few weeks each year by inland groups who journeyed to the Bay-shore to gather shellfish and other foods. At the turn of this century more than 400 shellmounds, the remains of these villages and camps, could still be found along the shores of the Bay—dramatic indication of a thriving population.

What would life have been like here? What would be happening at one of the larger villages on a typical afternoon, say in mid-April, 1768—one year before the first significant European intrusion into the Bay Area? Let us reconstruct the scene....

The village is located along the eastern shores of the San Francisco Bay at the mouth of a freshwater creek. An immense, sprawling pile of shells, earth, and ashes elevates the site above the surrounding marshland. On top of this mound stand some fifteen dome-shaped tule houses arranged around a plaza-like clearing. Scattered among them are smaller structures that look like huge baskets on stilts—granaries in which the year's supply of acorns are stored. Beyond the houses and granaries lies another cleared area that serves as a ball field, although it is not now in use.

It is mid-afternoon of a clear, warm day. In several places throughout the village steam is rising from underground pit ovens where mussels, clams, rabbit meat, fish, and various roots are being roasted for the evening meal. People are clustered near the doors of the houses. Three men sit together, repairing a fishing net. A group of children are playing an Ohlone version of hide-and-seek: one child hides and all the rest are seekers. Here and there an older person is lying face down on a woven tule mat, napping in the warmth of the afternoon sun.

At the edge of the village a group of women sit together grinding acorns. Holding the mortars between their outstretched legs, they sway back and forth, raising the pestles and letting them fall again. The women are singing

together, and the pestles rise and fall in unison. As heavy as the pestles are, they are lifted easily—not so much by muscular effort, but (it seems to the women) by the powerful rhythm of the acorn-grinding songs. The singing of the women and the synchronized thumping of a dozen stone pestles create a familiar background noise—a noise that has been heard by the people of this village every day for hundreds, maybe thousands, of years.

The women are dressed in skirts of tule reeds and deer skin. They are muscular, with rounded healthy features. They wear no shoes or sandals—neither do the men—and their feet are hardened by a lifetime of walking barefoot. Tattoos, mostly lines and dots, decorate their chins, and they are wearing necklaces made of abalone shells, clam-shell beads, olivella shells, and feathers. The necklaces jangle pleasantly as the women pound the acorns. Not far away some toddlers are playing in the dirt with tops and buzzers made out of acorns. Several of the women have babies by their sides, bound tightly into basketry cradles. The cradles are decorated lovingly with beads and shells.

As the women pause in their work, they talk, complain, and laugh among themselves. It is the beginning of spring now, and everyone is yearning to leave the shores of the Bay and head into the hills. The tule houses are soggy after the long winter rains, and everyone is eager to desert them. The spring greens, spring roots, and the long-awaited clover have already appeared in the meadows. The hills have turned a deep green. Flowers are everywhere, and it is getting near that time of year when the young men and women will chase each other over the meadows, throwing flowers at each other in a celebration so joyful that even the older people will join in.

Everyone is waiting for the chief to give the word, to say that it is time to leave the village. All winter the trails have been too muddy for walking long distances, the rivers too wild for fishing, and the meadows too swampy for hunting. Now winter is clearly over. Everyone is craving the taste of mountain greens and the first flower seeds of the spring.

But the chief won't give the word. A few days before he had stood in the plaza and given a speech. Anyone was free to go to the hills, he said, but he and his family would stay by the Bayshore for a while longer. Here there were plenty of mussels and clams, the baskets still held acorns, and the fields near the village were full of soaproot, clover, and other greens. In the hills there would be flower seeds, beyond doubt; but there would be very few, and the people would have to spread out far and wide to gather them. They would be separated from each other. A woman might get carried off, a man might get attacked and beheaded. There had been no such problems for several years,

true. But this winter many people had fallen ill. Some had even died. Where did the illness come from? Indeed, the villagers had brooded upon the illnesses and deaths for several months now, and many had come to the conclusion that the people to the south were working evil against them.

The women grinding the acorns talk about the speech, and now on this warm spring afternoon they laugh at the chief. He is getting old. He wants to avoid trouble with the neighboring groups, and this is good. But hadn't two of the young men from the village taken wives from the people to the south? And hadn't the young men brought the proper gifts to their new families?

Also, the hills do indeed have enough clover, greens, and flower seeds, so that the people will not have to spread out far and wide. Just look at the color! The birds, too, have begun to sing their flower-seed songs in the willows along the creek. It is time to leave. The chief is too cautious, too suspicious. Still, no one leaves for the hills yet. Perhaps in another day or two.

On a warm day like this almost all village activity takes place outdoors, for the tule houses are rather small. Of relatively simple design (they are made by fastening bundles of tule rush onto a framework of bent willow poles), they range in size from six to about twenty feet in diameter. The larger dwellings hold one or sometimes two families—as many as twelve or more people—and each house is crowded with possessions. Blankets of deer skin, bear skin, and woven rabbit skin lie strewn about a central fire pit. Hamper baskets in which seeds, roots, dried meat, and dried fish are stored stand against the smoke-darkened walls. Winnowing, serving, sifting, and cooking baskets (to name only a few), along with several unfinished baskets in various stages of completion are stacked near the entrance way. Tucked into the rafters are bundles of basket-making material, plus deer-skin pouches that contain ornaments and tools: sets of awls, bone scrapers, file stones, obsidian knives, and twist drills for making holes in beads. Many of the houses also contain ducks stuffed with tule (to be used as hunting decoys), piles of fishing nets, fish traps, snares, clay balls ready to be ground into paint, and heaps of abalone shells that have been worked into rough blanks. The abalone shells were received in trade last fall from the people across the Bay, and after being shaped, polished, and pierced they will eventually be traded eastward—for pine nuts, everyone hopes.

While all the houses are similar in construction, they are not identical. One of them, off to the side of the village near the creek, is twice as large as the others and is dug into the earth. It has a tiny door—one would have to crawl on all fours to enter—and it is decorated with a pole from which hang

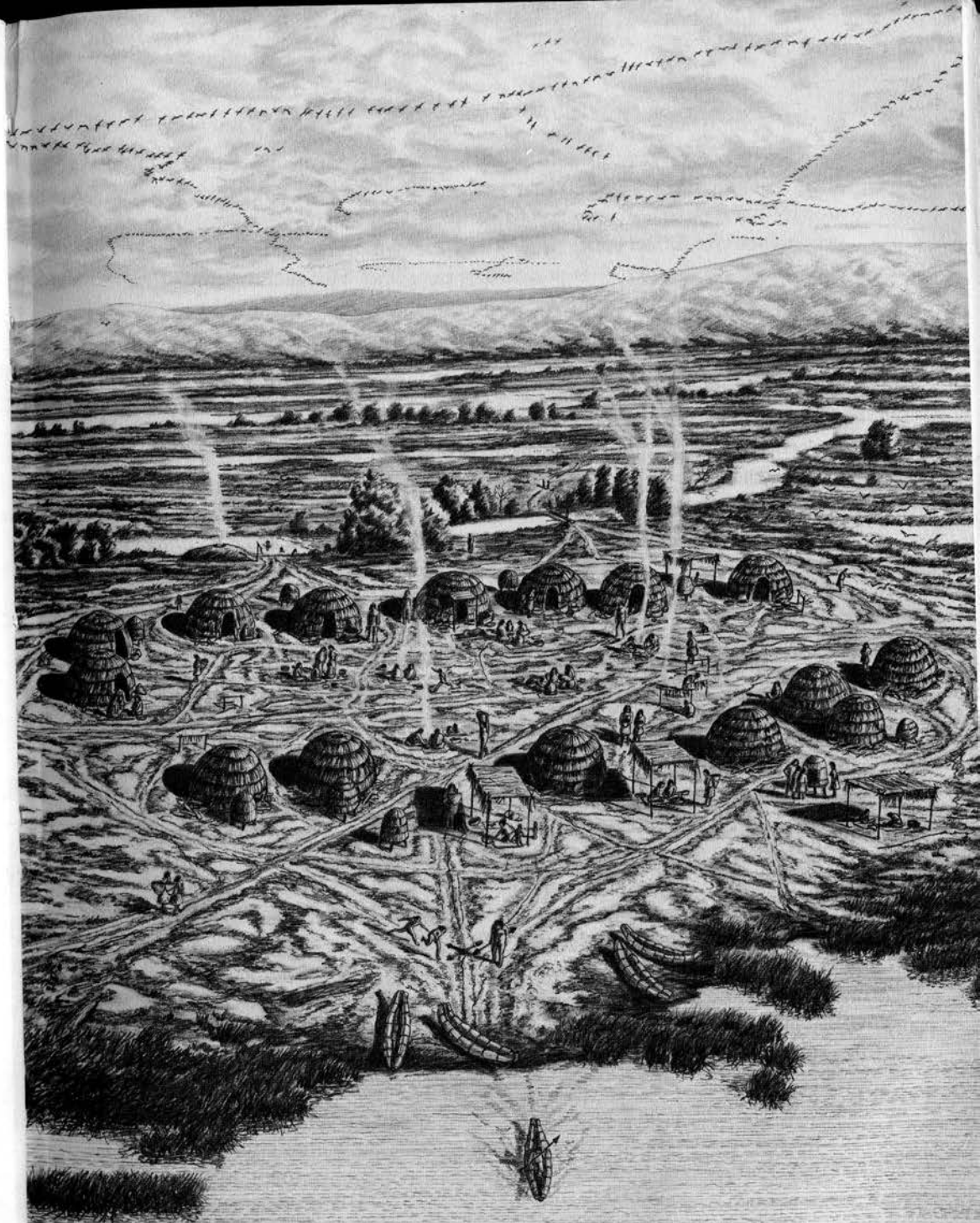
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feathers and a long strip of rabbit skin. Its walls are plastered thickly with mud, and smoke is pouring out of a hole in the roof. This is the sweat-house, or *temescal* as it was called by the early Spaniards. A number of adolescent boys are lingering around the door, listening to the rhythmic clapping of a split-stick clapper that comes from within. The men are inside, singing and sweating, preparing themselves and their weapons for the next day's deer hunt. It is here, away from the women, that the bows, arrows, and other major hunting implements are kept.

Another house is noticeably different from the rest, mainly because it is smaller and has fewer baskets and blankets. Whereas the other dwellings contain large families, this one contains only two people. They are both men. One of them leads a man's life, but the other has chosen the women's way. He wears women's ornaments, grinds acorns with the women, gathers roots, and makes baskets. The two men are living together, fully accepted by the other villagers.

There is one more house that is different from the rest. It is larger than the others, and it holds many more storage baskets filled with food. This is the chief's dwelling. A few of the wealthier men of the village have two wives, but only the chief has three. He needs both the extra food and the extra wives, for he must fulfill his responsibilities of disbursing food to the needy and entertaining guests from other areas.

Guests do arrive this afternoon, three traders from another village, and they are led at once to the chief's house. Their village is only about twenty-five miles away; and while the traders are related by marriage to some of the village families, they are very infrequent visitors, and indeed they speak a different language. But the language of trade—salt, beads, pine nuts, obsidian, abalone shells, and other desired goods—is universally understood. The language of hospitality is also universal. A great feast must be prepared in their honor. The chief looks them over. His position is somewhat difficult. On one hand he must be generous and hospitable, lest the guests think badly of his people and feel insulted. On the other hand there is a real need to conserve food supplies. Being a chief entails much responsibility—so much so that it is not uncommon for someone who is offered the chieftainship of a village to refuse the honor. Yet being chief also has its rewards. After the feast the chief is the first person in the village to see the visitors' goods and trade with them. Then it becomes the guests' turn to be generous and offer good bargains in trade, for that is what etiquette demands. The guests do not want their host to think them unmannered or ungrateful men.



Michael Harvey

As the afternoon wears on, a group of boys return to the village. They are carrying snares, bows and arrows, and pieces of firewood. They run to the women grinding the acorns and show what they have caught: rabbits, a ground squirrel, a few small birds. The smallest boy among them, no more than about four years old, is particularly delighted. He has caught his first animal: a mouse! There is great laughter among the women. Also, great praise.

"How fat it looks," says the mother matter-of-factly, hiding her pride lest the other women think her boastful. She will roast the mouse whole in the pit oven; it will provide about two good bites. But the food value is not nearly as important as the fact that her child is becoming a hunter. Indeed, she feels that she has done well by him. When she was pregnant she followed all the right taboos. She ate neither meat nor fish. She bathed him in cold water when he was born, and she herself burned the umbilical cord and disposed of the ashes in the proper way so that no harm would come to him. When he was still a baby she fed him quail eggs to make him fast on his feet. She nursed him for two full years during which she made love to no one, lest the love-making sour her milk.

Now he is growing up and becoming a hunter. Perhaps it is Quail who is helping him. Quail is a good helper for a little boy, she thinks. Later on, when he reaches manhood, he will seek others. Who will they be, she wonders? Preferably not Coyote, who is not very reliable, to say the least: one has to be a wise and powerful person to deal with a helper like that. She hopes he will seek more stable helpers. Mountain Lion would be excellent for a hunter. Badger, too. She is partial to Badger, and she hopes her son will someday have Badger dreams. Badger was one of her father's best helpers, a major family totem, and....

But no sooner does that thought enter her mind than she shuts it out. Her father is dead. Along with her mother she had singed her hair, blackened her face with tar, and mourned him for a full year. Now she must never mention his name again. No one will ever mention his name. She must try not to think about him. He is dead.

A ripple of laughter among the other women brings her back. They are laughing and their eyes are dancing. "It feels lucky tonight. Let's gamble."

Tonight they will gamble. They will sing their gambling songs and court fortune. The woman is glad that this is not the time of her period, for then she would have to stay away from other people lest she ruin their luck.

"I'll get that necklace tonight," one woman yells, pointing at another's necklace of shells and eagle down. "I'll win it yet. Won't it look fine on me?"

Everyone laughs. The acorn grinding song resumes, and the mother continues pounding. These acorns come from the valley oaks. They are big acorns, and so sweet that one hardly has to leach them. In many ways they are nearly the best of all acorns—almost as good as the black oak acorns. But they are so difficult to crack! Instead of splitting, the soft shells buckle. A woman often has to use her teeth, and some of the older women whose teeth are bad have to use deer bone awls to cut into them. Also, while they taste good, they do not fill a person up the way live oak acorns do. Yet live oak acorns are small and bitter, and they have to be leached for hours. Why can't things be easier, the woman wonders to herself. Maybe next year the black oaks will bear heavily. Maybe next year.

Toward the end of the afternoon more and more people drift back into the village. A group of women, children, and older men return from the mud flats. Everyone is carrying a digging stick, and the women have on their backs heavy baskets full of mussels, clams, and oysters. The baskets are supported by tumplines around the forehead, and they are dripping with sea water. Also from the direction of the Bay, a group of men haul onto shore a pair of small boats made of tule reeds. They hang their nets out to dry and happily approach the village with a big load of fish. Others who return—men, women, and children—carry bundles of firewood heaped high on their backs.

Suddenly all eyes turn toward the land where an old woman is making her way back to the village. Where has she been all day? Perhaps she has been collecting power plants, singing her songs in sacred places, communicating with spirit-world helpers, or visiting a secret hiding place in the woods where she keeps her medicine bundle. No one asks. The other women watch her carefully and greet her politely. She is a shaman.

So far everyone acknowledges that the shaman has been above reproach. She has accumulated much power and cured many people. Indeed, she has often danced and sung for hours at a time, and with her hollow tube she has sucked out of their bodies many malignant objects: lizards, inchworms, bits of deer bone, and pieces of quartz—hideous things, all sent to them by their enemies. But one always has to watch shamans, for sometimes they turn evil. They learn to communicate with Owls. They take on the character of Bears. The people they touch begin to die. When that happens, it is sometimes necessary for the people of the village to kill the shaman. But this is a difficult and serious business—especially if the shaman (whether man or woman) has many supernatural helpers.

So far there has been no cause for alarm. She seems above reproach. Also, she does not get along very well with the chief, and that is encouraging;

THE OHLONE WAY

for if a shaman turns evil the people often go to the chief for permission to kill him or her. But if the shaman and the chief are close friends or relatives, then the suffering a village might have to endure at their hands could be enormous. True, there is no immediate cause for suspicion, but such fears are never far from anyone's mind.

The women have finished grinding their acorns. They pile fresh wood onto their outdoor cooking fires, leach the acorn meal with hot water, and begin to make the mush that will form the basis for the night's dinner. The ovens are dug open and their savory contents added to the feast.

The men have finished sweating and dancing, and now they come forward from the direction of the sweat-house. They have scraped their bodies clean with curved deer ribs, and they have bathed in the cool creek. Many of the men have beards and moustaches, some wear hairnets made of milkweed fibers, and several have stone and shell amulets hanging around their necks. Their ears and noses are pierced, and long plugs of wood or bone have been inserted into them. Otherwise they are naked.

As they come forward to get their food, several of the men pointedly refuse any meat. Everyone knows at once that these are the ones who will go hunting the next day. Tonight they will eat only acorn food and they will spend the entire night in the sweat-house. The next day, if their dreams are favorable, they will don their deer-head masks to seek deer. The women, however, say nothing. A woman must never talk to a man about deer hunting: to say anything at all would bring bad luck to the hunter, and perhaps illness or even death to the woman.

The villagers eat in groups around the various houses. The meals are noisy, full of jokes and good humor. People exchange stories of the day's activities. A lazy woman who has ground her acorns badly and an inept fisherman who has not caught any fish are teased by everyone—as they have been teased many times before. The people dip two fingers into their bowls of acorn gruel and slurp up more of the rich, bland food. Clam shells, mussel shells, and animal bones are tossed into a pile beyond the circle of houses.

As it gets dark the infants and toddlers crawl in among the blankets to go to sleep. Others put on rabbit-skin capes or wrap themselves in deer-skin blankets. The older children gather around their grandfathers and grandmothers, hoping for a story.

Suddenly they hear a scream. Everyone looks up. Out of one of the houses races a coyote with a piece of dried fish in its mouth. A woman runs after it, waving her digging stick. One of the old men laughs. Coyote is like

AN OHLONE VILLAGE

that, yes indeed, Coyote is like that. And the old man tells once again the hilarious exploits of Coyote during the creation of the world.

As he tells the story, the sound of chanting rises from the far end of the village. The women have begun to gamble. They sit in two teams, on either side of a fire, facing each other. There are four women to a team. One team is led by an attractive, imperious young woman, perhaps eighteen years old and taller than the rest. She tosses her head to the rhythm of the chant and bounces lightly on her haunches to the music. The other women on her team are enjoying her animated antics as they all chant their favorite team song. The women range in age from an eight year old girl who shows promise to a white-haired woman known for her great skill and luck.

While the other team sits silently and watches, the four women sing intensely. They are smiling and laughing, because tonight their song feels strong and powerful. They touch shoulders and sway joyously from side to side, united firmly against the other team. Indeed, tonight they are powerful!

The leader rattles the bones and looks about her. Who will it be? The young girl looks especially strong and lucky. The leader hands the bones to her. The girl puts her hands under the blanket before her, closes her eyes, jiggles the bones a bit, and then pulls her closed hands out. She crosses her arms now and, looking very demure, chants quietly. Her head is cocked to the right. Does that mean anything, the other team wonders? Could such a youngster be bluffing? The women on the other team carefully study her face for some unconscious sign. The girl keeps chanting earnestly, her eyes half shut. Finally one of the women on the other team lifts a counting stick and points to the right hand. The chanting instantly stops. The girl pauses briefly for dramatic effect, pouts her lips slightly, and looks sadly down at her right hand. She then opens both hands. The painted bone is in the left hand! Everyone on both teams laughs and applauds. The girl is marvelous, yes, marvelous! Time after time throughout the evening she fools the other team. Some day, everyone acknowledges, she will be one of the truly great gamblers.

As the women pause in their chanting, the sounds of another chant can be heard. It is low and rhythmic, accompanied by the sound of the split-stick clapper. The men have returned to the sweat-house. They are singing their deer chants. Some have put on their feathers and are dancing. Tonight they will tell hunting stories, smoke tobacco, and perhaps dream the right dreams. If the dreams are favorable, tomorrow they will light fires in the sweat-house again, sweat some more, paint their bodies, put on their deer-head masks, and go out to hunt.

The other people in the village smile. Perhaps tomorrow there will be fresh deer meat. That is good, very good. Everyone will get some. But more than that, if the men head out into the hills they will bring back news about the flower seeds. Perhaps the chief will give the word to move outward into the hills where the people can throw themselves face down onto the slopes and eat the delicious clover, and where they can taste again the nutty, roasted kernels of buttercup, clarkia, and redmaid seeds. The people feel glad inside just thinking about it. It is the end of winter, and soon it will be time to move out into the hills.

HUNTING AS A WAY OF LIFE

A youngster, about seven years old, is wandering around the outskirts of the village. In his right hand he carries a bola: a fine, tan-colored, remarkably strong string (made out of the side ribs of wild iris leaves) with bones tied to each end. Holding onto one of the bones, the boy lazily swings the bola around and around as he scans the grassland for meadowlarks, blackbirds, or perhaps quail.

So far he has had no luck. Throughout the day he did notice several drab, red-breasted birds; but since they were scratching about in the leaves under the brush, he could not get a clear shot at them. Twice earlier he flushed coveys of quail and shot the bola straight into them; both times the quail did not wish to be caught, and the bola sailed through the middle of the flocks without entangling a single bird. Deer and antelope graze all around him, but he has neither the weapons nor the spiritual power to hunt such animals.

It is late afternoon, and the boy is feeling downcast. As he passes a clump of bushes he notices several fresh burrows. He stops to think. Although he would much rather have quail, it is getting late in the day and he does not want to return to the village empty-handed. He bends down and smells the various holes. He listens to the scratching sounds within them. Finally, he makes up his mind. From a nearby bush he breaks off a branch and peels away the leaves and spurs. The branch is long, thin, and limber. He now jabs it first into one hole, then into another. Before long he has collected four gophers. He looks them over and is relieved that they are not too small. Noticing that they have fleas, he ties their tails together with the bola string, hangs them from the end of a stout stick, and shouldering the stick he returns to the village.

At the edge of the village he spies one of the older men. The man is standing in a slight depression between two bushes, and he is shouting angry words into the air. He is having an argument with one of his allies. The ally has apparently begun to play tricks on him so that the man no longer has any luck hunting or gambling. The boy immediately understands what is happening. He wishes that he were old enough to have a strong ally—even a quarrelsome, unreliable ally would be better than nothing, he thinks to

himself—and, not wanting to get in the middle of the quarrel, he tries to sneak behind the man unnoticed. But the man hears the sound, stops his shouting, and turns around. He sees the boy; squinting his eyes he looks hard at the game dangling from the end of the stick.

"Tell me, boy—I'm growing old, my eyes are failing—are those elk you're carrying? Are they grizzly bear?"

The boy doesn't think that the man's comments are at all funny and walks quickly past him. He heads toward the village, hoping he won't meet any of the other men. He finds his mother outside their house and hands her the gophers. She pinches their thighs, hefts them one at a time in her hand, and declares herself moderately pleased (although she too would rather have had quail or meadowlark). She puts the gophers into the fire, and with a stick she rolls them back and forth in the ashes to singe off their hairs. Then she breaks off their tails, cleans out a hole under the fire (a hole kept especially for small animals such as these), places the gophers into the hole, and closes it with ashes. She does not bother to skin or clean such small animals.

The gophers roast slowly, and later they will be eaten. From beginning to end the killing and eating of the gophers is a casual affair. No preparation or ritual is expected, for gophers have very little spiritual power. No one feels pity or compunction. After all, in a world created by Coyote and Eagle animals such as gophers were meant to be eaten and enjoyed....

Like almost all other California Indians, the Ohlones followed the most ancient of all subsistence patterns—^Fhunting and gathering. They ate insects, lizards, snakes, moles, mice, gophers, ground squirrels, wood rats, quail, doves, song birds, rabbits, racoons, foxes, deer, elk, antelopes—indeed, the widest conceivable variety of both small and large game. Only a few animals (eagles, buzzards, ravens, owls, and frogs) were "taboo" for religious reasons.

There is nothing unusual about the scope of the Ohlone diet. In fact, only in recent times (astonishingly recent times when one considers the entire sweep of human existence) have people narrowed their preferences to a few major species such as cows, goats, pigs, sheep, and chickens, while almost completely excluding the rest of the animal kingdom. Before the recent widespread dependence on domesticated animals, for untold tens of thousands of years, human societies everywhere lived on insects, reptiles, and rodents as well as larger game animals.

So it was with the Ohlones. They ate insects, not as a last-resort starvation food, but as a regular and enjoyable article of diet. They casually

picked lice from their own robes, or from the robes and hair of others (lice, too, were an almost universal part of the human condition), and popped them into their mouths with scarcely a thought—a practice which disgusted early European visitors no end. *Gente de razon* ("people of reason," as the Spanish proudly called themselves) did not eat lice: *gente de razon* ate cows!

Grasshoppers were another common food. In the late spring the Ohlones went out into the meadows to gather great numbers of them. The mood was festive. Men, women, and children laughed and joked as they beat the tall grass with sticks and drove clouds of grasshoppers into specially dug pits. Even the youngest members of the village, the grass waving high above their heads, partook in this event.

Yellowjacket grubs were also favored. When the people discovered an underground yellowjacket nest, they lit a fire and drove smoke into it with hawk-feather fans to numb the wasps within. Then they dug the nest out with digging sticks and quickly gathered the larvae. These were either boiled together in a cooking basket or roasted on tiny spits over a fire.

In addition to insects, the Ohlones rarely passed by a fat lizard or a snake without trying to catch it. Moles were trapped in their tunnels, ground squirrels were driven out of their holes by smoke, and wood rats were caught by burning their stick nests to the ground. The Ohlones also caught mice and other rodents in deadfall traps, hunted birds with bolas and slings, captured quail in basketry traps, and speared racoons and other slow-moving animals. (The Ohlone spear was thrust, not thrown as a javelin as had been done in earlier times, before the invention of the bow and arrow.) Doves and other animals were taken with snares—loops of string that were tied to supple twigs, the twigs bent to the ground and held in place by a trigger.

Rabbits (jackrabbits, cottontails, and brush rabbits) were an Ohlone mainstay, and were caught in great numbers. It took some 200 rabbit skins to make a single blanket, and of course rabbit meat was greatly enjoyed. There was no one right way to hunt rabbits. Men and boys caught them with rabbit sticks that were thrown, with snares and slings, and with bows and arrows. Sometimes the whole village joined in a communal drive, chasing scores of rabbits into a net either by beating the bushes or by setting fire to the land. The communal drives always provided an excuse for great feasting and merriment.

Larger animals, too, were caught in a variety of ways. Sometimes the hunter disguised himself as a deer. He put on a deer-head mask, painted his body, and in this guise stalked not only deer but antelope and elk. Other times deer, elk, and antelope were driven into nets, over cliffs, or into an ambush

where the hunters lay in wait.

Antelopes, known for their almost unquenchable curiosity, were at times attracted by a hunter who tied strips of skin onto his ankles and wrists, lay down on his back, and waved his arms and legs in the air. When the antelopes drew closer to examine this phenomenon, the hunter's companions, who had hidden themselves nearby, shot at them with bows and arrows. As an indication of how successful these hunting techniques were, an early Spanish explorer noted that the Ohlones of the Monterey Bay Area never came to visit the Spaniards "without bringing a substantial present of game, which as a rule consisted of two or three deer or antelopes, which they offered without demanding or even asking for anything in return."

The development of the arrow further suggests the skill and resourcefulness of the Ohlone hunters. There were many different styles of arrow, each adapted to the animal being pursued. The most remarkable of them was the two-piece arrow, common throughout most of Central California. The mainshaft was made out of cane and fletched with trimmed hawk feathers, but instead of having a point it had a hollow recess. Into this recess the hunter could fit a shorter foreshaft (made from a hardwood such as ceanothus) onto which an obsidian or flint point was fixed. The advantages of the two-piece arrow were many. If a wounded animal dislodged the mainshaft, the foreshaft and the arrowhead would still remain embedded. Also, if a point was damaged, the whole arrow would not be lost to further use. A hunter could thereby venture out with a minimum of bulky equipment, carrying only three or four mainshafts along with a greater number of the smaller foreshafts and points. Each hunter painted his arrows in distinctive patterns, partly for the beauty of it, partly to bring himself luck, and partly to be able to identify his own arrows in a situation where several hunters were shooting at once.

The Indians of the Bay Area had a thoroughly intimate knowledge of the animals around them. A hunter knew a great deal about how animals thought and acted. He was skillful at tracking and expert at making animal calls—sucking hard against his outstretched fingers, for example, to make a noise like a cornered rabbit, thereby attracting predators and bringing forth other rabbits who would thump the ground angrily. His senses were so keen that he could sometimes smell an animal even before he could see it.

At the end of each day, when the men returned to the sweat-house, their talk and their stories were usually about hunting and animals. Their stories were perhaps like the tale of Holoansi, as told many years later by his grandchild. Although Holoansi was a Yokut, living to the east of the Ohlones,

the story has a lively and authentic ring to it and conveys a fine sense of what it must have been like to have been an Indian on a hunt for bear cubs.

Holoansi was a very fine hunter and was frequently out with his weapons. One morning he saw a bear with two cubs; he went home and told his friends about it. The next morning twelve men, each with bow and arrows, started for the bear's cave.

"Who's going to run?" they said. Holoansi offered to as he was a good runner, but another man wanted to, too: they argued a bit. Meanwhile the others arranged a semi-circle of stakes, driving them into the ground in front of the cave. They took up shooting positions behind these.

Holoansi went to the cave entrance to lure the bear, but the bear rushed at him before he could draw his bow. He was forced to run toward the circle of stakes with the bear clawing at his heels. A second runner jumped in to draw the bear's attention, and another man succeeded in shooting her in the shoulder. She continued to pursue the second runner. Holoansi dashed in the cave to grab the cubs, but the mother saw him and went after him.

Now, Lizard was the dream helper of Holoansi and he came to his rescue. He gave that man power to climb right up the side of the cave and whisk up and out of the entrance just out of the bear's grasp. But outside Holoansi was forced to run, and the bear still chased him. Holoansi tried to climb a high rock pile, but at that moment the bear caught him, clawing and biting him. The other men were all too frightened to do anything, save the second runner who came up and shot the bear three times as she turned toward her cave again.

Afterwards, the bear's skin and claws were brought back to the village. Members of the Bear lineage bought them (as was required by ancient custom) to keep them from harm and sacrilege. Later they would use the skin and claws in their Bear dances.

The men carried Holoansi back to camp. They put his eyes back and all his skin in place. They covered him entirely with eagle down and dosed him with jimsonweed. He began to get better at once, but some bad shaman saw that this was his chance to do away with Holoansi. He shot poison at him, and the old man died the next day.

The way of a hunter was full of risks, honor, and adventure; and—in a world of magic and “power”—it was also full of fear and even death.

To modern thinking there is something disturbingly “unsporting” about the Ohlone way of hunting. Killing bear cubs, burning the nests of wood rats, netting and clubbing scores of rabbits, and thrusting sticks into burrows appal us. And with good reason: it would be monstrous if someone in our own society were to engage in such practices at a time when wildlife has been vastly diminished. But the Ohlones had no need to practice “conservation,” as the early reports clearly indicate, their hunting did not diminish the numbers of animals to any appreciable degree.

Nor did the Ohlones feel pity toward the animals they killed. Reverence (for some animals), yes, but not pity. Perhaps they did not feel themselves superior to the animals, and superiority is one of the necessary ingredients of pity. An animal was killed because its time had come. An animal was killed because it gave itself over to be killed. For the Ohlones, living in a land of unbelievable plenty, hunting and killing animals was a rightful, guiltless activity such as it will never be again. As we look at a fragment of an Ohlone song, we find a wonderful joy, indeed a celebration of animal life:

I dream of you.
I dream of you jumping.
Rabbit,
Jackrabbit,
Quail.

THE DEER HUNTER

The Ohlones, like all other California Indians, were a “Stone-Age” people. Their arrows were tipped with flint or obsidian, their mortars and pestles were of stone, and other tools were made of bone, shell, or wood. To fell a tree they hacked away at it with a chert blade, pausing now and then to burn out the chips before they renewed their hacking. They used no metal, had no agriculture (at least as we understand it), wove no cloth, and did not even make pottery. They lived entirely by hunting and gathering.

But while the Ohlones were a Stone-Age people, hunting was not just a matter of bludgeoning an animal to death with a club, as it is sometimes pictured. Hunting, especially deer hunting, was among the most important things in a man’s life. The hunter pursued and killed deer without pity, but never without reverence. Deer were spiritually powerful animals in a world in which animals were still gods, and deer hunting was an undertaking surrounded at every step with dignity, forethought, and ritual.

The preparations for deer hunting centered around the sweat-house. Every village had at least one, dug into the ground at the edge of the village on the downstream side of the creek. Larger villages may have had two or more. The Ohlone sweat-house was fairly small, holding only about seven or eight men. It had a low ceiling (those within had to crouch), and the door was so low that the men entered on all fours....

It is early afternoon, and the dark interior of the sweat-house is smoky from a tiny fire that is burning near the doorway. The only person present is an old man, crippled in the hip from a hunting accident he has suffered many years before. He now serves as the unofficial caretaker of the sweat-house. He makes certain that enough wood is collected each day for a good fire, he helps keep the place orderly, and now and then he shoos away the children who try to enter the doorway or climb on the roof for a peek through the smoke hole. Much of the time he dozes. But now he is sitting against the wall of the sweat-house amidst a pile of milkweed stalks. He breaks the stalks into fibers by running his fingernail down them until the pulp is scratched away. Then with his left hand he feeds the fibers steadily onto his thigh and with his

right hand rolls them together, crisscrossing them to make strands of rope. He will later give the rope to the other men for their fishing nets, and they of course will share their catch with him.

Against one wall of the sweat-house lie a number of bows, each wrapped in its own deer-skin or cougar-skin covering. The deer-hunting bow is about four feet long, flattened, tapering toward the ends, with a rounded handgrip in the middle. Thick pieces of otter or weasel fur are wrapped around the bow about six inches from each end to deaden the "twang" of the bowstring. Broad strips of deer sinew are glued to the back of the bow, adhering to the wood like bark to a tree. This sinew backing gives the bow an almost magical elasticity. The inside curve of the bow is painted with a zig-zag design, and tiny feathers decorate the handgrip.

It takes a skilled man ten or more days to work a piece of wood into the proper shape for a bow, and in this Bay Area village the best bow wood comes by trade from distant mountains. But once finished, the Ohlone bow is an elegant, powerful object. It is a man's most valued and necessary possession, and each hunter treats it accordingly. He never leaves it strung when not in use, for the constant tension makes a bow very tired. He never stands it up against the sweat-house wall, but lays it carefully down so it can get its proper rest. He never handles it casually lest it be insulted, nor does he address or stare at another man's bow lest it take offense and lose its luck. He keeps it meticulously clean, talks to it in a quiet, dignified tone, and rubs deer marrow into the wood to give it a healthy glow and keep its spirit happy.

Other objects in the sweat-house include a pile of shells half-worked into beads, some blunted prayer sticks with tufts of eagle feathers attached, and (tucked into the rafters) a flute and some split-stick clappers. Several quivers made from the whole skins of foxes and bobcats are hanging from the rafters at the back wall of the sweat-house: within them are bundles of deer-hunting arrows tied together with deer-skin thongs. Also, lying here and there, are a few squarish steatite stones with grooves worked into them. These are "arrow straighteners." When an arrow becomes crooked, the stone is heated over a fire and the warped arrow is moved along the groove with a rapid rolling motion to straighten it.

By late afternoon the men of the village return to the sweat-house. The old man takes his pile of milkweed stalks and moves outside. The other men begin to heap wood on the fire. At first it smolders, and acrid smoke fills the sweat-house. The men cough and squint as they fan the fire. They kneel down to breathe the fresher air near the ground. Suddenly the fire springs to life, and the smoke begins to clear through the smoke hole in the roof. Heat now

fills the enclosure. The men crowd together near the back wall of the sweat-house, and there is much joking and satisfaction among them. It is a good hot fire today; the older men feel a welcome looseness in their joints. Among them is a fourteen-year old youth, and they begin to tease him.

"Are you going to run out again today?" they ask.

"Make sure you run through the door and not through the wall," someone advises, and the other men laugh loud and long.

The young man does not answer. As the heat intensifies he feels the sweat ooze out of his pores and flow in rivulets down his body. Following the example of the others he runs a curved rib bone of a deer over his body to drain the sweat. He has been admitted to the sweat-house only a month before, yet (despite the teasing) he already feels a welcome easiness here, a sense of being at home. In fact, as he squats against the back wall he has the curious sense that he has been here a million times before. It is as if the closed sweat-house with its cluster of men is the real, eternal world, and the world of the village, the meadows, and the woods is merely a colorful but passing dream.

The fire grows hotter. The men stop talking. The young man feels the heat flaying his skin and searing his lungs. He puts his face to the ground to catch some of the cooler air. The heat scalds. Sweat stings his eyes. The other men are groaning, but the sound of their voices becomes very distant, like waves on a far-off shore. He is afraid he will lose consciousness. He does not want to be teased, no, no, he does not. But even as he resolves to hold his place a blind desperation overcomes him and he lurches past the other men, skirts the fire, and scurries out of the entrance hole. To his surprise, the other men follow close behind, all of them pushing through the hole into the cool, sun-lit air; after a brief run they throw themselves into the bracing waters of the stream. As they splash in the water several other men are laying aside the shinny rackets and wooden ball with which they have been playing, and make themselves ready to enter the sweat-house.

Virtually every Ohlone man visits the sweat-house at least once a day. After all, a man must keep himself scrupulously clean, especially when he is about to dance, gamble, or undertake any adventure of importance, and most particularly when he is preparing for a deer hunt. The sweat-house provides not just a thorough physical cleansing, but here at the very center of the men's spiritual world a deeper kind of cleansing as well.

Along with the daily sweat-bath a man preparing for a deer hunt undergoes still other purifications. He lives apart from his wife, neither

touching her nor looking her in the face. He strictly avoids meat, fish, salt, and all oily foods, and he eats sparingly even of those foods that are permitted. He does not indulge in anger, and he follows innumerable prescriptions in regard to his bow, his arrows, and his general behavior. He spends most of his time, day and night, in and around the sweat-house.

Through denial and self-control the man turns his face from food, women, the life of the village, and from ordinary emotions. The discipline and deprivation strengthen him inwardly and at the same time open him to the larger spirit world. There are songs to sing, stories to tell, and dances to perform. He smokes tobacco, and one night—when he feels ready—he grinds some oyster shells to make lime, mixes the lime with tobacco, and swallows a large amount. The mixture acts as an emetic, and he goes to the edge of the village where he vomits repeatedly. The vomiting, along with the days of sweating and partial fasting, leave him feeling light-limbed and empty, almost transparent; and he goes to sleep that night with his mind open to dreams from the spirit world. He hopes, and perhaps fears a little, that an ally will come to him: a hunting ally (maybe even Mountain Lion) who will appear in a dream, give him advice, instruct him on seeking an amulet, or perhaps even teach him a power song.

That night the hunter dreams his dreams. The next morning he awakens before dawn, steps to the edge of the village, and thanks his ally. If the ally has given him special instructions—bathing in the creek, for example, or collecting a certain herb—he now fulfills his duty. Then he begins his final preparations. He sweats again and rubs angelica and other sweet-smelling herbs over himself and his bow and arrows. In a small mortar he grinds a ball of reddish clay into a powder, mixes the powder with grease, and with the help of another man carefully paints the proper designs over his entire body. He now puts on his deer-head mask and—with other deer hunters who have likewise prepared themselves—he leaves the village to seek the deer.

The hunt itself is a splendid sight. The hunter, often with a companion or two, his body painted, his bow and arrows properly treated, lean, hungry, alert, connected with the dream-world, his mind secure that he has followed all the proper rituals, approaches a herd of grazing deer. He wears a deer-head mask, and perhaps an amulet hangs from his neck. He moves toward the grazing grounds slowly, almost diffidently—in many ways more like a suitor than a potential conqueror.

As soon as he sights a herd he crouches low and begins to move like a deer. ("He played the pantomime to such perfection," noted a French sea

captain who witnessed one such hunt, "that all our own hunters would have fired at him at thirty paces had they not been prevented.") So convincing is the hunter's imitation that he must keep his eye out for mountain lions and grizzly bears, who sometimes mistake him for a real deer.

As the hunter closes in on the herd he has three strategies to choose from. First, he can keep his distance and try to entice one or more of the deer toward him. Perhaps if he acts oddly, he can get a curious individual to wander over. During fawning season he blows through a folded leaf, making a bleating sound that often attracts an anxious doe. In rutting season he rubs his antlers against a bush, knocks two sticks together to suggest the clash of antlers, and repeatedly twists his head sideways—ploys calculated to enrage a buck and cause it to leave the herd to challenge him.

A second strategy often used when many men are hunting together is to spread out over a meadow and frighten the herd of deer. Disoriented and panicked, the deer run in circles. The hunters study the circles and, positioning themselves behind rocks and bushes, ambush the deer.

The third strategy is for the hunter to move closer to the herd, indeed to become part of the very herd he is hunting. The hunter crouches down and drags himself along the ground, little by little, with his left hand. In his right hand he carries a bow and a few arrows. He lowers and raises his head so as to imitate the motions of the deer. The herd catches sight of him. The deer perk up their ears and strain their necks to get a better view. Suddenly, they toss their heads, and with wide-eyed terror they bound away. The hunter, too, tosses his head and bounds after them. They stop and he stops. They run and he runs. The hunter seems almost to be dancing with the herd. Gradually the deer feel soothed, and—if the hunter has properly prepared himself—the herd accepts him. They push their noses into the cool, green grass and the hunter easily moves in among them. When it comes time to release his arrow the hunter is often so close that (according to one description) he can nudge the deer into a better position with his bow. He shoots, and the arrow hits silently. A deer collapses. The others look about confused. Another arrow is released, a second deer falls, and the herd now bolts wildly up the hill.

What is the hunter thinking about as he moves closer to the herd of deer? There is an intriguing suggestion by J. Alden Mason, an anthropologist who studied the Salinans just to the south of the Ohlones. Writes Mason: "The hunter always chewed tobacco assiduously while approaching the game, as this tended to make it drunk and less wary."

Chewing the strong native tobacco undoubtedly affected the hunter's



THE DEER HUNTER

mind; but why, by altering his own consciousness, should the hunter think he was making the deer "drunk and less wary?" To understand this—to understand the subtle ways in which the hunter felt that his mind was linked to the mind of a prey whose nature and intelligence were not very different from his own—is to glimpse some of the drama and spiritual complexity of deer hunting as it was practiced by the Indians of California.

Once the deer has been killed, the decorum and restraint that mark Ohlone deer hunting do not break down. The butchering and distribution of the meat also must be done according to the prescribed ways.

After a prayer and a gesture of thanks to the deer, the hunter carries the carcasses back to the village where members of his family have been singing deer chants to give him good luck. Here the deer is skinned, and the skin is given to the hunter's wife. The stomach is removed, stuffed with certain entrails and choice pieces of meat from around the kidneys, and presented to the men who accompanied the hunter. The liver is set aside for an old woman who has fed him acorn mush and seed cakes since he was a child. The sirloin, legs, and other parts of the deer are distributed among relatives and neighbors. The brains are placed on a rock to dry for later use in tanning hides. Antlers and various bones are saved for making awls, wedges, tule saws, and other tools.

The hunter, of course, is proud and happy. Fires burn throughout the village as different people roast their parts of the deer. Long thin strips of meat hang from bushes to dry. The people of the village smile at him warmly. He is *koxoenis*—the bringer of meat. The men of the village give him some of the fish they have caught, and the women present him with steamed roots and chunks of acorn bread. He now looks his wife fully in the face, and they smile at each other. Tonight he will return to his own dwelling and slide in among the rabbit-skin blankets next to her.

The hunter feels very successful. Yet strangely enough, he eats little—often none—of the deer he has killed. To do so would seem ill-mannered to the people of the village, and it would be dangerous in regard to the spirit world. Thus the deer hunt ends as it began—not as a crude, "primitive" killing and eating of an animal, but as a spiritually aware, socially conscious exercise in restraint and self-discipline.

ALMOST AMPHIBIOUS

Stephen Powers, a nineteenth century ethnologist, described the California Indians as "almost amphibious." "They are always splashing in water," he noted. And no wonder! California had so much water in those early days: thousands and thousands of acres of freshwater swamps, a San Francisco Bay rimmed with vast saltwater marshes, rivers that flowed throughout the year, springs that bubbled out of the hillsides, natural lakes, ponds, and innumerable creeks. Water was everywhere, and everywhere it was teeming with life.

From so much water the Ohlones gathered an immense harvest of fish and waterfowl. The early explorers were frequently greeted by Indians bearing gifts of salmon, sturgeon, and mussels. The Ohlones fished constantly, using seine nets, dip nets, harpoons, weirs, basketry traps, hooks, and fish poisons.

During the winter, on days when the weather permitted, women, children, and sometimes also the men spread out along the lengths of the beaches to collect shellfish. Many of them had carrying nets or crudely made wicker baskets. (The women would never permit their fine, closely stitched burden baskets to be used for shellfish.) The people also brought with them digging sticks—stout pieces of hardwood sharpened at one end and hardened over a fire. At the end of each day the gatherers returned to their villages with tremendous quantities of shellfish; and by the end of the year they had collected literally tons of mussels, clams, oysters, olivellas, crabs, gooseneck barnacles, abalones, and still other shellfish. As centuries passed the discarded shells piled up at village sites to form mounds. Some of these mounds were as much as thirty feet deep, some a quarter of a mile across—dramatic testimony to thousands of years of feasting on shellfish.

Shellfish was a staple that was always available. But it was only one of many staple foods that the watery environments of the Bay Area provided for its earliest inhabitants. The people living along the coast and along the shores of the San Francisco and Monterey Bays also enjoyed tremendous runs of smelt. Father Junipero Serra described one run of smelt at the mouth of the Carmel River that lasted for twenty full days without a break. Seals and

ALMOST AMPHIBIOUS

dolphins swam among the smelts, and Indians came from miles around to wade into the water and scoop out the fish with dip nets. The netting, gathering, smoking, and feasting that took place during these runs—all in the presence of great flocks of pelicans, cormorants, gulls, and other seabirds—must have been a truly spectacular sight.

For the Ohlones who lived along the coast, beached whales provided another important source of food—so important that some of the coastal villages had shamans who specialized in dances and songs that would draw the whales to shore. The discovery of a beached whale meant days of feasting for the Ohlones. They hung strips of meat from the branches of trees, out of reach of the grizzly bears, and they stored the blubber in baskets for use as a kind of butter. Boys stood near the trees, armed with long sticks to chase away the flocks of screeching gulls.

On calm days the Ohlones ventured into the bays, inlets, and deep waters of the marshes in little boats. Their boats were about ten feet long, three feet wide in the middle, and were made entirely of tule rushes. To build a boat a man collected a large quantity of tules and tied them into three cigar-shaped bundles. He then joined the bundles together so that the fattest of them formed the deck and the other two bundles formed the sides of the boat. When the boat was finished, it held as many as four people, each equipped with an Eskimo-style double-bladed paddle. The extreme lightness of the tule gave the boat a fine buoyancy, and it floated delicately on the water, almost like a feather. One European noted that the men paddled with "great facility and lightness of touch," while another reported that the tule boats of the Indians could outrun the Spanish longboats.

By using tule boats, favorably located Ohlone villages gained access to offshore islands where countless seabirds had their rookeries. In the early spring the men paddled out to these islands and filled their boats with eggs. Cormorant eggs, with their strong fishy taste, were a particular favorite. Later in the season they raided the bird rookeries once more, this time for the young chicks. At Carmel, Junipero Serra described a scene where several different villages converged to feast on cormorant chicks: "And so they passed Sunday camping on Carmel Beach, divided into countless groups, each with its fire, roasting and eating what they had caught." Other times the men paddled to the offshore islands where they clubbed baby seals and sea lions—rich sources of meat, blubber, and skins.

In the northernmost part of the Ohlone territory, on the Carquinez Straits, an Ohlone tribelet called the Karkins used their tule boats to bring in enormous catches of salmon. Father Pedro Font described the abundant salmon harvest:

THE OHLONE WAY

Today we met twenty-two heathen loaded with these fish, and from carrying four apiece they were almost exhausted. At the village which we passed there were so many that it seems impossible that its residents could eat them, and yet part of the inhabitants were in their little tule boats engaged in catching more.

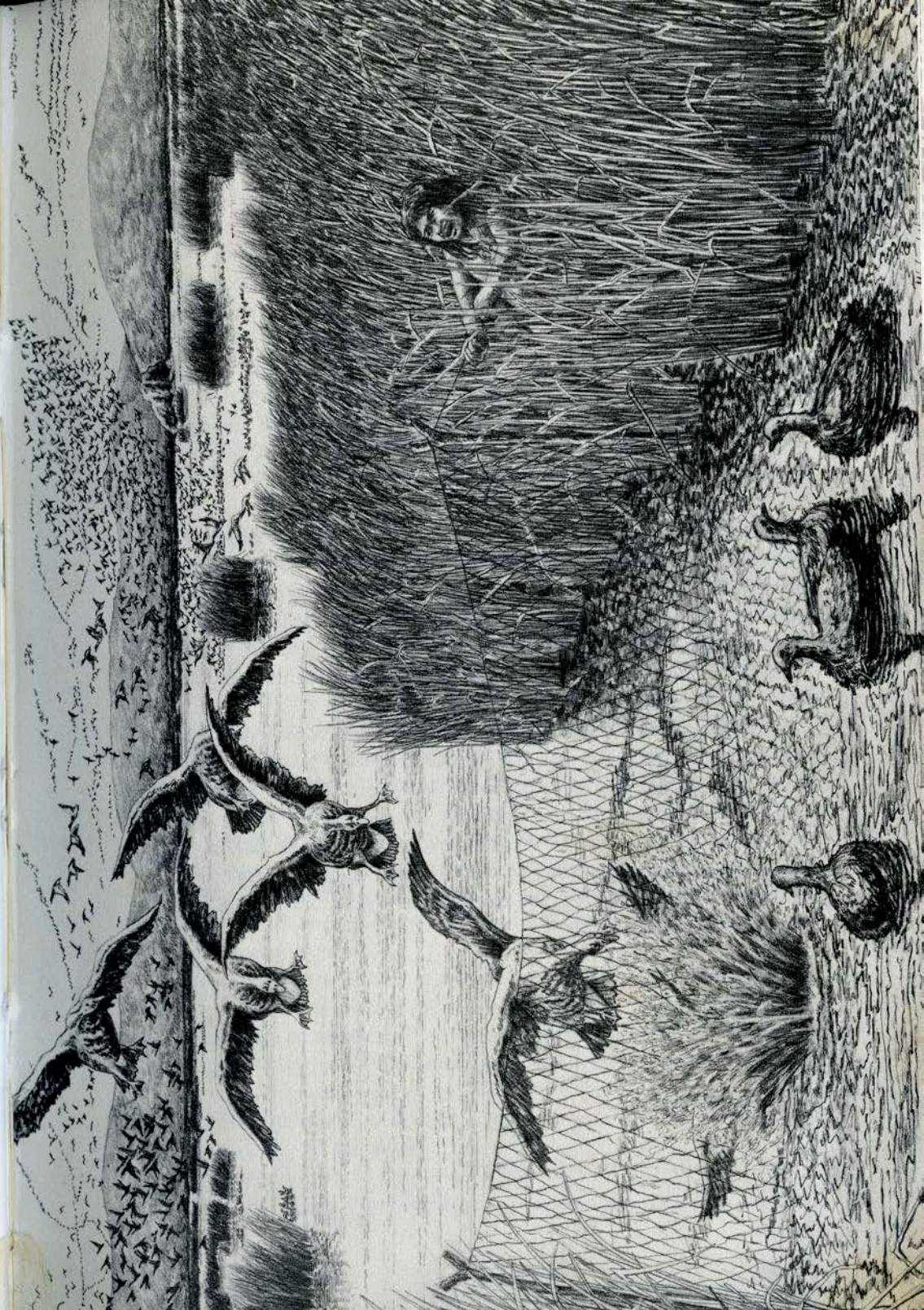
To catch the salmon, the Karkins plunged two poles into the river bottom, stretched a seine net between them, and anchored their boats against the poles. When they felt the thrashing of a fish in the net, they lifted one of the poles, thereby twisting the "purse" shut and bringing the net close to the surface where the fish could be clubbed and removed.

For the Karkins, unlike most other Bay Area Indians, salmon may have approached the importance it had further north, where it was often the one major staple. (The Yurok word for salmon, *nepu*, means literally "that which is eaten.") Yet several other rivers and streams of the Bay Area had more modest, yet still valuable, runs of silver salmon and steelhead. During the night the men built bonfires along the river banks to lure the fish close to shore. They hung long, smooth charmstones over the river—magic to draw the fish closer. Standing poised with harpoons in their hands and warming themselves by the fire, they chanted the ancient salmon songs—the very songs that Coyote sang during Sacred Time, the time of creation, when he first taught the Ohlones how to catch salmon.

Along other streams, the Ohlones caught salmon and steelhead with the help of weirs—stakes that were pounded into the streambed and interwoven with willow branches and tule. The stakes were arranged so as to funnel the fish either toward a harpooner or into a basketry trap.

For those Ohlone tribelets that had access to the immense saltwater and freshwater marshes, there was still another food resource: waterfowl. In the early spring the men paddled their tule boats in among the rushes and cattails, and—amidst a great quacking and honking—they collected quantities of duck and goose eggs. Later in the season they returned once more to fill their boats with ducklings and goslings.

Full-grown ducks and geese were caught with nets and decoys. During the fall and spring migrations great flocks of them stretched from one horizon to the other, darkening the sky with their numbers, according to early reports. The hunter erected two poles, one on each side of a quiet body of water. He attached a net to one pole and loosely threaded it through a crotch in the other, leaving the middle slack and under water. Then he set a few decoys—geese or ducks stuffed with straw—to float near the net while he hid



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himself in the reeds. When a flock of geese or ducks began to descend toward the decoys, the hunter pulled hard on the rope which he held in his hands. This jerked the net into the air and stretched it taut between the two poles, catching the flock mid-flight. Geese and ducks, like fish, could be preserved for later use by smoking and drying.

Even those few Ohlones who lived among the hills, away from the great marshes and major rivers, were not without fish. Small creeks and ponds held surprisingly large trout. Sometimes, to the people's delight, trout got trapped in small, shrinking pools as the creeks began to dry up during the summer. But even when the creeks were full, the inland people still caught fish by damming a portion of the creek and tossing in some chopped soaproot bulbs or mashed buckeyes. These plants stunned the fish, which floated to the surface, unconscious but still completely edible.

With such a wealth of resources, the Ohlones did not depend upon a single staple. If the salmon failed to run, the people moved into the marshes to hunt ducks and geese. If the waterfowl population was diminished by a drought, the people could head for the coast where a beached whale or a run of smelts might help them through their troubles. And if all else failed, there were *always* shellfish: mussels, clams, and oysters, high in nutrients and theirs for the collecting.

Living in a land of great plenty, the Ohlones—unlike those who lived in a more hostile environment—did not feel that life was a “dog-eat-dog” affair, or that each day was a grim test of survival. Not at all. There is no record of starvation anywhere in Central California. Even the myths of this area have no reference to starvation. All around the Ohlones were virtually inexhaustible resources; and for century after century the people went about their daily life secure in the knowledge that they lived in a generous land, a land that would always support them.

THE ACORN HARVEST

The men hunted and fished, they sweated in the sweat-house, and they cultivated power and magic to insure a plentiful supply of salmon, deer, antelope, elk, rabbit, quail, and other game. These foods were important and welcome to the villagers who added the fish and meat to their meals. But the basis of each meal was generally acorn mush. For most Ohlone groups, acorns were the staff of life, the food people ate nearly every day of their lives.

Live oaks spread throughout the Bay Area, towering valley oaks occupied the inland valleys, small groves of black oaks dotted the hills, and extensive stands of tanbark oaks covered the Santa Cruz Mountains. Each tribelet knew the location of the oak groves around them, and the oak trees' stages of development had a central place in the Ohlone mind. In the spring the people rejoiced at the bud-thickening and the leaf-burst of the deciduous oaks. Later they celebrated the appearance of the tiny cascades of pale oak flowers. As summer progressed the sight of the gradually ripening, shiny, green nuts filled them with joy and security. Throughout the year the people responded to the stately rhythm of the oaks with the greatest awareness and involvement.

With the passing of summer, hunters and medicine gatherers returned from their forays with reports on the condition of the various groves. If they reported that the black oaks were bearing heavily, the people felt great joy. If they found that the oak moths were particularly severe among the live oaks, everyone felt deep concern.

Throughout the year the people held various feasts, festivals, and religious dances, many of them tied to the biological rhythms of the oak trees. Time itself was measured by the oaks. The acorn harvest marked the beginning of the new year. Winter was spoken of as so many months (moons) after the acorn harvest, summer as so many months before the next acorn harvest. The rhythms of the oak trees marked the passage of the year and defined the rhythms of Ohlone life.

As fall approached the people looked forward to the acorn harvest. This was usually the biggest event of the year. If it was a favorable year for black

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oaks or tanbark oaks (these were greatly preferred to the live oaks or valley oaks), several families with "collecting rights" headed toward a grove. It would be well into October, and the nights would be somewhat chilly. Everyone eagerly awaited the partying and socializing that would go on. Mothers looked forward to seeing their daughters who had married into neighboring villages but who would return to the ancestral groves for acorn gathering. Younger women knew that they would be wooed by men of other villages. There would be gambling, trading, ball games, feasts, and dances. Later in the year, when the various tribelets returned to their own villages, there would be time to brood upon grudges and quarrels: an unfair trade, a woman seduced, innumerable infidelities and insults—sometimes real, sometimes imagined. But harvest time was a time for joy and abandon. The branches of the trees were heavy with acorns—plump, brown, ripe acorns—and the groves of trees extended in all directions.

At night in the acorn groves the dancers dressed in their finest feathers and body paint and repeated the ancient sequence of steps. As they danced, a chorus of men chanted the word for "acorn" and then the word for "plenty," often breaking the words up into separate syllables and chanting the syllables for a time before once again restoring the words to their original forms. The feet of the dancers became one with the rhythm, while the flicker-shaft bandeaus across their foreheads waved sinuously, as if possessed with a life of their own. The people chanted and danced—not merely for a distant god or goddess—but rather for the oak trees themselves; and the trees seemed to glow with pleasure and health at the expressions of joy and gratitude that filled the entire grove.

Each morning the gathering of the acorns began afresh. It was a noisy, industrious affair that lasted for two or three weeks. Everyone participated. Boys climbed the trees to shake the branches, men knocked the acorns down with long sticks, and everywhere there were people stooping and picking over the acorns on the ground. Choosing big, firm acorns without worm holes, they snapped off the caps and dropped them into large conical burden baskets which were propped against the tree trunks. When a basket was full, it was brought into a clearing and the acorns were laid out to dry in the sun.

The Ohlones were not alone in the acorn groves. Squirrels, jays, deer, and of course grizzly bears also came to the groves to gorge themselves in preparation for winter. Acorn woodpeckers were especially busy and prominent, inserting acorns into holes they had drilled in certain trees. Larger trees might have thousands of little holes, each with an acorn fitted tightly into it. The Ohlones laughed at the acorn woodpeckers, perhaps because they

THE ACORN HARVEST

felt a kinship with this curious bird who like them gathered acorns and stored them for the coming year. Spirits were high, especially in years when the acorns were plentiful.

Eventually the harvest ended. Every family had collected enough acorns. The people lingered around the acorn camp for a few more weeks, but the party mood was fast disappearing. It rained more frequently now, and the harvesters felt that it was time to head back to their permanent winter villages. It was time to repair bows and arrows, time to make new baskets, nets, knives, traps, beads, stirring paddles, and brushes. Family after family drifted away, and the acorn camp gradually broke up.

Back at their villages the people relined the hampers with mugwort and other aromatic herbs to repel insects and keep the acorns from molding. They rebuilt the acorn granaries—large, basket-like structures on stilts that stood outside the huts. They filled the hampers and the granaries with fresh acorns. The rains began in earnest now. Life became settled. Winter was upon them—a time for dancing, retelling myths, gathering shellfish, and (for the men) the daily ritual of the sweat-bath. Soon the acorn harvest would be only a memory.

On those rare years when the acorn harvest failed, the people gathered buckeyes instead. Acorns were not absolutely essential to life, only to a proper life. And with the hampers and granaries filled with acorns once again, a good way of life was assured for another year.

The preparation of acorn mush was a woman's daily occupation—almost as regular and predictable a part of life as the rising of the sun. Each day a woman removed several handfuls of acorns from her storage baskets. She hulled them one at a time by placing them on an anvil stone, hitting them with a hammer stone, and peeling off the shells. Then she put the kernels into a stone mortar or sometimes a mortar basket (a bottomless basket glued to a rock). Sitting with the other women of the village, she pounded the acorns with a long pestle, pausing now and then to scrape the acorn flour away from the sides of the mortar with a soaproot fiber brush. Then she pounded some more. The rhythmic thumping of the women's pestles filled the air. For the Ohlones this was the sound of their village, the sound of "home."

After pounding, a woman put the flour into a shallow sifting basket which she vibrated rapidly back and forth to separate the fine flour from the coarse. Putting the fine flour aside, she returned the coarse flour to the mortar for still more pounding.

The flour was now uniformly fine, but still far too bitter to eat. The

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woman next scooped out a hole in the sand near the creek, lined the hole with fern leaves, and emptied the flour into the hole. (Some women preferred to use openwork "leaching" baskets which they similarly lined with leaves.) She then poured large quantities of water over the flour to leach out the bitter tannin. If she was in a hurry and firewood was plentiful, she used hot water. Some acorns, like those of the valley oaks, had little tannin; they leached out quickly. Others, like live oak acorns, took considerably longer.

After the leaching came the cooking. A woman placed the flour and some water into still another kind of basket—one so skillfully made that it was completely watertight. Since she could not place the basket directly onto the flames, she heated some round stones in the fire. When a stone was hot she removed it from the fire with two sticks, dipped it quickly into some water to wash off the ashes, and dropped it into the acorn mush. She stirred constantly with a looped stick or wooden paddle to keep the hot stone from burning a hole in the basket. She then added more stones until the basket was perhaps one quarter filled with stones, and she kept them all moving and rolling until—after only a few minutes—the mush was boiling. In Bayshore villages that were built on alluvial soil, stones had to be carried in from far away; and good cooking stones—ones that would not crack when heated—were highly valued.

When the mush was fully cooked, the woman served it, sometimes in a watery form as a soup, often as a thick porridge. If she wanted to make acorn bread, she boiled the mush longer and then placed the batter into an earthen oven or on top of a hot slab of rock. Acorn bread (described as "deliciously rich and oily" by early explorers) was a favorite Ohlone food—a food to be taken on trips or to be shared at the many feasts and festivals throughout the year.

Acorns were a crop ideally suited to the Bay Area, and indeed to most of California. Unlike wheat, corn, barley, or rice, acorns required no tilling of the soil, no digging of irrigation ditches, nor any other form of farming. Thus, while the preparation of acorn flour might have been a lengthy and tedious process, the total labor involved was probably much less than for a cereal crop. Yet the level of nutrients in acorns was extremely high—comparable in fact with wheat and barley. What's more, acorns were extremely plentiful. Frank Latta, an amateur ethnographer who spent a large part of his life studying the Yokuts, estimated that an Indian family consumed from 1,000 to 2,000 pounds of acorns a year. Granted that an Indian family tended to have more members than our own, nevertheless this is still a large quantity of acorns.

THE ACORN HARVEST

The extraordinary virtues of the acorn help explain why the Ohlones and other Central California Indians never adopted the agricultural practices of other North American groups who raised squash, corn, and other crops. Lack of agriculture was not the result of isolation, conservatism, laziness, or backwardness, as some people have suggested. The truth is far simpler: Central California Indians did not adopt traditional agricultural methods because they didn't have to. Acorns, along with an extremely generous environment, provided them with a more-than-adequate diet.

THE SEED MEADOW

It is toward the end of spring, and a woman and her daughter are hiking along the crest of some hills. The woman is in her late twenties, and the daughter is about twelve years old—although neither woman knows her age for sure since, like other Ohlones, they do not keep count of the years. Around their necks hang abalone necklaces, magic against rattlesnakes, which jingle and throw off glints of sunlight as they walk. Burden baskets, held in place by tumplines, bounce lightly against their backs. The women are wearing basketry caps to prevent the tumplines from chafing their foreheads. The artistry and weight of the abalone necklaces and the precise execution of the basketry caps are strong indications that these are women of a well-to-do family.

The two women now head away from the crest of the hills down the side of a ridge and follow the path alongside a tiny creek. The path is wide enough only for one person, but it is well-worn, stamped into the ground by thousands of footsteps. In some places it is a foot below the level of the surrounding land. When she was a little girl, the mother had followed her mother along this same trail. And her mother had followed her grandmother. So it had been from very ancient times.

Not only is the path well-worn, but it is also intimately known. Every turn in the path has a proper name. Tiny groves of trees, clumps of bushes, rocks, resting places, and spirit places along the path also have proper names. In fact the path itself has a name. (Yet, curiously, the hill they have just hiked over has no name: perhaps it is too big, too all-present.) As the mother turns now and then to talk with her daughter, she is careful to speak kindly about the path, lest it feel insulted and trip her. She is doubly careful for she knows that all along the path, especially in the spirit places, are good and evil spirits who are listening to her every word.

Yet while the women are careful, they are not filled with morbid fears or dread. They are both familiar with the spirit world; their relationship toward it is an ingrained habit of mind. Indeed, today the women feel particularly light-hearted. The land smells sweet in the late spring, and the tall grass brushes lightly against their breasts and shoulders. The meadows are alive

THE SEED MEADOW

with the buzzing and clicking of insects. Swallows swoop over the grass tops, swerving here and there to catch small butterflies, and meadowlarks rise up from beneath their feet. A lizard scurries along the path just ahead of them, unable (or unwilling) to climb out of the sunken path into the surrounding meadow.

The women follow the path alongside the creek until they reach a broad, open meadow. Here they lay down their baskets and, removing their caps, they shake their long hair loose with a few nods of the head. They drink some of the water out of the creek and splash their faces and bodies. They playfully splash water at each other and laugh in easy companionship. They have already bathed once this morning in the stream near their village, but women of good family never lose the opportunity to bathe a second time.

The women now scan the meadow more closely. The mother touches the seed-heads of grass with experienced fingers. She shows her daughter that the brome grasses are ripe and ready to be collected. They remove scoop-like "beating baskets" from the larger burden baskets and hold them in their right hands. Then, cradling the burden baskets in their left arms, they wade out into the high sea of grass and flowers. They move slowly in an ancient, swaying motion. The beating basket sweeps through the seed heads, loosening the grass seeds and knocking many of them into the burden basket. Soon the burden baskets are brimming with seed, and the women retrace their steps along the path toward the village.

On the way back, at a turn in the trail, they come to a wide, very quiet place. The mood is different here, the temperature is different, a different smell pervades the air. Feathered prayer sticks (*iiot* or *tcokon*, as they were called) have been planted in the ground. This is a holy place, a place of powerful spirits, a place where, if one is spiritually prepared, one might hear snatches of the magnificent power songs that were sung at the very creation of the world. The women stop and fall silent. Then, throwing a handful of seeds on the ground, they speak a formula of thanks and continue on towards the village.

"Your field is always first," note the other women as the mother and daughter enter the village with the year's first grass seeds. Of course, the women do not say it aloud. They would never say such a thing aloud, but it is spoken clearly with their eyes as the mother and daughter pass by them with their brimming baskets.

And indeed it is true. Their collecting area is rich in power. It bears plentiful seeds, and it bears them several days before anyone else's. Earlier

THE OHLONE WAY

this spring the mother and daughter have already harvested abundant stores of tansy-mustard seeds, sage or chia seeds, evening primrose seeds, clarkia seeds, and most recently madia seeds. Yet, if the truth be known, the woman is not totally content or at ease; once again her meadow has failed to produce more than a handful of redmaid seeds. And, ironically, the tiny black redmaid seeds with their rich, oily, almond-like flavor are the woman's favorite food. The woman broods over this. Why have the redmaids failed again, she wonders? But of course she knows. The reason lies in the eyes of the other women: envy! Envy, even if it is unspoken, is nevertheless dangerous, and she resolves that tonight she will share her harvest with the other women lest their envy cause still more damage.

That afternoon she sets about preparing a great feast of seeds. She puts the seeds into the mortar, rolls the pestle lightly around to loosen the hulls, and tosses the seeds in a winnowing basket to separate the hulls from the grain. Next, she places the grass seeds along with a few pinches of flower seeds in a shallow, tray-like basket, drops a few red-hot coals into the basket, and moves the basket rapidly up and down, tossing the seeds and embers until the seeds are roasted and ready to eat. That night the woman is generous, and the people are happy to share with her these first grass seeds of spring. The woman is pleased to note that the envy is gone from their eyes.

Every day now the mother and daughter return to their meadow to collect seeds from the bromes and other grasses. Yet, as their hampers gradually fill, the women find themselves getting more and more annoyed with the task. The weather is hotter now, and the walk to the meadow is becoming more difficult. The creek has dried up so they can no longer bathe, splash, or even drink. The grasses, too, have become dry and they scratch unpleasantly as the women wade through them. Also, the baskets feel heavier now; the walk along the path seems longer. The mother grows impatient with her daughter, and they occasionally snap at each other and quarrel. "The harvest is over," declares the mother one day. "There is enough food. We deserve a rest."

But before they desert the meadow for the year, there is something else that has to be done. One day the mother and daughter return—not alone, but followed by aunts, uncles, brothers, nephews, nieces, and other relatives. The party walks single-file along the path. The women carry burden baskets and digging sticks. One of the men has brought some hot embers packed into a fire-carrying bundle. They are all in a holiday mood.

When they reach the meadow, the people spread out to form a big circle around the meadow's edges. Then—yelling, laughing, and kicking their feet

THE SEED MEADOW

with exaggerated motions—they move slowly toward the center of the meadow where the women have dug a deep hole. As the circle tightens, a great cloud of grasshoppers is driven into the hole. Everyone piles dry grass on top of the hole and sets it on fire, smothering the grasshoppers and singeing their wings. The women then gather the grasshoppers into their burden baskets and, congratulating themselves on their huge harvest, everyone heads back up the path toward the crest of hills. Only the mother and daughter are left behind.

The two women are holding torches made out of bundled grass. They touch the torches to the meadow. The grass crackles and sputters around them as the flames creep along the ground, heading toward the oak-bay forest. The heat becomes more intense. The women now drop their torches and hurry along the path, up alongside the creek bed, and over the ridge to the crest of hills to rejoin their people. They feel happy once again. The harvest is in, and it has been a good year. Tonight there will be a grasshopper feast. "The first grasshopper feast of the season," smiles the woman to herself.

As for the meadow, it will lie blackened and desolate throughout the summer. Then, when the first rains come in October, seeds in the ground will germinate again; by the following spring the meadow will once more be a rich source of flowers and grasses.

The Ohlones, like most other California Indians, periodically burned their land. They did it deliberately, and by so doing they profoundly altered the ecology of the Bay Area. Their repeated burning had many different effects: it kept the brush from taking over the meadowland; it helped perpetuate the digger pines (a source of delicious, highly valued pine nuts) whose seeds germinate best after a fire; it fostered certain grasses and flowers which the Ohlones found desirable; it provided a good wildlife habitat for large game animals such as elk, deer, and antelope; and it prevented the build-up of fuel which might eventually have caused a truly disastrous forest fire.

Thus the first explorers who so lyrically and enthusiastically described the "park-like" forests and open meadows of the Bay Area had not stumbled upon a virgin wilderness untouched by human hands. Far from it. They had instead entered a landscape that had been consciously and dramatically altered for centuries. Amazingly, the splendid landscape and bountiful wildlife of the Bay Area existed not despite human presence, but (at least to some extent) because of it.

THE OHLONE WAY

By and large—there were certainly exceptions—the men concerned themselves with hunting and fishing, while the women gathered the plant foods: the acorns, seeds, roots, nuts, greens, and berries that formed the major part of the Ohlone diet. Hazelnuts, laurel nuts, pine nuts, and (in places where they were available) black walnuts were all collected and eaten. The pits of the holly-leaved cherry were ground into a nutritious meal. Buckeyes were a plentiful, never-failing source of food—although the Ohlones found their preparation so difficult (buckeyes have to be roasted, peeled, mashed, and leached in cold water for eighteen hours to remove the poisonous prussic acid) that the people ignored them except in those years when the acorn crop failed.

During the rainy winter the Ohlones collected mushrooms, and in the early spring they gathered greens. Clover, poppy, tansy-mustard, melic grass, miners' lettuce, mule ear shoots, cow parsnip shoots, and the very young leaves of alum root, columbine, milkweed, and larkspur were all used, some as salad greens, some as cooking greens. Seaweed was gathered, dried, and used as salt.

Soon after the spring greens appeared came time for gathering roots. With their digging sticks the women pried out of the ground cattail roots, brodiaea bulbs, mariposa lily bulbs, and soaproot bulbs. (A digging stick is a remarkably efficient tool when used properly as a pry-bar, rather than as a shovel.) Soaproot, or *amole*, was roasted (one missionary described it as tasting like "preserved fruit"), and it was also used for glue, fish poison, and still other purposes.

Finally, throughout the summer there were berries. There were berries to cook, to eat out of hand, to dry for later use, or to make into a refreshing cider: strawberries, wild grapes, currants, gooseberries, salal berries, elderberries, thimbleberries, toyon berries, madrone berries, huckleberries, and manzanita berries—all of them growing in great numbers.

Such a rich supply of food gave the Ohlones a plentiful diet. According to the accounts of early visitors, Ohlone meals were not only adequate, but apparently quite delicious as well:

Some Indians were at once sent by the chief to bring some mats cleanly and carefully woven from rushes, simple ground coverings on which the Spaniards might lie at ease. Meanwhile a supper was brought them; right away came *atoles*, *pinoles*, and cooked fishes, refreshment that quieted their pangs of hunger and tickled their palates too.

The *pinoles* [seed cakes] were made from a seed that left

THE SEED MEADOW

me with a taste of toasted hazelnuts. Two kinds of *atoles* [porridge] were supplied at this meal, one lead-colored and the other very white, which one might think to have been made from acorns. Both were well-flavored and in no way disagreeable to a palate little accustomed to *atoles*. The fish [sturgeon] were of a kind so special that besides having not one bone they were most deliciously tasty; of a very considerable size, and ornamented all the way round them by six strips of little shells. The Indians did not content themselves with feasting our men, on that day when they met together, but, when the longboat left, gave more of those fishes and we had the enjoyment of them for several days.

A WANDERING LIFE

For the Ohlones one harvest followed another in a great yearly cycle. There were trips to the seashore for shellfish, to the rivers for salmon, to the marshes for ducks and geese, to the oak groves for acorns, to the hills and meadows for seeds, roots, and greens. There were also trips to quarries where the men collected minerals and stones, and still other trips for milkweed fiber, hemp, basket materials, tobacco, and medicine.

Thus Ohlone life was a series of treks from one harvest to another. As one food or material ripened or came into season—and the season was often quite brief—the people worked hard to collect it and in some cases to dry, smoke, or otherwise preserve it. Then, after a small respite, there would be another harvest, another event, another episode in the year.

The series of ripenings and harvestings divided the year into different periods, and it gave Ohlone life its characteristic rhythm. Moving from one harvest to the next, the Ohlones led what early observers called “a wandering life.” Each tribelet had a major village site, but they did not live there throughout the year. “They move their village from place to place,” commented Father Francisco Palou. Sometimes the whole group traveled together. Other times it split up into separate families. But always the Ohlones were on the move, wandering about their land in pursuit of still another ripening crop.

The wandering life set the Ohlones apart from many other Indians in North America. The Pueblo people of the Southwest, for example—who cultivated corn, squash, and beans—built cities and lived settled lives. Closer to home, the Hupas and Yuroks in Northern California depended mainly on salmon and lived alongside the salmon rivers in permanent villages with wood-slab houses and large ceremonial halls. Not the Ohlones. They followed a more ancient way: the way of the hunter-gatherer. “Like the Arabs and other wandering tribes,” wrote Captain Frederick Beechey, “these people move about the country and pitch their tents wherever they find a convenient place.”

In some respects the Ohlone way of life was similar to that of other hunter-gatherers throughout the world. But there was one important differ-

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ence. Other people, living in less favorable environments, needed expansive territories over which they could range in pursuit of game, nuts, or (in some areas) watering holes. But in Central California, where the land was so fertile, so packed with wildlife and edible plants, the people mostly confined their wanderings to their own Lilliputian territories, generally not more than about a hundred square miles. Stephen Powers' characterization of a Maidu people to the northeast of the Bay Area might just as accurately have described the Ohlones: “They shift their lodges perpetually: yet it is very seldom that a Nishinam, after all his infinite little migrations, dies a mile from the place of his birth. They are thoroughly home-loving and home-keeping, like all California Indians.”

Thus we can picture an Ohlone family on one of its “infinite little migrations.” They number perhaps a dozen people. The old and infirm have been left behind in the main village where they will be visited regularly by other family members who make certain they are well-fed and comfortable. The women of the group are weighed down with burden baskets and digging sticks. Sets of cooking baskets and a variety of skins and pouches are heaped on top of the burden baskets. Some of the women have babies in cradles lashed to the top of everything else.

The older children carry small baskets full of seeds, acorns, and dried meats and fish. The men have quivers of bows and arrows tucked under their arms; over their shoulders are slung carrying nets filled with skins, knives, fire-making tools, beads, cordage, and perhaps ceremonial regalia. Some of the men and women also carry medicine bundles hidden within their baskets or nets.

They stop frequently along the trail to eat, nap, or simply rest. The children romp about, excited by the sight of new or seldom-visited meadows. The men poke among the bushes, wandering off to revisit an old quarry site, a bear den, an eagle's nest, or some other point of interest. The women rest at the side of the trail: they are tired, for a fully-loaded burden basket weighs up to 200 pounds.

Later in the day the people arrive at their destination. The children gather firewood, the women unpack their baskets and cook dinner, and the men set about constructing shelters and a sweat-house. Within a day or two everyone is settled, the encampment is complete, and the people are thoroughly “at home.”

The wandering life-style of the Ohlones explains a good deal about their personal habits. Traveler after traveler, for example, complained (or joked)

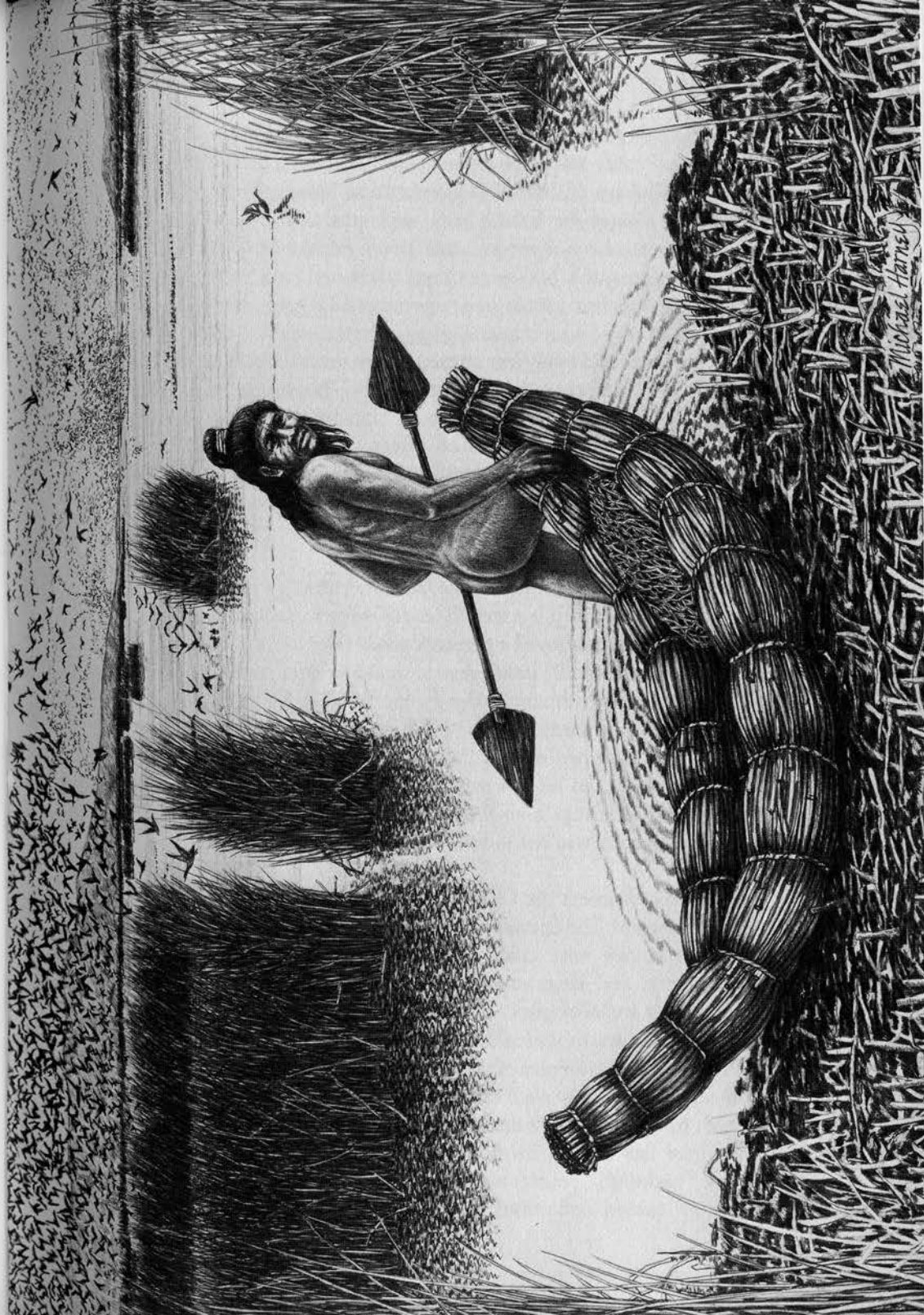
THE OHLONE WAY

about their "gluttony." "They gorge themselves," noted one missionary. "It is futile to exhort them to moderation, for their principle is: 'If there is much to eat, let us eat much.'" To the Spanish and early Anglo settlers—prudent, frugal, agricultural people—gorging was a sin. But in a situation where certain foods such as duck eggs, cormorant chicks, berries, whales, or greens become suddenly abundant for only a few weeks each year, gorging is perfectly appropriate.

The episodic character of the harvesting also helps explain another much noted Ohlone characteristic: their so-called "laziness." For them hard work came only in spurts. Deer hunting, for example, was an arduous pursuit that demanded fasting, abstinence, great physical strength, and single-mindedness of purpose. The acorn harvest, the seed harvest, and the salmon harvest also involved considerable work for short periods of time. But when the work was over, there was little else to do. Unlike agricultural people, the Ohlones had no fields to plow, seeds to plant, crops to cultivate, weeds to pull, domestic animals to care for, or irrigation ditches to dig or maintain. So at the end of a harvest they often gave themselves over to "entire indolence," as one visitor described it—a habit that infuriated the Europeans who assumed that laziness was sinful and that hard work was not just a virtue but a God-given condition of human life.

Like other people who are always on the move, the Ohlones tended not to build permanent structures. Their houses were neither of wood nor adobe (although both these materials were readily available throughout the Bay Area), but were made of tules. Tule houses were suitable for the moderate Bay Area climate, and they were skillfully made. (In fact only recently, with the interest in geodesic domes, have people in our own culture come to appreciate domed dwellings for their efficient use of material, their superior ability to retain warmth, and the comfortable and aesthetically pleasing living space they create.) But tule tends to rot rather quickly; and for the early Europeans who valued permanent, well-crafted houses—structures that could be passed on from one generation to the next—tule was not an acceptable building material. For a wandering people like the Ohlones, however, the temporary nature of their tule houses was an advantage; such dwellings could be built up in a few hours—especially if a framework of willow poles was left in place—and could later be deserted with little loss.

For the same reason, the Ohlone boats were neither the elaborate dug-outs of the people a few hundred miles to the north, nor were they the plank boats of the Chumash of the Santa Barbara Channel. Instead, the Ohlones built tule boats which lasted no more than a season, but which—when it came



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time to move on—could be left behind without an afterthought.

The wandering life also helps explain why the Ohlones preferred baskets to pottery. The Indians of Central California knew how to fire clay, making little figurines, sinkers for fishing nets, and other ceramic objects. Yet pottery, for all its obvious virtues, was never developed—because, one suspects, heavy, breakable pots were simply not suited for a wandering life.

Needless to say, for a people who moved around a great deal and had to carry their possessions on their backs, great stores of wealth and collections of art objects were considerably less attractive than for other people who lived more settled lives. To be sure, the Ohlones loved fine beadwork, featherwork, and basketry; yet they were not accumulators. Status was not to be gained by hoarding shells, jewels, and other such things. Instead of wealth, it was prerogative—where one sat in the sweat-house, how often one's family was consulted by the chief, whether one was asked to sweep the plaza before a dance, and a thousand other such distinctions—that defined a person's place in the village pecking order.

Rather than valuing possessions, the Ohlones valued generosity. Instead of having inheritance, which is a way of perpetuating wealth within a family, the Ohlones generally destroyed a person's goods after his or her death. Not that the Ohlones were totally indifferent to wealth and its class distinctions: rather they measured wealth and judged good breeding by how generous a person was, not by how many material goods he or she accumulated. Thus a wealthy man was expected to contribute generously to the group's many feasts and festivities, and he was expected to throw the most precious gift baskets and other offerings onto the funeral pyre of a deceased friend or relative. To be wealthy was not to have; to be wealthy was to give.

To the early explorers the Ohlones' lack of accumulated wealth was a grave disappointment. The Spaniards would much rather have found another Aztec or Inca empire with cities, monuments, treasure houses, priests dressed in finery, and kings exacting tribute in gold, silver, and gems. Likewise the early archaeologists (considerably less sophisticated than those of today) hoped to unearth splendid objects of great rarity and beauty which would grace the major museums of the world. Instead, the shellmounds of the Bay Area surrendered only clam shells, bits of mortars and pestles, stone arrowheads, bone awls, and human skeletons.

Thus there has been a historical tendency to think of the Bay Area Indians as a "backward" people, a people who never attained a rich material culture, never learned agriculture, never built cities, monuments, or even

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totem poles—a people who lacked all the accepted trappings of "civilization." In the eyes of the Europeans the Ohlones were poor, and to them poverty was a great failing. But the Ohlones had not failed. They were a hunting and gathering people, and if we compare them with other hunting-gathering people, we find that they were among the most successful in the entire world. In short, the Ohlones did not practice agriculture or develop a rich material culture, not because they failed, but rather because they succeeded so well in the most ancient of all ways of life.

A SETTLED WAY

"They believe that their tribes originally came from the north," said Captain Frederick Beechey, and this one sentence was apparently all that the Ohlones knew of their own history. And no wonder. It was forbidden to speak of the dead, to mention their names, or to recount their deeds. All memory of the past—and with it all sense of human history—was buried with each generation.

Judging from archaeological remains, it seems that the first people to drift into California arrived over 10,000 years ago. They were a technologically simple people: they neither had bows and arrows, nor did they know how to process acorns. They hunted mainly with spears, and they gathered roots, nuts, and berries. They came in tiny bands into a vast land, a land that had never before seen people. What they felt when they saw the herds of antelope and elk, the grizzly bears and the salmon, the great flocks of pelicans and the seal-covered rocks, the virgin redwood forests and the almost endless expanse of marshland, we cannot begin to imagine.

For thousands of years small groups of these people moved into California. They came from different places and over a long period of time, as the diversity of Indian languages indicates. Among the Californians at the time of the European conquest were Indians who spoke Algonkin, a language family of northeastern United States; Athabaskan, a language family of west-central Canada; Hokan, a language family of the Great Plains; and Shoshonean, a language family that includes Comanche, Ute, and Aztec. Another people, the Yukians of north-central California, spoke a language that can be linked to no other language group in the world: they were apparently the sole survivors of their language family.

During the thousands of years that these diverse peoples migrated into California, they lived in what must have been a state of intermittent strife. Sporadically, throughout the centuries, people recently settled were pushed out of their territories by more warlike (or desperate) invaders. The invaders

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settled down for a generation or two, grew content and peaceful, until they too were eventually edged out by still another wave of newcomers.

Among those who wandered into California were groups of Penutian-speaking people. The Penutians made epic migrations during prehistoric ages, and by the time the Europeans arrived they had settled over a vast portion of western America. They may have included (the linguistic evidence is in dispute) such diverse people as the Tsimshians, a totem-pole building, slave-holding people of British Columbia; the Walla-Walla, Nez Perce, Yakima, Chinook, Coos, Cayuse, Klamath, Modoc, and other tribes of Washington, Oregon, and northernmost California; and the Ohlone, Miwok, Yokuts, Maidu, and Wintun of Central California. According to some linguists, Penutians also included the Maya, Mixe, and Zoque people of Meso-America, and perhaps even some tribes of South America.

The Central California Penutians entered the state in two or more movements, most likely from the north. Gradually they spread throughout most of the Central Valley—the richest, most desirable area in California—and along the coast from Marin County south to Point Sur. By the time of the European invasion, Penutian-speaking people had come to occupy over one-half of the state.

The earliest contingent of the Central California Penutians, the ancestors of the Ohlones and the Miwoks, settled near San Francisco Bay. From here they spread north and east to form the various Miwok groups, and also south toward the Monterey Bay Area to form the Ohlone groups. Exactly when the Ohlones moved into their present territory no one knows. Linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests that they may have settled here some 4,500 to 5,000 years ago, merging by conquest and marriage with earlier inhabitants (perhaps a Hokan-speaking people related to the Pomo and Esselen) and eventually overshadowing them. Beyond doubt the Ohlones had been settled for an extremely long time before the arrival of Europeans, and it was during these many centuries that they achieved something quite rare in human history: a way of life that gave them relative peace and stability, not just for a generation or two, not just for a century, but probably for thousands of years.

The history of these long years of stability is hinted at by the shellmounds of the Bay Area. At the turn of this century there were some 425 of them around the immediate shores of San Francisco Bay, and many hundreds more were scattered along the ocean coast and throughout the Monterey Bay Area. The so-called Emeryville Mound, which stood between

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present-day Berkeley and Oakland, measured 270 feet in diameter at its base and was nearly thirty feet deep in its center. There were other mounds nearly as huge, and their immense size suggests that they held a long history.

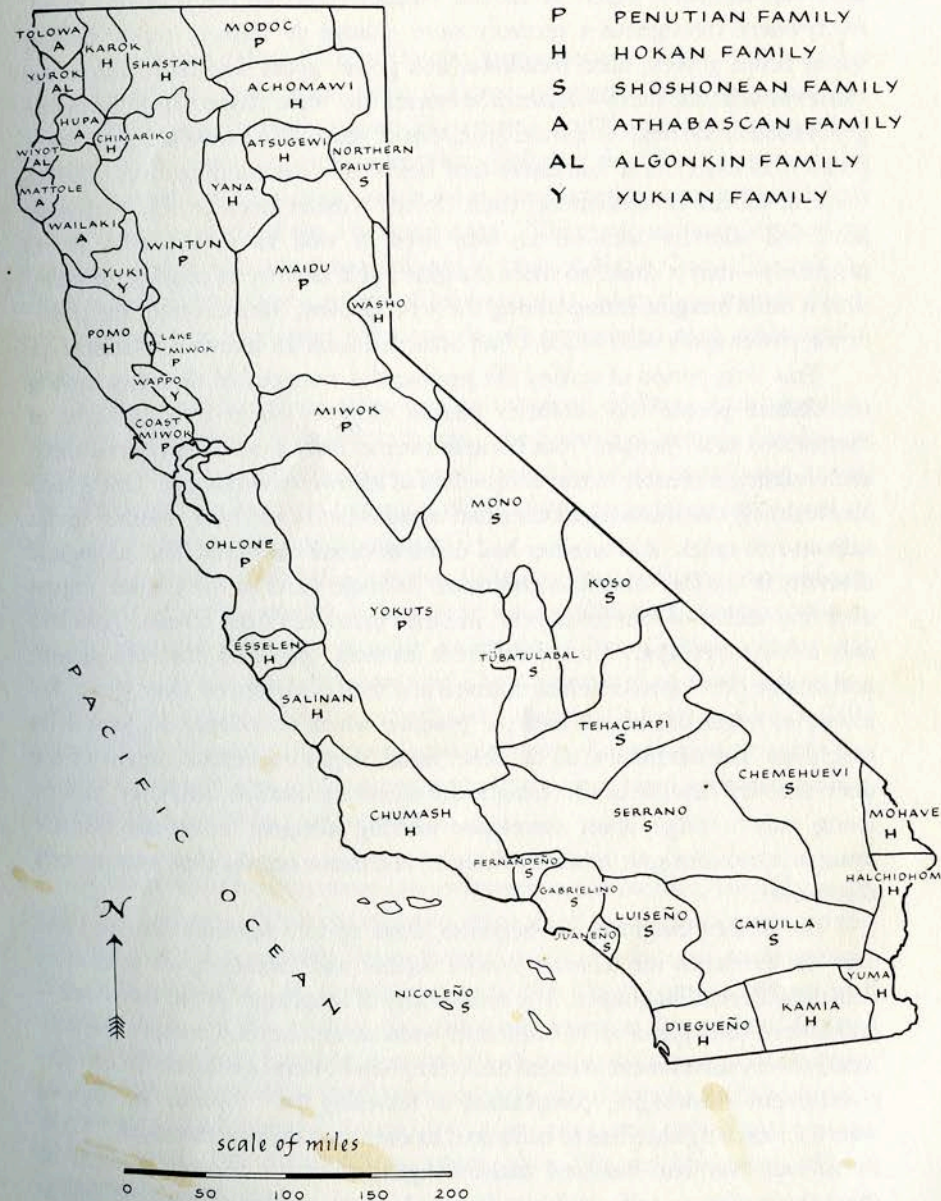
As archaeologists have excavated the various mounds, the story that has emerged is one of the growth and development of the Bay Area people. From the earliest years onward, tools and cooking utensils slowly improved in quality. Changes which to us seem minor were enormously important to the ancient inhabitants of the Bay Area. Improvements in the mortar and pestle, for example, meant that people's teeth were no longer ground to the gums by grit, as was the case in the earliest years. The invention of the bow and arrow, which eventually replaced the spear, enabled the Bay Area residents to hunt birds and game that had previously been only an occasional part of their diet. Manufactured goods and raw materials found in the shellmounds also reveal that throughout their history the Bay Area groups had changing, often complex trade relationships with other tribelets in the surrounding areas. Finally, at a level that corresponds roughly to 1,000 B. C. and again at about 500 A. D., there were changes in the ritual positions in which the bodies of the dead were buried—changes that may have signified outside religious influences.

But while the shellmounds do show evidence of change and growth, the change is surprisingly moderate. From what we know of the archaeology of other sites of similar antiquity—Grecian, Mesopotamian, or Meso-American—moderate growth over centuries is the last thing we would have expected. Where were the dramatic “horizons,” the layers in the shellmounds that mark conquests, migrations, and other cataclysmic events? Such things are by and large absent in the Bay Area shellmounds. There is nothing here that cannot be explained in terms of the gradual development of the Bay Area people, or in some cases by a gentle borrowing or absorption of customs and technologies from the surrounding people.

“It is clear,” concluded Alfred Kroeber in an early examination of the archaeological evidence, “that we are here confronted by a historical fact of extraordinary importance.” And indeed we are. We are confronted by the likelihood that the residents of the Bay Area had achieved a condition of relative peace and stability that lasted for hundreds and hundreds of years. We are confronted by the likelihood that the people found by the Spaniards at the end of the eighteenth century were the direct descendants of a people who had lived undisturbed on their land for centuries—a bare minimum of 1,200 years (assuming that the change in burial position at 500 A. D. signified an invasion of some kind), and probably for as long as 4,500 or 5,000 years.

Major Language Groups & Families of California

- P PENUTIAN FAMILY
- H HOKAN FAMILY
- S SHOSHONEAN FAMILY
- A ATHABASCAN FAMILY
- AL ALGONKIN FAMILY
- Y YUKIAN FAMILY



THE OHLONE WAY

The great period of relative peace and stability, so rare in human history, helped shape the Ohlone way of life. During this time the various tribelets settled into their own territories and developed an intimacy with their land—an intimacy which is almost inconceivable to the modern mind. Everywhere throughout a territory were clumps of bushes, rocks, fishing spots, acorn groves, seed meadows, and power spots that had names and stories attached to them—names and stories that were passed down from one generation to the next for untold hundreds of years. Well-traveled trails were pressed as much as a foot-and-a-half below the surrounding land. During these centuries of settlement, each Ohlone tribelet became so completely identified with its land—in its own eyes as well as in the eyes of its neighbors—that it could no more imagine itself moving to another territory than it could imagine transplanting the acorn groves, the meadows, the trails, or the power spots with which it had achieved such an intimate relationship.

This long period of settled life produced a remarkable diversity among the Ohlone people. As centuries passed they no longer even thought of themselves as a "people," but became instead forty or so different tribelets, each relating intensely to the uniqueness of its own environment. One group had teeming marshlands, another had meadowlands and hills, another had a salmon-rich creek, still another had miles of ocean coastline. The ecological diversity of the Bay Area was enormous. In some parts of the Ohlone region over fifty inches of rain fell a year, in other parts less than fifteen. Tribelets only a few miles apart hunted different animals, gathered different plants, and in time developed different customs and food preferences. One group, for example, might eat skunk meat, a practice which absolutely disgusted its neighbors. The neighbors, on the other hand, might eat certain organs of the deer, the very thought of which made the others squeamish. Similarly, groups living only a ridge apart developed earring designs, bird-bone whistle designs, tattoo designs, basketry designs, and dance regalia that were utterly distinctive.

The Ohlone language too began to break up into separate dialects, and over the centuries the dialects drifted further and further apart until they became different languages. The multiplicity of languages in the Bay Area—and indeed throughout all of California—was almost beyond comprehension. Nearly every traveler commented on it. Stephen Powers, a nineteenth century government ethnologist, complained of traveling for "months in regions where a new language has to be looked to every ten miles sometimes." California had over one hundred native languages—some seventy percent of them (according to anthropologist Robert Heizer) as mutually unintelligible

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as English and Chinese. This multiplicity of languages was to create a state of complete chaos at the missions. At Carmel Mission, for example, no fewer than eleven different languages were being spoken—some Ohlone, others Esselen or Salinan. At Mission Santa Clara the number of languages was twenty.

Fragments of eight different Ohlone languages have been recorded, and the total number may have been a dozen or more. They were broadly associated the way Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and French are associated as Romance languages; yet they were still so different that the language of the Santa Cruz area, for example, would have been largely incomprehensible to the Rumsen speakers of the Monterey Area. "There are as many dialects as villages," noted Father Lorenzo Asesara of Mission Santa Cruz. "Even if the villages are no more than a couple of leagues apart, when they are not allied, their dialects are so distinct that they do not understand each other in the least."

For Otto von Kotzebue there was an unsolved riddle in such language diversity. Why was it, he wondered, that "the South Sea Islands, far distant from each other, and dispersed over nearly one-third of the torrid zone, speak one language? Yet here in California, tribes of one race, living quite near to each other, speak different languages?"

Why indeed? California's linguistic richness was not characteristic of any other place in North America. In fact there was no other area of similar size in the entire world—with the possible exception of New Guinea—where one could find such a remarkable diversity. The existence of so many languages side by side can lead to only one conclusion: that the Ohlones and other California Indians must not only have led settled lives for centuries, but that the dominant characteristic of this great span of time must have been the relative isolation of one tribelet from another.

Isolation and diversity were major themes in Ohlone life, but they were not the only themes. While the tribelets maintained their separateness, at the same time they felt a strong desire for sociability, trade, and intermarriage with their neighbors. As centuries passed this desire grew stronger and stronger, until by the time of the European invasion the various Ohlone tribelets were linked together by networks of trade obligations, friendships, and marriages. How could the Ohlones reconcile the desire for sociability with their historic condition of isolation? It was not easy, and indeed the tension between these two contradictory urges gave Ohlone life much of its characteristic complexity.