

CHINOOKAN HOUSEHOLDS ON THE LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER: CONTACT AND COMPLEXITY

Introduction

The project completes archaeological research conducted in the Greater Lower Columbia River Region (GLCRR, Figure 1) (Hajda 1984) since 1987 on the political economy of Native American households between A.D. 1400 – A.D. 1850 by Portland State University's Wapato Valley Archaeological Project (WVAP). Since its initiation the project has produced three Ph.D. dissertations (we do not have a Ph.D. program) 14 MA theses and 23 publications, including an edited volume (Sobel, Gahr and Ames 2006), many coauthored by former or current students. The larger project investigates two topics: 1) how household production was organized to sustain and finance permanent inequality among complex hunter-gatherers; and 2) how households participated in the fur trade between 1792 and 1850, including changes in production and social organization in response to the fur trade. This proposal requests funding to assist in the completion of analyses and report preparation of the excavations of the Meier and Cathlapotle sites (Figure 1), two contact-era Native American residential sites in the Wapato Valley (a.k.a. Portland Basin) portion of the Great Lower Columbia River Region (GLCRR) (Hajda 1984), near Portland, Oregon, the integration of the results of all analyses, including those from two additional sites, and storage of all collections produced by the excavations. The immediate project has been funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (RZ-50601-06) for \$150,000.00 (including overhead) and a donation from a local supporter for \$20,000.00. The NEH grant was originally for the period 2006-2009 but has been extended to 2010. The original budget request to NEH was \$404,378.00. Consequently, significant aspects of that proposal were dropped or deferred. Among the funds that were some for student hourly wages. The requested funding replaces some of the lost student wages.

Our partners in this project include the Chinook tribe, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Friends of the Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge as well people in the communities of Scappoose, Oregon, and Ridgefield, Washington. Other institutions and personnel involved include Oregon State University, University of Michigan, University of Missouri, Simon Fraser University, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, University of California Berkeley, and Southern Illinois University. One of its most tangible products has been the construction of a plankhouse based on our excavations on the Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge (Sohn 2005) which is used as by the Chinook for social and ritual purposes and by the USFWS and the community for interpretation.

Regional Background

The GLCRR encompasses the final 200 miles of the Columbia River and adjacent portions of the Pacific coastline. The region was one of several interaction spheres comprising the Northwest Coast culture area (Hajda 1984, Suttles, 1990, Ames and Maschner 1999). The documentary record is primarily the accounts of explorers such as Lewis and Clark, of individuals in the fur trade, and early settlers (e.g. Gairdner 1841, Simpson 1847, Coues 1897, Franchere 1967, Moulton 1990). There is not the voluminous ethnographic record that exists for portions of the coast further north (e.g. Boas 1894, Ray 1938).

Several ethno-linguistic groups occupied the GLCRR at contact. Speakers of Chinookan languages were the most numerous (Hajda 1984, Silverstein 1990) with large comparatively dense populations concentrated on the major rivers and tributaries. Chinookan social organization and economy had much in common with other Northwest Coast societies (Hajda 1984, Silverstein 1990). The household was the basic socio-economic unit, and the village or town the maximal unit. Households lived in large post and beam plankhouses. Society was divided into two broad classes, free and slave (Donald 1997, Hajda 2005, Ames 2008). Free people were subdivided into a chiefly elite and commoners. Chiefly status was based on heredity, wealth, and widespread social and economic ties (Hajda 1984). The slave population in the late 18th and early 19th centuries may have been 25% of the total (Mitchell 1985).

Contact began c. 1775, with the first documented exploratory voyages along the coast (Hajda 1984, Gibson 1992). Ongoing contact on the Columbia began in 1792 with the European discovery of its mouth (Vancouver 1926), and the start of the maritime fur trade. The fur trade brought the GLCRR into an