

# “Born of Horses:” Missionaries, Indigenous Vaqueros, and Ecological Expansion during the Spanish Colonization of California

By Paul Albert Lacson

## Introduction

In June 1774, Evangelista, a Costanoan Indian boy, explained to Father Junípero Serra the reaction of his people to the arrival of Spanish horses in 1769. Costanoans, who considered horses and mules to be the same animal, believed that mules had given birth to Spanish colonists.<sup>1</sup> Evangelista theorized that missionaries, soldiers, and settlers “were the sons of the mules on which they rode.” He also supposed that the Spaniards were not quite newcomers, surmising that the people-born-of-mules were actually returning souls of Indians from “surrounding countries, who have come back this way,” only this time as the offspring of strange animals.<sup>2</sup>



*Spanish pioneer woman ca. 1650. Painting by José Cisneros in Riders Across the Centuries (El Paso: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 45.*

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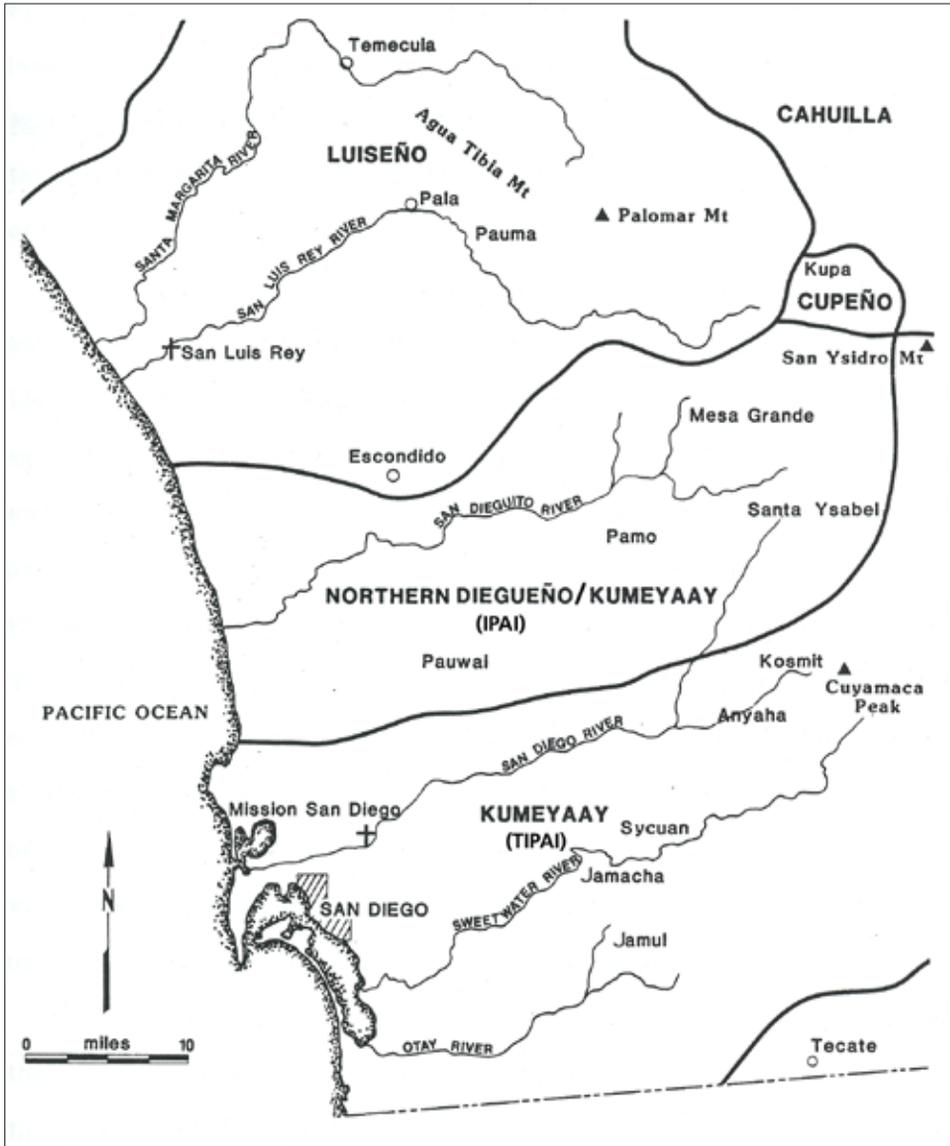
*Leather jacket soldier, ca. 1775. Painting by José Cisneros in Riders Across the Centuries (El Paso: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 75.*

In 1769, Spanish colonists initiated a revolution in the relationship of California Indians to their environment when they introduced new crops, domesticated animals, and agriculture. Horses proved especially influential in transforming the economies, social hierarchies, political structures, and inter-tribal relationships of Native Californians. This article examines the key factors that led California Indians to embrace horses and caused Spanish colonists to entrust Indians with the powerful creatures—animals that could facilitate Indian rebellions against mission, presidio, or pueblo settlements. At the center of both processes were the Indian vaqueros who seized the opportunity to work with the new

animals and who displayed the traits necessary for Spanish missionaries to give them access to the animals.

Given the thriving horse cultures that developed among Indian peoples throughout North America by the nineteenth century, especially in the Southwest and Great Plains, it may seem natural that California Indian peoples should welcome horses. Their embrace, however, of the horse, first introduced by the Spaniards, is complicated by the fact that other biological introductions wreaked havoc on the native population of the region. Historians of American Indian history have produced a healthy spate of scholarship that drives home the point that North America's native peoples readily adopted European goods, ideas, and practices that benefited them—a necessary corrective to the view of American Indians as primitive peoples left behind by history.<sup>3</sup> They have given the impression, however, that American Indians did not welcome the introduction of new biota in the same way that they greeted metal tools or woven cloth shirts. Following the lead of the renowned environmental historian, Alfred Crosby, scholars have stressed the destructive impact of European-introduced biota. They have emphasized that European colonies depended on the biological success of non-human migrants, like plants, animals, and microbes. In other words, it took more than an enterprising spirit and providential grace to wrest control of North America from the continent's native peoples.

By including plants, animals, and diseases as "allies" of Europeans, historians have advanced our understanding of the processes by which native peoples



The Spaniards distributed horses and other livestock throughout the territory of San Diego County native Indian bands.

were dispossessed of their land. Pekka Hämäläinen, however, has convincingly identified a problem with the emphasis on the destructive impact of European-introduced biota, pointing out that the story is dangerously close to biological determinism. It represents what he calls “the biological turn of American colonial history” in which “all the conquerors often had to do was to show up and somehow stay alive; their microbes did the rest.”<sup>74</sup> No longer stressing the benevolence of God



*Mission San Diego de Alcalá. Editors' collection.*

or superior technology, the new narrative gives the impression that humans, whether European or indigenous, had less agency in determining the outcomes of European-Indian contact than previous generations of scholars had recognized. While such a view has gone a long way towards de-emphasizing an exaggerated degree of control held by Europeans, this spate of scholarship minimizes the extent to which American Indians readily incorporated certain aspects of European-introduced biota for their benefit.

This article builds on the study of Hämäläinen's Comanche incorporation of horses by

stressing that indigenous peoples did not just passively accept or endure the introduction of European biota, especially horses. By examining the experiences of California Indian vaqueros (cowboys), it argues that Native Californians sought to take advantage of horses and other livestock in the same way that they incorporated metal tools and woven cloth; they put the new creatures and their newly acquired equestrian skills and knowledge to use in ways that furthered native goals. By integrating new animals into California Indian societies, Indian vaqueros aided the Spanish in their initial colonizing efforts, especially in the creation of mission communities based on agriculture and livestock raising. Indian access to horses, however, also created obstacles to the Spanish colonization project, especially as envisioned by Franciscan missionaries. Throughout the Spanish period, missionaries found it difficult to maintain a geographical divide between "civilization" and "savagery," between the coastal communities of Christian neophytes and the inland communities of Indians who chose not to join missions. Vaqueros developed the knowledge and equestrian skills necessary to challenge the spatial arrangement envisioned by Franciscan missionaries in which "civilized" communities existed along the coast while "savagery" was limited to the interior regions of California's Central Valley (the modern San Joaquin Valley).<sup>5</sup>

Unlike other parts of North America, where the dearth of records does not allow historians to identify the specific Indian individuals who played the most influential roles in incorporating horses into their societies, the meticulous record keeping of Franciscan missionaries in Alta California makes it possible to explore the histories of specific Indian individuals crucial to the spread of horse knowledge and skills among California Indians, mission and non-mission Indians alike. For example, an examination of an 1835 census of the Kumeyaay Indian pueblo in San Pascual, situated along the San Dieguito River between the modern cities of Escondido and Poway, illustrates the penetrating changes in Kumeyaay society wrought by the Spanish introduction of horses.<sup>6</sup> Among the thirty-four men listed in the census, many pursued “trades or pursuits” connected in some way to the new culture of horses: seven vaqueros, ten muleteers, one blacksmith, two weavers, two millers, one carder of wool, five farmers, and one cheesemaker. Some worked directly with horses (the vaqueros and muleteers); others supported the ability of people to ride horses (blacksmiths); some made items like cheese and woven cloth products that required the work of horses to herd cattle and sheep (the cheesemaker, weavers, and carder); and others worked with agricultural products that depended on horses and oxen to plow the soil that nourished agricultural products (millers).

By 1835, inhabitants of San Pascual took for granted the consumption of woven cloth and dairy products, as well as the sight of Indian vaqueros taming horses and herding the sheep and cattle necessary to produce such goods. An 1827 report by Franciscan missionaries passing through San Pascual described a scene that had come to seem quite natural along other parts of Alta California’s west coast: “In these districts pasture the horses and mules and the sheep of this [San Diego] Mission.”<sup>7</sup> While nothing could seem more natural than horses eating grass or weavers making cloth out of the wool from sheep that vaqueros had herded, these animals were not native to Alta California. Their existence—and the human effort necessary to ensure their survival—requires an explanation.

This article illustrates the emergence of California Indian vaqueros in spreading a new relationship with the land—a relationship in which domesticated animals, especially horses, radically reshaped the lives of California’s indigenous peoples.

## **Reactions**

Knowledge of sheep, cows, pigs, chicken, and horses may not have made its way to Alta California until 1769, despite the fact that the Spaniards had introduced domesticated livestock to northwestern New Spain in the mid-seventeenth century. The Costanoan boy’s belief that mules gave birth to Spanish colonists suggests

that the animals from the exploratory expeditions of 1769 may have been the first domesticated livestock that he or his neighbors had encountered. Evangelista’s views may not have been representative of every Costanoan, and certainly should not necessarily be taken to reflect a theory held by every California Indian, but his assessment of horses does illustrate a lack of experience with domesticated livestock among all Native Californians.

From the perspective of Indians, regardless of their knowledge about horses, one thing was clear: Native Californians associated horses and other livestock with the Spanish newcomers. While a seemingly obvious point, the association is worth emphasizing since Indian peoples resistant to Spanish colonization violently targeted animals in efforts to expel the Spanish. For instance, when Kumeyaay Indians attacked Mission San Diego in 1775, in addition to burning buildings and killing a Franciscan missionary, they also targeted livestock. According to Father Vicente Fuster, who survived the attack, “[O]ur enemies fired arrows at all the livestock both large and small and at the horses. They had not even overlooked the hogs.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1785, Tongva Indians rebelled against missionaries at Mission San Gabriel and killed several sheep and goats as part of the rebellion.<sup>9</sup> Along with mission buildings and people, the new animals symbolized an unwelcome presence that became targets of violence during Indian rebellions against Spanish colonization.

Over time, however, whether California’s native peoples approved of Spanish colonization or not, most willingly incorporated livestock, especially horses, into their lives. Relatively soon after the arrival of Spanish newcomers, California Indians became the primary caretakers of horses, mules, cattle, oxen, and other Spanish-introduced livestock. Less than a decade after the establishment of Mission San Diego, Father Fermín Francisco de Lasúen reported Indians from that mission rounding up livestock in his 1778 annual report to New Spain’s viceroy.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, Kitsepawit, a Chumash Indian from Mission San Buenaventura, bragged that Native Californians had become the best horse riders in the region.<sup>11</sup> By the early twentieth century, it was common to

1804	2
1805	21
1810	37
1815	25

*Number of Indian Vaqueros at Mission San Buenaventura. Source: Libro de la Ropa, Vaqueros, Santa Barbara Mission Archive-Library*

find mounted California Indians working as cowboys on the ranches and farms that dotted the coast.



*Fray Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, Mission San Carlos Borromeo.*

Beginning with a seed population of fewer than 1,000 animals in 1769, the number of Spanish-introduced livestock in what would become the state of California grew precipitously in less than a century. In 1850, there were approximately 295,000 such animals in the state (approximately 254,000 cattle, 18,000 sheep, and 23,000 horses and mules). By 1860, the numbers rose even more dramatically: 1,000,000 cattle, 1,100,000 sheep, and 170,000 horses and mules.<sup>12</sup> At Mission San Diego, there were 102 cattle, 304 sheep, and 54 horses in 1776. At the end of the Spanish period in 1821, the growth of the livestock population mirrored the increase in population throughout Alta California;

missionaries reported 8,436 cattle, 17,000 sheep, and 1,060 horses.<sup>13</sup> Of course, no biological population, whether human or animal, arrives at a particular population size “naturally.” Like the fields of wheat, barley, and beans that depended on the hard labor of the natives, California’s livestock population would not have flourished without the work of California Indian vaqueros.

By learning equestrian skills, neophyte Indians could contribute immeasurably to the creation of agricultural communities that would form the centerpiece of the civilizing program of Franciscan missionaries. Military leaders worried, however, that mounted Indians might use their new skills and access to horses against the Spaniards. In 1787, Alta California’s governor accused Franciscan missionaries of ignoring a 1786 decree by the Viceroy of New Spain Bernardo de Gálvez that prohibited the “use and management of horses” by Indians. Father-President of the Franciscan missions Father Lasuén acknowledged that neophyte Indians did indeed have access to horses, but assured the governor that a scarcity of labor gave missionaries little choice in the matter:

No one is more concerned or more interested than the missionaries that the Indian should continue in his native ignorance of horsemanship. But Your Lordship is well aware of the cattle and horses which, with the King’s pleasure, every one of the missions possesses, and that horsemen are needed to look after them. And these have to be Indians, for there are no others.<sup>14</sup>



*Mission Indian Vaquero, ca. 1800. Painting by José Cisneros in Riders Across the Centuries (El Paso: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 93.*

Father Lasuén explained to the governor that it was no different from equipping Indians with farm implements to sow and harvest crops. Just as Indian neophytes had to be “entrusted with axes, sickles, [and] machetes”—implements that could easily be used as weapons against the Spaniards—the labor shortage forced missionaries to give Indians access to horses.<sup>15</sup> Ignoring the objections of military officials who worried that mounted Indians posed a security threat, missionaries facilitated the

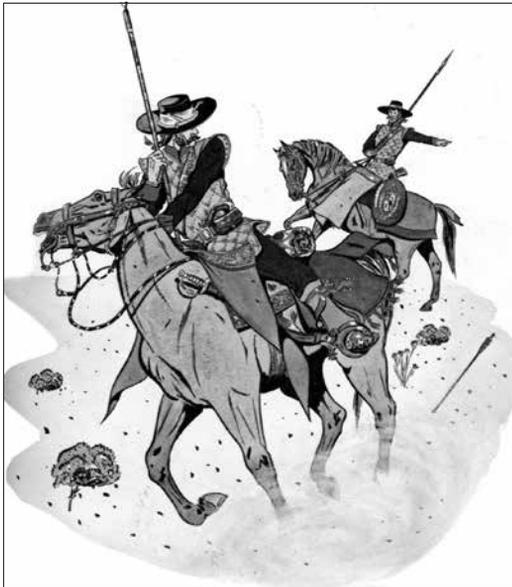
equestrian education of Indian neophytes. If the number of vaqueros at Mission San Buenaventura was representative, then Indian vaqueros were a minority among mission neophytes (Table 1). Between the mission’s founding year of 1782 and the end of the Spanish period in 1821, missionaries baptized over 3,500 men at Mission San Buenaventura.<sup>16</sup> Despite the small number of vaqueros, however, military authorities worried that the knowledge they gained might be easily taught to Indians who might threaten Spanish settlements.

Military officials were prescient. Neophytes did use horses in ways that threatened mission communities. For instance, Christian Indians fled on horseback from mission compounds to native communities in California’s Central Valley. In November 1815, Sergeant Juan Ortega probed the region surrounding Tulare Lake in search of Indian fugitives from Missions San Miguel, San Juan Bautista, and Soledad. After two days, Ortega spotted two Indians on horseback and gave chase, but “they abandoned horses and saddle and crossed the [Kings] river by swimming,” noted the sergeant. Unable to cross the river, Ortega’s party stopped to retrieve the horses and saddles that the Indians had abandoned. Martín Olvera, one of Ortega’s soldiers, inspected one saddle and concluded that it belonged to Antonio, a neophyte Indian who recently left Mission Soledad. As it turned out, Antonio had stolen three horses from Mission Soledad.<sup>17</sup>

Reminiscing about his experiences as a soldier, Felipe Santiago Garcia remembered the seemingly insatiable appetite for horses among Yokuts Indians from California’s Central Valley: “[W]e had to keep constant watch that the Indians

did not steal our horses; they were everywhere.”<sup>18</sup> In an 1815 expedition into the San Joaquin Valley, Sergeant José Dolores Pico spotted approximately five hundred dead animals, including horses.<sup>19</sup> During forays into the Central Valley, soldiers had come to expect either stolen horses or the remnants of horses that Indians had eaten. After a probe into the Central Valley in 1815, a soldier reported surprise that his expedition did not encounter any horse carcasses: “In all the journey described [of an 1815 expedition along the Kings River and around Tulare Lake] no slaughter of horses has been observed.”<sup>20</sup>

Just as military officials had feared, knowledge of horses spread from neophyte vaqueros to other Indians, including non-mission Indians in inland communities. With their newly acquired equestrian knowledge, Indians from the interior raided Spanish communities for horses to supplement their food supplies. In 1819, Father Mariano Payeras reported that “the best horses” were “being stolen; that in the Tulares all ride, even the women; and that regular fairs for the sale of horses are held there.”<sup>21</sup> The fact that Indians were stealing the “best horses” implies that they had learned to discern the qualities of better horses over lesser ones. Vaquero equestrian knowledge and skills had spread at the expense of Spanish missions. The knowledge and use of horses among California Indians in the early-nineteenth century represented radical changes from 1769, when Evangelista assumed that Spanish colonists were born of horses.



*Indian Vaqueros. Cover painting by Jack Schlicting in Times Gone By, No. 4 (1965).*

## **Vaqueros**

It is possible to identify key factors that led to the initial emergence of Indian vaqueros by focusing on the Chumash Indians of Mission San Buenaventura. Only a small fraction of the 3,500 baptized men gained ready access to horses. The emergence of a cadre of Chumash vaqueros represented a convergence of interests between Spanish colonists and Chumash Indians. Given that Indian vaqueros facilitated the integration of horses into California Indian societies, and given that



*Mexican Ranchero. Painting by José Cisneros in Riders Across the Centuries (El Paso: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 127.*

Spanish military leaders in Alta California opposed providing Indians with the opportunity to develop equestrian knowledge and skills, the convergence of Spanish and Chumash interests must be analyzed rather than assumed. An examination of vaquero baptismal and marriage records yields biographical clues suggesting the traits that made a particular Indian trustworthy enough to be taught equestrian skills and to be given easy access to horses and other livestock. In turn, the same records hint at how the position of vaquero made sense from the perspective of Chumash Indians.

Father José Señán, one of two missionaries stationed at Mission San Buenaventura during the early nineteenth century, left behind a remarkable document entitled, *Libro de Ropa*, (literally, “Book of Clothing”). Señán tracked clothing distributed to any baptized Indian at Mission San Buenaventura; he also recorded the names of Indian vaqueros, the type of equipment distributed (saddles, cowboy hats, riding bags, and other equestrian equipment), and the dates that he provided each item. By analyzing the list of vaqueros and their baptismal, death, and marriage records, it is possible to identify key characteristics of Chumash vaqueros.<sup>22</sup>

Vaqueros were fairly young. In 1805, the average age was twenty-three years old. Some, like Juan Martín, started at a particularly young age. According to his baptismal record, Martín was no more than seventeen years old in 1809, the year that he received his first piece of vaquero equipment. It is possible that he became a vaquero at an even younger age, before Señán recorded his acquisition of a saddle. Another vaquero, Juan Pablo, had been brought by parents, Olegario Jose Sayeguit and Leonarda María, to the Mission San Buenaventura at the age of five months to be baptized. Thirteen years later, Father Señán listed him as a vaquero who received his first set of saddlebags and vaquero boots on May 25, 1805. A thirteen-year-old vaquero! The oldest vaquero listed among those who received supplies and clothing in 1805 was Eustaquio Nimumiachet at thirty-six years of

age. The average age at baptism among vaqueros in 1805 was nine-years-old.<sup>23</sup>

Young vaqueros appealed to colonists for at least three reasons: first, they seemed more likely to be open to new technology (broadly defined to include animals, like horses, that could enhance their transportation and communication); second, younger vaqueros had the potential to give them longer terms of service; and finally, they were in the prime of their physical development, which meant that they had the physical strength and stamina required of the job. Missionaries targeted younger people because they believed that younger Indians were more willing to incorporate various aspects of Spanish culture. Going back to the Spanish conquest of sixteenth-century Mexico, missionaries saw something natural about the willingness of young boys to change and include Spanish ways into their daily lives and identity.<sup>24</sup>

From a variety of mission sites in Alta California, missionaries shared stories of the willingness of young boys to take on radically new practices, institutions, and ideas. Two years after their arrival in Alta California, in 1771, Father Junípero Serra reported from Mission San Carlos on the progress of neophytes in learning Spanish: “[T]here are four big boys who not only are able to say their prayers well, but are making much progress in the Castilian tongue.” In the same letter, Serra informed his superiors of “two young Christians,” both boys, who seemed to be making progress “as interpreters to the gentiles.”<sup>25</sup> From farther north, missionaries at Mission San Juan Bautista reported progress in teaching writing to



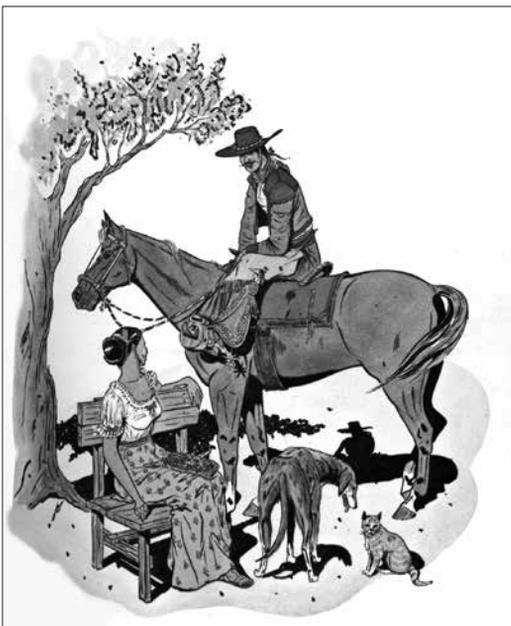
*Mission San Carlos Borromeo at Carmel. Editors' collection.*

young boys. According to an 1814 missionary report, "The Indian youths especially realize very well the utility of reading and writing."<sup>26</sup> Given that missionaries viewed young boys as the most amenable and able faction among Indians to learn the Spanish language, embrace Catholicism, and learn to read and write, it is not surprising to find that they offered the position of vaqueros to boys and young men.

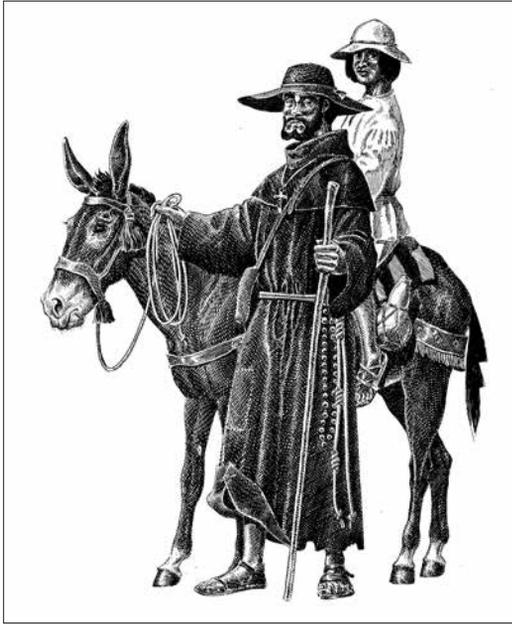
While missionaries seemed to assume that adults were slower to accept Christianity than children, the profiles of San Buenaventura's vaqueros reflect a mixed response among adults. Some parents of vaqueros did indeed seem more reluctant than their children to become Christian, as reflected in the timing of their baptisms. Out of thirty parents of vaqueros for whom I was able to obtain biographical information, seventeen were baptized after their children. Most of the parents in this sample (13 out of 17), agreed to baptism at least five years after their son had been baptized, suggesting that their son's experiences as a baptized Indian with the responsibility of caring for livestock, may have influenced a parent's decision to become Catholic. Baltazar Atiquiuzé's parents waited nine years after their son's baptism to get baptized themselves. Others waited much longer. The parents of Tiburcio Guepiachu, for instance, underwent the ritual of baptism in 1807, twenty-two years after their son was baptized at the age of six.<sup>27</sup> From the perspective of missionaries, this may have served as evidence of the

lack of enthusiasm among older people to adopt Spanish ways.

Some vaqueros followed the lead of their parents in becoming Christians. A range of years existed for parents who underwent baptism prior to their vaquero sons. On one end of the spectrum, the parents of Pedro Regalado Aguigüinchat agreed to baptism less than two months before having Aguigüinchat baptized in April 1785. Other parents, like those of Simpliciano Maria, were baptized eight years before their son. In between, there were parents like Lázaro Suluasquiet who was baptized one year before the baptism of



*Mexican Vaquero stops to flirt. Cover painting by Jack Schlicting in Times Gone By, No. 1 (1965).*



*Franciscan Missionary with mule, 18th century. Painting by José Cisneros in Riders Across the Centuries (El Paso: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 78.*

his two-day-old son Manuel de Jesús Achuniamamahit in 1785. Among the vaqueros for whom I have found biographical information in the Franciscan baptismal and marriage registers, slightly less than half (11 of 30) came from families in which their parents agreed to Catholic baptism before their vaquero sons. While more vaqueros seemed to be the ones teaching their parents about Catholicism and trying to convince them to at least take the time to be baptized, a significant number of vaqueros were introduced to Catholicism by their parents, as evidenced by the fact that their parents were baptized first and brought their

sons to be baptized at a very young age.

Whether a vaquero paved the way to Catholicism for his parents or vice versa, missionaries trying to identify potential vaqueros required more evidence of loyalty than just baptism. In addition to baptism, familiarity with particular families over time helped missionaries determine the viability of a young man to hold the position of vaquero. Felipe Neri's parents were among the first cohorts of Chumash Indians to agree to baptism at Mission San Buenaventura. Named after the second Father-President of Alta California missions, Father Lasuén, Neri's father Fermín was the ninth Chumash Indian to be baptized at the mission. From the coastal town of Sucu, Fermín was baptized at age eleven on April 28, 1783, a little over a year after the mission's official founding. And, in May 1789, Fermín brought his one-day-old son Felipe to Father Francisco Dumetz to be baptized. By 1805, the first year that Father Señán listed Felipe Neri as a vaquero, missionaries at San Buenaventura had known his father for over 22 years, and his mother for at least 20 years. While Felipe Neri's family had a particularly long relationship with Mission San Buenaventura, his situation was not anomalous. Of the eleven vaqueros whose parents underwent baptism before them, only one was baptized just prior to the baptism of the vaquero. Pedro Regalado Aguiguinchát's father was baptized seven days before his baptism and his mother was baptized less than two



*Mission San Buenaventura founded 1782. Editors' collection.*

months before Aguiguinchát's baptism. The rest of the parents who introduced their children to Catholicism, rather than vice versa, were baptized more than a year before they brought their future vaqueros to be baptized.

While Franciscan missionaries had to assess which Indians were most suitable to gain knowledge of and access to horses, Chumash Indians (and other coastal California Indian peoples) had to determine what to make of the new animals in their midst. Far from forcing the animals upon Indians, based on missionary reports, it seems that California Indians enthusiastically embraced horses. Fathers Luís Gil y Taboado and Father José

María de Zalvidea highlighted the enjoyment that Tongva Indians derived from riding horses: "The one activity they engage in is to go about horseback from one ranch to another."<sup>28</sup> If the Tongva Indians surrounding Mission San Gabriel are any indication, Native Californians welcomed the introduction of horses and the opportunities to gain the knowledge and skill required to ride them.

The fundamental commonality among the Indians who held the position of vaquero was that they were all men. Limiting key leadership positions to men seemed to represent continuity with pre-colonial Chumash leadership patterns. By the time of Spanish colonization, only men represented themselves to Spanish colonists as leaders. Men, not women, had the opportunity to engage in polygyny as a means of enhancing their connections and power among different villages. Anthropologist John Johnson convincingly demonstrates that polygyny was limited to men listed as capitanes (captains) by Franciscan missionaries in the marriage registers.<sup>29</sup> That the position of vaquero was limited to men suggests continuity in another way: Chumash men continued their work with animals while women tended and harvested plants that Indians consumed as food and medicine.<sup>30</sup> In addition to providing protein for their diet, the hunt for animals had contributed to a man's sense of masculinity in the years before Spanish

colonization. Serving as a vaquero gave a select number of men an opportunity to actively participate in the new Spanish agricultural economy while simultaneously promoting a traditional sense of Chumash masculinity. In contrast, the men who worked the agricultural fields engaged in work that represented a break from the past as growing crops long had been associated with the work of women.

For most vaqueros, however, one's sex as a male was not enough: their Chumash town of origin mattered. One of the most striking characteristics of Mission San Buenaventura vaqueros was the dominance of men from key towns in the Chumash economic network. Most vaqueros on Seán's cloth distribution list came from major trade centers, especially coastal and river towns. Out of the forty-seven Chumash vaqueros for whom I have been able to determine villages of origin, twenty-two came from coastal communities and thirteen came from inland river towns. While twelve came from inland villages that were not directly on waterways, the majority came from major trade centers on key transportation routes. For instance, both Benito de Palmero and Antonio Victorio came from the southernmost Chumash coastal town of Humaliwo (the modern city of Malibu). Malnapaachót came from Misosbno, a maritime community north of Mission San Buenaventura. Seven vaqueros came from Sisolop, the coastal community closest to Mission San Buenaventura.

By the late eighteenth century, all California Indian peoples had developed economies centered around towns that acted simultaneously as political, economic and ritual centers. Like other California Indian groups, the Chumash economy depended on an exchange network among groups from different ecological zones: the Channel Islands, inland valleys, foothill regions, mountains, and coastal communities. According to anthropologist Lowell John Bean, "Formal or informal trade feasts were set up between groups living in different ecological areas, so that goods from the mutually advantageous but politically separate areas were exchanged from those of others."<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the emergence of Mission San Buenaventura's cadre of mission Indian vaqueros represented a convergence of expectations between Spanish colonists and Chumash Indians. Once introduced to equestrian knowledge and skills, Chumash Indians, like the Dakota and Lakota Indians of the Great Plains and the Comanche of the Southwest, readily incorporated horses into their world. While the animal was initially introduced as a means of promoting Spanish colonization, by the end of the Spanish period (1821), Chumash Indians had begun to use horses in ways that challenged the hope of Franciscan missionaries to create a stark geographical divide between the "civilized" coast and "barbarous" inland communities.



*Mission La Purísima Concepción, founded in 1787, is a part of the California State Parks system and a National Historic Landmark. Internet photo.*

## **Geographies of Power**

Just as consumption patterns and work shaped identity, so too did place. Christian neophytes lived along the coast with their tutors of “civility,” the Franciscan missionaries. Non-Christian Indians who clung to their “savage” ways isolated themselves from the influence of Spanish culture in exclusively native communities throughout Los Tulares, the name used by Spanish colonists to refer to the interior regions of Alta California, the modern Central Valley.<sup>32</sup> Until all California Indians could be converted to Catholicism, Franciscan missionaries sought to segregate baptized from non-baptized Indians. Until the early nineteenth century, “savage” villages and regions could be found in close proximity to coastal Franciscan missions. By 1820, because of the huge number of baptized coastal Indians, missionaries had come to view Alta California’s coastline, between Mission San Diego and Mission San Francisco, as an exclusively Christian and “civilized” place. Mission Santa Clara missionaries explained that there were “no more Indians in the area to conquer except toward the east.”<sup>33</sup> On February 2, 1820, Mariano Payeras, Father-President of California’s Franciscan missions, declared, “We have happily baptized all the heathens found in the chain of 220 leagues [from Mission San Diego to Mission San Francisco]...and we can truthfully say that there is hardly one gentile from the coast to the interior.”<sup>34</sup> Franciscans

believed that they had created a coastal landscape of “civilization,” defined by agricultural communities of Christian Indians loyal to the Spanish crown. In the minds of missionaries, the eastern interior region known as Los Tulares was a region where non-baptized Indians continued to live in “darkness” and “mystery.”

Franciscan missionaries may have wanted to create insular mission communities that “protected” neophytes from surrounding non-Christian Indians, but aided by their access to and knowledge of horses, Native Californians frustrated the efforts of missionaries to establish a clear boundary between “light” and “darkness.” Indian-Spanish relations in mission communities along the coast did not develop in isolation from the interior regions of Alta California. In fact, the Spanish introduction of the horse intensified connections between coastal and interior communities, between baptized Indians and non-baptized Indians, between Indian vaqueros with equestrian knowledge and interior Indians eager to learn about horses.

The relationship between the Yokuts Indian village of Tulami and Chumash Indians from Mission La Purísima illustrates the connection between coastal communities and interior communities made possible by horses. By 1817, Tulami, a Yokuts village on the northwestern shores of Buena Vista Lake, had developed a reputation among the Chumash neophyte Indians of Mission La Purísima as a refuge away from Spanish settlements. In the winter of 1817, Father Mariano Payeras discovered that six neophytes left Mission La Purísima and headed east to Tulami without informing him or the other missionaries. Because the neophytes neglected to ask the missionaries for permission to leave La Purísima, Father Payeras categorized the Indians as “fugitives.” He asked the commandant of the Santa Barbara presidio to organize a search party to capture and return the “fugitives” to the mission. Owing to his previous successes in the conversion of children, Payeras was especially hopeful of retrieving the youngest Indian, a thirteen-year old boy named Sebastián Viquiét.

The geographical knowledge among Tulami Indian leaders made it difficult for Spanish military expeditions to find runaways. Faciats, a Yokuts Indian leader from Tulami, had become well-known among Spanish colonists and Indians alike as a powerful leader. Keenly aware of the surrounding natural environment, Faciats had developed a reputation as someone who knew how to keep former neophytes safe from Spanish search parties. Faciats had proven adept at making use of the Kern River and Buena Vista Lake as a means of evading capture, as he did for the neophytes who fled Mission La Purísima. According to Odórico, a trusted Chumash neophyte among Spanish colonists, “Faciats, fearing the entrance of the troop, left Tulami and crossed, not to any island, but rather to the mainland on the other bank of the [Kern] river.”<sup>35</sup>

The Tulami were one of approximately fifteen Yokuts-speaking groups to live in the Southern Valley. Approximately forty different groups comprised the Yokuts people of California's Central Valley. The majority of Yokuts in this part of the valley inhabited the region to the north of Tulami, with most of them surrounding Tulare Lake. Tulami could be found to the southeast of Tulare Lake on the northwestern edge of Buena Vista Lake. Anthropologists estimate that approximately 1,300 Yokuts inhabited the region around Buena Vista Lake, including the Chuxoxi and Hometwoli peoples. Most of the 15,700 Yokuts in the Southern Valley lived north of Tulami around Tulare Lake, with many other tribes living in the sloughs that connected Tulare Lake, Buena Vista Lake, and Kern Lake. The Yokuts also inhabited the lower parts of Kings, Kaweah, Tule, and Kern rivers.<sup>36</sup>

If Faciats guided the six runaway neophytes from Mission La Purísima back to Tulami, the Indians would have joined a thriving community of non-baptized Yokuts Indians and "many Christians from all the missions of this jurisdiction," including neophytes from missions San Miguel and San Luis Obispo, according to Alta California's Father-President, Mariano Payeras. The neophytes who lived at Tulami were Indians "determined not to recognize their destiny," complained Payeras.

While Tulami had become a safe refuge for neophyte Indians, many of the neophytes who fled the missions did not arrive as weak and helpless refugees. They arrived with horses, which meant that they arrived with a valuable commodity that gave them leverage in their dealings with the Tulami people. Even if they arrived without horses, neophyte runaways represented an important source of information when planning horse raids on mission sites. The emergence of a mixed community where non-baptized Indians mingled and conducted business with baptized Indians who had access to horses proved to be profoundly disturbing to Payeras. "They are establishing in the interior a republic of Hell," he wrote.<sup>37</sup>

Tulami, a burgeoning community comprised of a combination of baptized Indians from the coast and non-baptized Tulareño Indians, was one of the most well-known and powerful interior Indian communities that emerged out of the mixing of coastal and interior Indians and the incorporation of horses. It was a place that coastal neophytes could turn to if they decided to completely renounce their association with Spaniards and later, Mexican settlements. When Indian neophytes faced east towards Los Tulares, they saw an opportunity to forge a future in an exclusively native community.

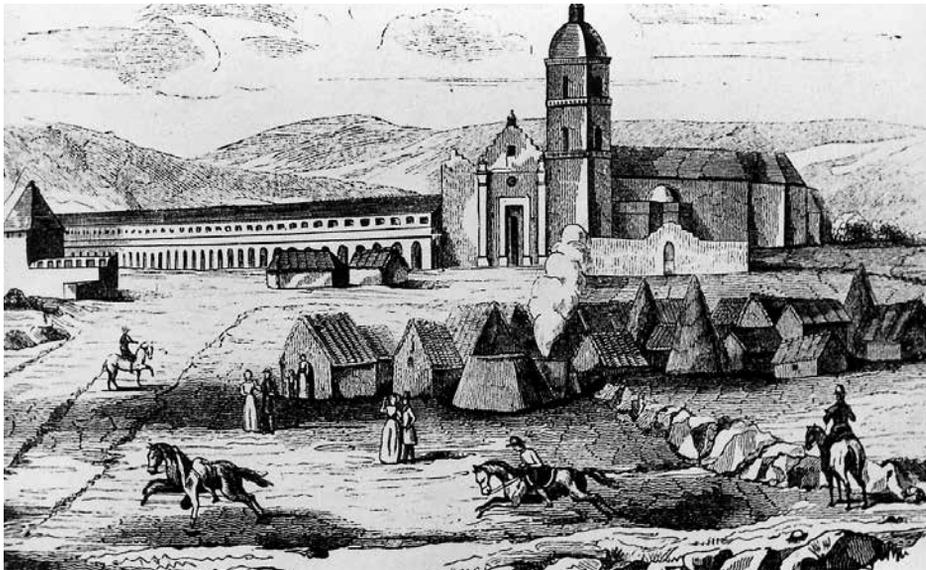
Coastal neophytes were not the only Native Californians to initiate meaningful connections between Spanish communities and interior regions. Native Californians from Los Tulares, especially the Yokuts, looked west and sought to

forge ties with coastal Indians. The Yokuts peoples, like other California Indians, had traded for centuries with groups from different ecological zones to obtain resources not readily available in their territory. Yokuts in the Central Valley established settlements along rivers and sloughs, which provided an abundance of fish and mussels. They also depended on tule elk and pronghorn antelope for protein. Prior to the American transformation of the San Joaquin Valley into industrial farmland, herds of elk and antelope roamed California's Central Valley. With the exception of the wetlands areas that produced thriving communities of tules and marsh grass, the vegetation in Yokuts territory was rather sparse, with oak trees being limited to stream courses and other well-watered areas. To obtain food like acorns that could be stored for long periods, Valley Yokuts without ready access to oak trees traded with coastal Indian groups and foothill Yokuts who did have a greater abundance of acorns.<sup>38</sup> After the arrival of Spanish colonists and their horses, Yokuts intensified their connections with coastal Indian communities. By the early nineteenth century, Yokuts Indians had incorporated Spanish-introduced livestock into their subsistence system, either by obtaining horses from mission vaqueros who herded them to the Central Valley or by raiding the missions themselves.

## **Conclusion**

By 1840, Mexican leaders found Indian horse raids so detrimental to the economy that California's governor Juan Bautista de Alvarado issued an edict meant to "prevent in any way the continual robberies committed in the country by the Indian barbarians...causing the ruin of ranch owners and threatening the lives of defenseless families." To prevent the continued raids by Los Tulares Indians on the ranchos of Mexican California, this edict charged a force of twenty men with the responsibility of assisting "all private property and ranch owners who shall request their protection."<sup>39</sup> Despite the new law and procedures for enforcing the law, Los Tulares Indians continued to acquire horses from Mexican settlements on the coast throughout the entire Mexican period. In fact, the intensity of horse raiding increased over time into the beginning of the American period.

Historians have depicted the period from the 1820s through the 1860s as the beginning of the end for Native Californians. According to this narrative, the greatest blow to California Indians was delivered by the secularization of the missions in 1834. No longer able to rely on mission-produced goods, California Indians faced harsh economic times and were compelled to seek work in new communities, like the emerging towns of San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara. Indians who did not live near emerging cities had an even



*Mission San Luis Rey de Francia drawn during the expedition of Auguste Duhaut Cilly in ca. 1827. Editors' collection.*

more difficult time. Without a mission to serve as the center of their community life, Native California Indian culture began to disappear, or so the argument goes.

While there is no doubt that secularization led to many significant and negative changes in the lives of Native Californians, some native peoples found a way to benefit from the breakup of the Franciscan monopoly on land. Los Tulares Indians managed to expand their influence and to profit from first the hide and tallow trade during the Spanish and Mexican periods, and then the cattle boom in California at the beginning of the American period.<sup>40</sup> With both the hide and tallow trade and the cattle boom, Los Tulares Indians capitalized on the dependence of the industries on horses.

In thinking about Alta California during the Spanish and Mexican period, three kinds of settlements dominate the historical imagination: missions, presidios, and pueblos. In future work, scholars would do well to focus on Native Californian village settlements. The development of communities like San Pascual, situated between coastal settlements and far interior settlements, deserves more attention, especially since it represented a community of mixed mission and non-mission Indians in close proximity to the former Spanish missions of San Luis Rey and San Diego in San Diego County. By better understanding the emergence of Los Tulares Indian communities and places like San Pascual, the long-term consequences of the native incorporation of horses can be better understood.

## NOTES

1. Two major Indian peoples lived in the Monterey Bay region during the period of Spanish colonization: the Costanoan Indians who resided to the east and north of the Salinas River and the Esselen people who lived west of the Salinas River. Combined both societies had a population of between 2,500 and 3,000 people. For a brief overview of Native Californians from the Monterey Bay regions, see Steven W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 16–26.
2. Junípero Serra, “Memorandum,” Monterey, California, June 22, 1774, in Antonine Tibesar, ed., *Writings of Junípero Serra* (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1956), II:87.
3. In Daniel Richter’s *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), a book that focuses on Eastern Indians, Richter provides readers with a superb synthesis of how Northeastern American Indians made use of new ideas, things, animals, and practices. Bruce Trigger’s article, “Early Native North American Responses to European Colonization: Romantic Versus Rationalistic Explanations,” *Journal of American History*, 77, no. 4 (March 1991): 1195-1215, demonstrates that scholars are in agreement that Native peoples readily incorporated European-introduced goods. His article introduces students of the Native American past to the scholarly debate among scholars over the explanations of such introductions.
4. Pekka Hämäläinen “The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Change, and Indigenous Power in the Southwest Borderlands,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 2, 3d Series (April 2010): 173-208.
5. In her article, “Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the ‘Borderlands’ of the Early Southwest,” Juliana Barr demonstrates that native peoples possessed more leverage than generally recognized in the establishment and maintenance of spatial arrangements that reflected their values. See Juliana Barr, “Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the ‘Borderlands’ of the Early Southwest,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 5-46.
6. For the origins of San Pascual as a post-mission period Indian community, see Glenn Farris, “Captain José Panto and the San Pascual Indian Pueblo in San Diego County, 1835-1878,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 43 (Spring 1997): 116-131.
7. Quoted in Farris, “Captain José Panto,” 4.
8. Father Vicente Fuster to Junípero Serra, November 28, 1775, San Diego, in Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, I:454.
9. Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, eds., *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535-1846* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001), 249.
10. Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, *Writings*, ed. and trans. Finbar Kenneally (Washington: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1965), II:338.
11. Fernando Librado, *Breath of the Sun: Life in Early California as Told By a Chumash Indian*, Fernando Librado to John P. Harrington, ed. Travis Hudson (Banning: Malki Museum Press/Ventura County Historical Society, 1979), 106-109.
12. For estimates of livestock populations, see Lee T. Burcham, *California Range Land: An Historico-ecological Study of the Range Resource of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 129.
13. Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo, *Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 123-124.

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14. Lasuén to Don Pedro Fages, San Carlos Mission, August 21, 1787, in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, I:150.
15. *Ibid.*
16. The Huntington Library, Early California Population Project Database, 2006.
17. Entries November 9 and November 19, 1815, Juan de Ortega, "Diario, Nov. 4-15, 1815," Robert Ernest Cowan Collection (hereafter, RECC), Bancroft Library (hereafter, BL).
18. Felipe Santiago Garcia's Account of Moraga's 1807 Expedition, from "Story of an Old Dragoon of Monterey," in Taylor, *Discoverers, Founders and Pioneers of California*, 255.
19. November 28, 1815, José Dolores Pico, "Diario, 1815," REEC, BL.
20. November 19, 1815, Juan de Ortega, "Diario, Nov. 4-15, 1815," RECC, BL.
21. Payeras quoted in Thomas N. Layton, "Traders and Raiders: Aspects of Trans-Basin and California-Plateau Commerce, 1800-1830," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1981), 131.
22. *Libro de Ropa*, Mission de San Buenaventura, Santa Barbara Mission Archive-Library (SBMAL).
23. For dates of baptism and deaths of Juan Pablo, Olegario Jose Sayeguit, Leonarda Maria, and Eustaquio Nimumiachet, see *The Huntington Library, Early California Population Project Database*, 2006. For dates of clothing distribution, see *Libro de Ropa, Misión de San Buenaventura*, SBMAL.
24. On the focus of Catholic missionaries on children during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 75-77; and Richard Trexler, "From the Mouths of Babes: Christianization by Children in 16th Century New Spain," in John Davis, ed., *Religious Organization and Religious Experience* (Academic Press: London and New York, 1982), 115-135.
25. Serra to Francisco Carlos de Croix, June 18, 1771, Monterey, in Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, I:209.
26. Felipe Arroya de la Cuesta, May 1, 1814, Mission San Juan Bautista, in Maynard J. Geiger and Clement W. Meighan, eds., *As the Padres Saw Them: California Indian Life and Customs as Reported by the Franciscan Missionaries, 1813-1815* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Mission Archive Library, 1976), 37.
27. The Huntington Library, Early California Population Project Database, 2006; *Libro de Ropa*, Mission de San Buenaventura, SBMAL.
28. Geiger and Meighan, *As the Padres Saw Them*, 24.
29. John Johnson, "Chumash Social Organization: An Ethnohistoric Perspective," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1988.
30. The Chumash sexual division of labor reflects a larger pattern among other native peoples in North America. Daniel K. Richter, "Believing That Many of the Red People Suffer Much for the Want of Food": Hunting, Agriculture, and a Quaker Construction of Indianness in the Early Republic," *The Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (1999), 612-615; David J. Silverman, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66-68.
31. Lowell J. Bean, "Social Organization in Native California," in Lowell John Bean and Thomas C. Blackburn, eds., *Native Californians: A Theoretical Retrospective* (Menlo Park: Ballena Press, 1976), 120.
32. Spanish colonists referred to the Central Valley as *Los Tulares* because of the abundance of tules that inhabited the valley.
33. Fray Magín Catalá and Fray José Viader, Mission Santa Clara, November 4, 1814, in Geiger and Meighan, eds., *As the Padres Saw Them*, 17.

34. Father Mariano Payeras to the Reverend Father Guardian of the Apostolic College of San Fernando in Mexico, Mission La Purísima, February 2, 1820, in Donald Cutter, ed., *Writings of Mariano Payeras* (Santa Barbara: Bellerophon Books, 1995), 225.
35. List of neophytes who have fled from Mission La Purísima, 1818, in Cutter, ed., *Writings of Mariano Payeras*, 143-44.
36. William J. Wallace, "Southern Valley Yokuts," in *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, ed. Robert F. Heizer (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978).
37. Father Mariano Payeras to José de la Guerra, Commandant of Santa Barbara Presidio, Mission La Purísima, December 24, 1817; List of neophytes who have fled from Mission La Purísima, 1818; and Father Payeras to José de la Guerra, Mission La Purísima, May 4, 1818, in Cutter, ed., *Writings of Mariano Payeras*, 141, 43-44, 49.
38. William J. Wallace, "Northern Valley Yokuts," *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, 462-70, Wallace, "Southern Valley Yokuts," *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, 448-61; Robert F. Spier, "Foothill Yokuts," *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, 471-84.
39. Juan B. Alvarado, San Juan de Castro, July 4, 1840, California Archives, Departmental State Papers, Monterey, Tomo IV, 43:172-177, BL.
40. For an interpretation of Indians as active agents of change during the post-mission period, see George Harwood Phillips, "Indians and the Breakdown of the Spanish Mission System in California," *Ethnohistory* 21, no. 4 (1974): 291-302.