Death and Burial at the
Royal Presidio de San Diego, Alta California

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Abstract

Mission San Diego de Alcalá’s death and burial records from Spanish and Mexican era San Diego, together with the results of archaeological excavation at the Royal Presidio de San Diego, offer a unique opportunity to help characterize life and death within southernmost Alta California’s colonial frontier. The written records document that at least 213 persons buried at the presidio between 1769 and 1831, although other records indicate as many as 222 through 1876. The archaeological record contributes information on 119 burials, 91 of which have undergone basic forensic study.

The overall goal of this study is to construct understandable meaning from the detritus of daily life more than one hundred and eighty years ago. A synthesis of the archaeological data, the forensic information, and varied historical information provide new and important information about ethnicity, gender, mortality, and burial patterns within the presidio’s cemetery and adjacent chapel. Analysis of the funerary goods and other artifacts provides insights into trade, status, and religious customs. While the occupants of the presidio were “Spanish” in a general sense of language and culture, few of the deceased had ever been to Spain, and non-Hispanic Native people accounted for about one-quarter of the deceased. Hispanics were nearly all mixed race, what might better be called Mexicano, by the later 1770s. Interestingly, of the remains of 25 persons encountered in the chapel, six can be positively identified by name, and a seventh is also identified but with less certainty.

Introduction

Some Historical Background

Built in 1769 to be the first prong of Spanish settlements that would dot the coast of Alta California, the Royal Presidio de San Diego was home to padres, soldiers and their families, craftsmen, Indian workers, prisoners, and others prior to the early 1830s, before Pueblo of San Diego (now Old Town) was established at the foot of Presidio Hill.

Settlers’ spiritual needs were addressed by the presidio’s “church complex,” here used as a term of convenience but also one defined by Ezell (1976) as such and that gathers together: the garrison’s adobe chapel (Figures 1 and 2), cemetery (aka campo santo), priests’ quarters, storage rooms (ancillary non-military structures), and courtyard. Non-consecrated open ground, where some burials occurred, might be viewed as set apart from the “church complex” designation, since it lacked any Roman Catholic imprimatur.

The chapel (Figures 1 and 2) consisted of the following: the nave (a longitudinal room used generally by the congregants); a sanctuary with a slightly raised floor adjoining the nave directly east; a sacristy (an area where sacred items were kept [e.g., vestments, vessels] on the south); a baptistry on the south; and a side chapel on the north. Fourteen burials are known from the nave, four from the baptistry, three from the side chapel, three from the sanctuary, and one from the sacristy.

Population at the presidio waxed and waned, particularly as regiments moved up from mainland Mexico and then deployed elsewhere. There were rarely more than 70 occupants within the adobe walls of the garrison. In 1774, at the urging of Father Junipero
and their converts again decamped from the presidio in 1776 returning east to permanently inhabit the more extensive mission grounds.

For a second time the presidio reverted to its function as a military garrison having a church complex whose chapel relinquished yet again its status as a mission building. As documented in the baptismal records, some individuals were, however, baptized and/or underwent conversion at the presidio under the aegis of visiting priests. Some presidio occupants were brought to the mission to receive last rites or other religious rites and were buried there rather than at the presidio. For a detailed chronological narrative of the adobe chapel, which was completed in 1783, see Ezell (2009).

Serra and Father Luis Jayme, the central institution, Mission San Diego de Alcalá, was relocated from the presidio to a site 6 miles east and deeper into what is now Mission Valley. The presidio then reverted back to being a secular frontier military institution with a chapel, but a chapel now divested of its former status as the mission chapel.

The following November Tipai warriors intent on rid-

Figure 1. Schematic of adobe chapel and ancillary structures at San Diego Presidio. Courtesy Steve Van Wormer.
There was a greater use of the upriver mission burial grounds where more than 2,000 persons were laid to rest. The majority of “Hispanic” settlers, Indians, and other members of the San Diego community were buried there. The cemetery at the Royal Presidio de San Diego, which largely served that military outpost, continued to be used as late as 1876, almost 40 years after military abandonment of the fortifications. The majority of these burials occurred between 1790 and 1825, with a substantial decrease after 1825, reflecting the movement of settlers to El Pueblo de San Diego at the base of the hill during the Mexican period.

Based on the mission’s presidial death and burial records, at least 213 individuals were officially buried at the presidio campo santo and chapel between 1769 and ca. 1830. Other persons not listed in the church records were also buried at the presidio including the non-Catholic American trapper Sylvester Pattie (deceased 1828), who would have been interred in non-consecrated open ground beyond the campo santo.

In the early American period, José Francisco Snook (died 1848), Henry Delano Fitch (died pre-1849), and Natalia Fitch (died ca. 1841) were laid to rest in the front of the adobe chapel’s nave. Much later, perhaps...
reflecting the continuing sacredness of the place, at least four Indian women were buried at the presidio between 1873 and 1875 (Carrico 2014:76). In 1875 José, an Indian from what is now Old Town San Diego, was buried on Presidio Hill complete with “a funeral entourage and mournful chants” (Carrico 2014:76).

In 1835, and without documented ceremony, the presidio was abandoned by troops who left for another assignment. Apparently, a few soldiers and an officer occasionally stayed in the adjacent San Diego pueblo. On December 18, 1841, Bishop Francisco Garcia Diego y Moreno offered the Sacrament of Confirmation to 125 persons at what must have been a forlornly desolate chapel (Bancroft 1886:196). While not specifically stated that the bishop performed the ritual at the presidio, such may be inferred.

Today the ruins of the presidio and the adobe chapel lie beneath fill dirt and grass above Old Town San Diego and Highway I-8. The location is a park owned by the City of San Diego, a civic body that largely ignores the historical heritage and cultural value of this unique National Register heritage site.

**Study Focus**

This study revolves mainly on archaeological, forensic, and archival investigations relating to the Royal Presidio de San Diego, mostly to persons whose final resting place occurred within its church complex (Figure 1). It does not address the results of extensive field work in other portions of the presidio, such as the gateway/prison (Barbolla 1992), or the living quarters/barracks (Bartel 1991; Williams 2004). As Alta California’s first mission and presidio in the chain of twenty-one missions and four presidios, the archaeological results are of great value to historians, archaeologists, descendants, and Native Americans.

The major goal here is to provide information on persons buried in the presidio chapel including their names, years of interment, gender, age status (adult or child), and a brief commentary that might identify occupations, ethnic status, and marital status. In the case of attaching names to a decedent within the chapel, success was achieved in several instances, firmly for six, tentatively for a seventh.

Other goals revolved on examining the demographics of the presidio’s inhabitants using burial data. This includes information on mortality, health, and ethnicity. Frontier trade, religious customs, and social status are also explored. Artifacts of special interest include funerary furniture (caskets and coffins), religious icons, glass beads, and other grave goods. When known, burial positions (directional orientation, body positioning, disturbances) are also discussed.

**Limitations and Potential Biases in the Study**

Given the wealth of data on the 119 burials that were fully or partially archaeologically excavated, the thousands of artifacts spanning one hundred years, and the voluminous historical records, it is not feasible in a journal article format to document all that is known about Alta California’s first Spanish colonial cemetery. Instead, one focus of this report is to discuss in general the presidio burials and more specifically the seven burials that can be reconciled with the historical records and the artifacts recovered with the burials.

By moving beyond the archaeological record of the burials, it is possible to give a sense of life and meaning to what are otherwise only archaeological remains. Another emphasis is on providing an overview to the previously undocumented excavations within the presidio cemetery. The more than a decade of near constant excavation by San Diego State College (now University) and later by Mesa Community College resulted in hundreds of field logs, photographs, and, of course, artifacts but few published narratives.
There is some level of ambiguity in the mission burial and death records from the late 1700s and in the archaeological data compiled for more than a decade of excavation and analysis in the 1960s–1970s. The archival data was initially derived from carefully studying and compiling copies of the original death and burial records kept at the San Diego Mission Diocese. More recently the Huntington Library’s Early California Population Project provided these data online and tabulated in English, making the author’s task of reading the documents far easier and electronically searchable.

The mission burial and death records are generally straightforward with the caveat that some of the spellings and orthographic forms for Native American names, in particular, Kumeyaay placenames and family names are at times inconsistent and linguistically in error. Because Mission San Diego was destroyed in early November 1775, mission records for birth, baptisms, marriages, and deaths between May 1769 and November 6, 1775, were lost, although in 1776–1777 Father Junipero Serra and others made a valiant attempt to reconstruct the records. While the record of baptisms may have been sketchy, marriage and death records were probably more accurately reconstructed both because of the limited number of these occurrences and more accurate remembrances of those involved.

Certainly, some burials took place at the presidio prior to the first entry in Libros I which occurred in November 1775 after the Tipai revolt. Father Luis Jayme is listed as burial 00001, and Joseph Arroyo is official burial 00002. Yet, in the death record for Joseph Arroyo on November 6, 1775, the officiant noted that Arroyo’s mother, María Petrona Garcia, had previously been buried at the presidio. Her reconstructed burial record is number 00018, which is undated, being one of the documents reconstructed after the November 4, 1775, fire and destruction. Even with these limitations, it is possible by comparing baptismal records with death records to derive gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, and place of birth of the deceased. Additionally, marriage records also provide points of comparison and occasionally data not presented in baptismal and death records.

The archaeological record also carried some ambiguities and uncertainties. The San Diego State College (now University) archaeological program at the chapel complex extended over a decade involving literally hundreds of students and volunteers with varying degrees of observational and excavational skills. Further, the field techniques varied somewhat, including defining what actually constituted a single burial. Commonly, a skull or a large portion of a skull denoted a minimum specimen, although at times this standard varied. In the field logs and tabulations of presumptive burials, numbers 1–126, were assigned to sets of remains (including a single amputated female leg), but in fact it appears that there were actually 119 verified burials.

In Jeffery Howard’s forensic study of 91 sets of human remains from the chapel and campo santo (1975), he did not, of course, have the more recent forensic guides of Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994) to standardize his data as he might have today. Instead he applied the works of Stewart and Trotter (1954), Vallois (1965), and Bass (1971). For the current study, which does not focus specifically on the physical attributes of the skeletons, this lack of more modern standardization is not crucial.

Regarding potential bias in the physical and forensic study, some researchers have suggested that female skeletal material may deteriorate more rapidly than male thus leading to an underestimation of the number of female burials. Research by Walker et al. (1988:183–188) on burials from Mission La Purísima Concepción and a precontact cemetery disputed this notion but did find that young children and the elderly may be significantly underrepresented in burial
populations (Deetz 1963). Given that few elderly people lived and died at the San Diego Presidio, there is probably little bias in that direction. There may be, however, an underrepresentation of young children in the archaeological record.

Nearly 150 years of disturbance from bioturbation, faunal turbation, and historic activities (including burials within and on top of previous burials) severely disturbed many interments. It is possible, although probably rare, that some portions of an individual may have been counted twice and others perhaps not at all. In addition, over the past several decades some artifacts have lost their provenience through a variety of errors and mishaps.

Nonetheless, the combination of various sources, including archival records, archaeological records, artifacts, and published reports, provides a substantial and valuable data base. Out of respect for Native American concerns, the photographs that illustrate this report do not depict any identified Native American remains. While not presenting a complete picture of the burials and archaeological record for the presidio campo santo, this paper offers significant insights.

Archaeological Excavations

When excavation began in 1965, by what was then San Diego State College, it was initially thought that the mounds on the southern central portion within the known boundaries of the presidio were the commandant’s residence or some other domestic buildings. As the project director Paul Ezell later related, they were instead the chapel and its associated burial ground, and their discoveries were in many ways an unpleasant surprise. The discovery of burials under the mortared tile floors came about while investigating clearly defined “slumps” in the floor suggesting that the soils under some tiles had been removed and then replaced (Figure 3).

Figure 4 captures the level of activity as students and volunteers attempted to document the seemingly never-ending number of burials. Archaeological excavation directed initially by Ray Brandes, then director of the Serra Museum, and supervised by Donald Brockington in 1965 (Brockington and Brandes 1965) and then more extensively by Dr. Paul H. Ezell of San Diego State University from 1966 to 1976 (Ezell 1976) uncovered the remains of approximately 119 burials comprising 56 percent of the burials known through mission records (n = 213).

There are several probable reasons for this disparity. There is no reason to believe that the so-called “Marston Wall” from the 1920s that was constructed to encompass the presidio actually includes the entire

Figure 3. Burial 8 showing the burial pit excavated below the subfloor of the presidio chapel within the sacristy. Burial is running east/west.
complex and/or the southern defense wall. The southern defense wall, which is assumed to be the outer limits of the garrison, may have expanded or retracted over the decades of use, and in fact at one time was described as a simple stockade (Ezell 2009:34–35). Construction of a later adobe defense wall and the consecrated ground for burial may or may not be within what is now assumed to be the limits of the defense wall. Burials on the south side of the campo santo were found up to the very edge of the modern wall. It is quite possible that tens of burials still remain beneath the grass outside of the modern wall to the south.

Additionally, an undetermined number of burials found at upper levels of the site were left in situ without exploring the possibility that earlier burials existed beneath them. Such a pattern of burials within the same grave pit at differing levels was referenced by Ezell (1976) and noted at Mission San Diego de Alcalá (Carrico 2019). A third possibility is that the remains of the newly born and young infants may not have endured the more than 200 years in the ground.

Many, if not most, of the burials were in fact left in situ upon discovery, and the forensic study data was generated largely on-site (Howard 1975). In part
this was because of the extremely fragile nature of the burials. Few burials or portions of burials were removed to a laboratory for study. Those remains were stored at San Diego State University and at the San Diego Historical Center, but all remains have subsequently been reburied at the presidio.

Initially the site was divided into numbered rooms following the apparent forms of the still extant but buried walls. Later, when it became clear that one of the larger “rooms” was actually the interior of the chapel, a shift was made to use more standard 5 x 5 ft. units with addresses such as “East 5 North 10” with each unit’s southwest corner serving as the datum. All units were excavated in 6 in. levels, although the burial features, which were sometimes pedestaled, were often treated as a single cultural level or cultural feature.

The most dominant structure within the church complex was the presidio’s adobe chapel (Figures 1, 2, and 5), which was begun in 1778 and completed in April 1783 (Ezell 2009). It replaced earlier wooden structures and what was described in 1782 as a miserable hut used as a church. The new structure included a long nave (approximately 40 m in length and 8 m wide), a side chapel later cut into the original nave wall on the north, a baptistry on the southwest side of the nave, a sacristy on the south side of the nave, and an altar and altar platform (predela) abutting the end (eastern wall) of the sanctuary.

To the east of the nave was a series of rooms, including living quarters for the visiting priest, storerooms, and other rooms with uncertain functions, although the room immediately behind the sanctuary may have served as a dressing room or ready room for the priests. These buildings were apparently laid out on magnetic north rather than true north with an approximate 3.5 degree variance. That the early colonists possessed a compass with which to lay out lines is verified by the mission inventories (Inventario 1777).

To the south of the chapel and its contiguous rooms were two large open areas; one served as the cemetery, and to the east there was a courtyard that contained a hornó (domed oven) for cooking and a drain system to carry water away from the buildings (Figure 1). Van Wormer (2014) noted that this open area and an area south of the sacristy, especially in later years, also served as a repository for trash and refuse. These outdoor areas were, as with the rest of the presidio, surrounded by an adobe defense wall.

Chapel construction followed basic engineering common to many southern California Spanish structures. The walls were constructed of unfired adobe blocks that were set on slightly raised cobble foundations in an effort to reduce capillary action and erosion of the blocks. The floors were first leveled and then most often layered in sand and capped with fired clay floor tiles (ladrillos) joined by mortar. The early chapel and other structures were roofed with thin beams and thatching, and in later years large beams replaced the superstructure and were then covered in curved roof tiles called tejas (Ezell 2009).

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, after performing some limited amateur archaeological investigation, the entire presidio site, including the chapel complex, was buried beneath tons of soil and grass sod. The soil was excavated from the San Diego River and from low mounds below Presidio Hill. Apparently unbeknownst to the excavators, they were, in some cases, essentially removing portions of a Kumeyaay village known as Kosaii (Kumeyaay for “dry place” or “drying place”). This presumed removal and displacement of precontact materials explains, at least in part, the presence of arrow points, Native ceramics, and lithic materials in what is often called the “Marston fill.” George Marston was a prominent local merchant and philanthropist credited with purchasing and saving what is now Presidio Hill and the presidial ruins from residential development.

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While there may be some doubt as to the exact location of Kosaii, also spelled Cosoy, competent researchers including Mogilner (2016) and Ezell and Ezell (1987) locate the settlement on the flanks and at the foot of Presidio Hill along the banks of the meandering San Diego River. As a result of this “borrowing” from a midden deposit, at least some of the upper levels of the presidio complex are a mixture of redeposited contact period Native materials and an older precontact deposit.

Thus, during the 1960–1970s archaeological excavations, it was common to encounter substantial Kumeyaay artifacts (Tizon Brown Ware, lithic materials, shellfish, bifaces, and milling tools) in those upper levels of the soils and then transition lower to the postcontact Spanish period. The presence of such large quantities of Kumeyaay artifacts and cultural debris in the upper levels is, arguably, not from use and discarding in the late 1700s and early 1800s, but rather from redeposition.

This probable, but not conclusive, reverse stratigraphy coupled with subsurface turberation posed serious obstacles to interpretation, at least for the upper levels. Because of continuous use of the city park that has overlain the burials since the early 1930s, use that has included irrigation and application of fertilizers,
the physical state of many of the burials deteriorated. Reflecting both the relative age of interment and method of burial, several of the burials were nothing more than powder, while others were in remarkably good shape.

An apparent pattern of better preservation appears to be associated with those burials that were without a coffin (Ezell 1976). It has been speculated that the wooden coffins served as a type of trap for water and chemicals, thus speeding up the process of decay and deterioration. By contrast, a body wrapped only in cloth or in a blanket would have allowed for moisture and chemicals in the soil to pass around the cadaver, or at least not remain in contact with the body as was the case for the coffins.

**Burial Population Based on Mission Records**

Before discussing the population at the presidio, it is appropriate to provide some general definitions for racial and ethnic types represented there. The issue of how to categorize the varied ethnic and racial “types” who lived on the frontier and at the presidio is highly complex (Mason 1998:8–11, 48–50; Johnson and Lorenz 2010:157–193). Even contemporary observers were in a quandary as shown by a response to an 1813 questionnaire inquiring about castes and castas in California. The response from Mission Santa Barbara said in part: “It cannot be known with certainty how many castes the inhabitants of the Presidio [Santa Barbara] adjoining this mission are divided. Although it is very well known that not all are genuine Spaniards either of European of American origin, yet, at least they regard themselves as such (Geiger and Meighan 1976:12).”

As used in this paper, españoles, Spanish, and gente de razón refer to those settlers and occupants of the presidio who either self-identified themselves as such or appear in mission baptism, marriage, and death records as such. In general, these three terms refer to persons of non-Native origins or ethnic backgrounds who professed ties to Spain, or more broadly by the 1700s to Mexico. Persons not within these categories were Indio (Native persons), mestizo (the product of an españoles and a Native), and quebrado/mulatto (the child of an españoles and a Negro). For examples of how these racial and ethnic classifications played out in Alta California and the fluidity inherent in self-identification, see Mason (1998:45–64).

Based on the Spanish/Mexican Catholic mission burial records, and not including the eight or so later post-1831 American period interments, of the 213 persons buried at the campo santo and chapel, adults of several ethnicities formed the largest category, comprising 122 individuals or 59 percent. Subadult, infant, and child burials of all ethnicities comprised the remainder 43 percent (n = 91) of the total. That total number of 213 includes burials within the various rooms of the chapel and excludes Luis Jayme who was removed.

It should be kept in mind that this relatively high figure for subadults reflects the sheer number of “españoles” and indigenous/mestizo children who lived at the garrison with their españoles fathers and mestizo and indigenous mothers and potentially of the high childhood mortality rate. Male non-Indian adults comprised 55 of the adult population (n = 122) and when combined with the 29 Native Indian adult males, including mestizo/and probables, comprised 84 of all adults.

This high percentage of adult males could be expected given that the presidio was a military garrison with a marginally predominant male population. Thirty-four of the 213 archivally recorded burials were in fact soldiers or sailors, while other males were armorers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and other craftsmen. According to the mission records, 43 of the burials were adult Indians, and 29 of these were male. Indian burials, 43 adults and 14 children, comprise 57 of the burials at the presidio. In all cases only those persons identified in the mission records specifically as Indio or India or
mestizo are placed into the non-European (españoles) or non-Anglo-American category.

The 23 adult female non-Indians and 14 female adult Indians were largely wives of the Spanish and Mexican soldiers and, less frequently, workers; an unknown number were widows. In addition, American period historic accounts noted that between 1873 and 1875 at least five “Indian women,” presumably indigents or workers/servants from Old Town San Diego, were buried in the old presidio cemetery (Carrico 2014:76). Only three of the documented burials at the presidio chapel were Anglo-Americans (Natalia Fitch, her father Henry Delano Fitch, and José Francisco Snook). Their burials are recorded in post-secularization Catholic church records.

The ethnic character of the presidio deceased reflects the varied cultural and ethnic diversity officially recorded for early colonial San Diego. Williams (2004:124), using data derived from Mason’s (1998) analysis of padrones (contemporary registers), noted that in 1782 about six in 10 of the presidio population listed themselves as Espanoles (nearly all born in the Americas), a third were mestizos, 1.9 percent were of African/Spanish descent, 3.8 percent were “racially mixed,” and 1.9 percent were Indios. Eight years later, reflecting continued ethnic and racial mixing, persons at the presidio self-described themselves as the “Espanoles” comprised 52 percent, racially mixed climbed to 33.3 percent followed by “Indios” at 9.4 percent, and “Mestizos” at 2.1 percent.

With the exception of Francisco Gomez, a native of Seville, Spain, no one buried at the presidio was a first generation European—and so might more accurately be called “Mexicans.” As noted above, the majority were what is commonly and confusedly termed Hispanic of often mixed blood, including Spanish/Indian, Spanish/African/Indian, and Spanish/African. By 1769 the Spanish colonial world had experienced more than 250 years of ethnic and racial blending. Even Natalia Fitch, the child of Henry Delano Fitch, was the offspring of an Anglo-American father and a Hispanic mother, Josefa Carrillo Fitch.

For the most part the Indians of pure blood buried at the presidio were local Kumeyaay or Cochimi from Baja California, while other members of the indigenous population were often mixed (mestizos) from the interior of Mexico, Baja California, and the San Gabriel/San Juan Capistrano missions north of San Diego. Kumeyaay people buried at the presidio in the Spanish/Mexican period came from a wide range of villages throughout the San Diego region, reflecting the success of conversion at many villages but failure to convert Kumeyaay at others.

The Native villages most represented in the death and burial records were those closest to the presidio, including Ystagua, Aapusquele, and, Rincon de Jamo, as well as more distant settlements including U’tay (Otay), Jacum (Jacumba), and Ahti (Las Chollas). Clan names were rarely entered for the presidio burials, but the Hilmeup, Escaripa, and Quilp clans are represented. Indians from the missions of Baja California included Natives from Mission San Ignacio, Mission San Gertrudis, Mission San Fernando de Velicatá, Mission San Xavier, and Mission San Miguel. All these Native people from Baja California were Cochimi except for Tipai/Kumeyaay from San Miguel.

Several Indian prisoners were buried at the presidio, including an unconverted Tipai rebel leader, Naguasajo, who hanged himself in his prison cell and is unlikely to be buried in consecrated ground (Chace 2017; Geiger 1955:78–79); Tabaco, an Ipai rebel leader from the distant village of Pa’mu (Pamo), also died in his cell (Carrico 2017) as did Naltipoco, a Tipai from U’tay (Otay).

Additionally, four Kumeyaay Indians who were executed at the site between 1813 and 1826 (Libros de Mision San Diego, Tomo I–II) are buried at the...
A Gabrielino, or Tongva, Juan de Mata from Mission San Gabriel, who was killed during transport to an uncertain location was buried at the presidio, and Miguel, another Gabrielino who died in the presidio prison and received last rites, was buried there.

One member of the clergy was buried at the site. Father Luis Jayme was buried at the presidio following his murder by Kumeyaay rebels in November 1775. He was later disinterred and reburied at the Mission San Diego de Alcalá in Mission Valley from where he was subsequently moved at least two more times. When the “new” mission church was completed in ca. 1778, he was reinterred in the chapel and then again in 1813 when the mission church on its current site was completed.

The deceased who found their final resting place at the presidio campo santo also included several soldiers from throughout Baja California, including Loreto, and soldiers and their wives from the mainland including San Blas, Guadalajara, Cucula, Tepic, Magdalena, Mazatlán, Mexico City, and Sinaloa. There was also a caulker, Juan Bernardino Ulloa, from the Spanish frigate *Princesa*. Other burials include soldiers’ mothers and children, two successful American merchants, and a blacksmith and a carpenter, both killed in the 1775 Ipai uprising (Carrico 1997).

**Mortality Data and Physiological Information**

The mission burial and death records typically provide only minimal information about the cause of death at the presidio with little more than the name, gender, and age. Overall, San Diego, both the mission and presidio, suffered lower mortality rates than most of Alta California. As shown in Table 1, with the exception of the years 1810–1814 and 1825–1829, San Diego death rates were consistently well below death rates of those for the combined other missions (Carrico 2019; Jackson 1994:117–162). San Diego was hit by epidemic diseases (measles and perhaps smallpox) in the 1806–1808 period and again in the mid-1820s.

Jackson (1994:117–143) and Jackson and Castillo (1995:41–42) documented that the measles outbreaks of 1806 and 1808 stand out with substantially higher death rates for the Alta California missions, including San Diego, and note that in the Alta California mission system the years 1827–1828 were also higher, but not significantly so. This apparently was not the case at the San Diego Presidio where 1806 and 1808, respectively, witnessed only five and eight deaths. Mortality did climb in the 1810–1814 period. By contrast, deaths at the presidio were the highest in 1797 (n = 10, significantly higher in 1827 during the measles/smallpox epidemic (n = 18) and 1828 (n = 10). It would appear the death rates throughout the Alta California mission system were much higher in 1806–1808 than was the case at the presidio but that the measles epidemic of 1827–1828 was more severe at the presidio. At the San Diego Presidio, based on a relatively small overall population, the child mortality rate during 1827–1828 represents 43 percent of the deaths. This percent of child deaths is strikingly consistent with Jackson’s figure of 44 percent for the Alta California missions overall (1995:119).

Because the mission death records rarely list the age at death, we are lacking such details for most burials. The forensic study, however, conducted on a portion (91 of 119) of the burials reviewed in the context of the mission burials and death records offers a glimpse into mortality (Howard 1975; Libros de Mision 1777–1830). The average age of death for adult Hispanics was 42 years, and the average age for adult Indians was 38 years. The four-year difference is probably not statistically significant and may reflect the slightly older population of Hispanics who resided at the presidio. In addition, as Williams (2003) has noted and the mission records seems to verify, there was an age differential between Hispanic males and females.
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at the presidio. On average, men were ten years older than the women they selected as wives.

Overall, the archaeological forensic data and written records indicate that the causes of death varied from childbirth, musket ball wounds, hanging (suicide), arrowhead wounds, and varied diseases (e.g. pneumonia). Most often the cause of death was not stated.

Specific examples of where the cause of death was stated include the blacksmith, Joseph Arroyo, and the carpenter, Urselino, both killed by Tipai arrows in the 1775 insurrection at Mission San Diego de Alcalá and buried at the presidio. Urselino’s death record noted specifically that he died from arrow point wounds to the groin area. As discussed below, four Kumeyaay men were executed by musket fire and at least one hanged himself (although he would not have been buried in consecrated ground).

Placement and Patterning of the Burials

Of the 119 burials that were archaeologically excavated or partially excavated, 94 were buried in the cemetery or in open ground (possibly unconsecrated ground) near the cemetery. Twenty-five individuals were buried in the chapel, including 14 in the nave itself, four in the baptistry, three in the sanctuary, three in the side chapel, and one in the sacristy.

A vast majority of the burials were in supine position situated with their head positioned to the east, hands folded across the chest or abdomen, and ankles most commonly folded across each other. This arrangement is consistent with data on the burials from Mission La Purisima (Deetz 1963; Humphrey 1965), the only other Spanish colonial mission for which there is substantial published interment data. At Mission San Diego de Alcalá in Mission Valley, most of the burials uncovered in a 1989 excavation within a portion of the church’s campo santo also exhibited hands folded across their chests but were pointed in a north/northeastern direction (Carrico 2019). Placement of the head tilted to one side or the other occurred but rarely. Average depth of the burials was 4–6 ft. below ground surface at the time of burial, although some, possibly later burials, were between 3 and 4 ft. in depth.

It appears that the majority of the interments were either without any enclosure (e.g., coffin) or with merely

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<th>Period</th>
<th>San Diego</th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1785–1789</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790–1794</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795–1799</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800–1804</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1805–1809</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810–1814</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815–1819</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820–1824</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825–1829</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830–1834</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Death Rate</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>-22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Comparison of California Mission Death Rates per Thousand Persons, Mission San Diego versus California Missions.

PCAS Quarterly 55(1)
a shroud or blanket. One soldier was buried in a horse hair blanket, and at least two females had lace and filigree shrouds. Approximately 21 of the burials were in wooden coffins with 11 being hexagonal and 6 simple rectangular. Four were of indeterminate shape. This is a higher number than the six coffin burials suggested earlier by Greta and Paul Ezell (San Diego Historical Society 1968), but at the time the couple had knowledge of less than 25 burials. Suitable wood for coffins was difficult to procure in frontier San Diego. The 1777 and 1783 Inventario for Mission San Diego lists coffins, “big” and “small” (Inventario 1777; 1783) but does not note the type of wood or origin.

The presence of hexagonal coffins apparently does not reflect a particular temporal setting given that Burial 7, assumed to be Joseph M. Arroyo, was in a hexagonal coffin, and he was buried in November 1775. The Fitch burials (Burial 12 and 16) were also in a hexagonal coffins. At Mission San Diego, 1850s U.S. Army soldier burials were in hexagonal coffins (Carrico 2019; Moriarty 1973; Moriarty and Weyland 1971).

For the 94 burials excavated within the campo santo, rather than within the chapel, there was evidence of severe disturbance caused by the excavation of later burial pits. It is probable that over the more than five decades of use as a burial ground, markers became displaced or lost. Grave diggers, probably lower ranking soldiers or Indian laborers, would have dug into previous graves before realizing their mistake. In some instances, it appears that the bones of previous burials were pushed aside to make room for another burial (for example, see the descriptions of Burial 5 and 15 below).

For those persons buried within the chapel (nave, baptistry, sanctuary, side chapel, and sacristy), interesting chronological indicators were noted. It is possible that some of the early burials, pre-1778, predated construction of the adobe church, which was completed in 1783. In those instances, the burials may have been literally tiled over to accommodate the larger church beyond the footprint of the earlier churches.

In other instances, several of the burials were placed in the ground after the floor tiles had been initially laid and mortared. The floor tiles were apparently chiseled or dug out, the grave excavated, the deceased lowered into the ground (with or without a coffin), soils shoveled back in, and tiles replaced and re-mortared. In general, this pattern probably indicates a post-1783 date, when the chapel construction was completed, and pre-1835 burials, reflecting that the religious structures were still in use and that for cultural and aesthetic purposes the floor was repaired. By contrast, some burials beneath the tile floors exhibited placement of the tiles on top of the burial pit but without careful placement and re-mortaring of the tiles. This probably reflects post-abandonment burial after 1835.

Based on archaeological evidence, at least 25 persons were buried within the church itself, typically in the nave area (refer to Figure 5 for the locations of seven of the burials). Three were interred in the sanctuary, including one individual (Burial 7) buried beneath the altar platform itself (Figure 6). At least four burials, including Burial 97, were buried in the southern baptistry (Figure 7), and at least three burials (Burials 5, 6, and 15) were in the northern side chapel. A single burial (Burial 8) was noted in the sacristy. Regarding burials within a California church or chapel, Bancroft (1885:1:598) noted, “It was customary to bury gente de razon [literally persons of reason, i.e., Espanoles and converted persons] in the churches or chapels, but the friars [after 1797] made an effort to break up the practice.”

The mission death and burial records, as shown in Table 2 note that 41 persons were buried in the church, the vast majority between 1775 and 1797, after which the practice seems to be halted, at least officially. A single burial was recorded in the mission records as in the chapel as late as 1830; the decedent was José
Death and Burial at the Royal Presidio de San Diego, Alta California

Figure 6. Aerial photograph ca. 1975 of eastern portion of presidio chapel and associated rooms. Altar is right center, priests quarters to the left center, sacristy at the top right above (south of) the altar. Note the burial pit for Burial 7 within the altar base predella.

Figure 7. Aerial photograph of baptistry with Burial 97 exposed at the southern end of the room. Photograph is looking south at an oblique angle.
Mariá Estudillo, a cavalry captain. The recovery of 25 burials through archaeological excavation in the chapel and mission death and burial records noting 41 such burials offers an interesting gap between the written record and the archaeological record.

As correctly suggested by Costello and Walker (1987:15) for the Santa Bárbara Presidio, and in contrast to what Ezell (1976) suggested early in the excavations, neither social status nor gender was associated with burial in the chapel. It is possible that as at Santa Bárbara Presidio, the chapel was typically used for the earliest burials with later burials taking place in consecrated ground to the south of the chapel. Certainly, the burial of what is assumed to be Joseph Arroyo in 1775, but apparently reinterred within the sanctuary at the foot of the altar around the time of completion of the 1783 chapel, reflects early usage of the religious structure. This continued up until about 1827, although such use tapered off after 1797. Burials in the chapel subsequent to the 1830s, such as those of Henry and Natalia Fitch and Joseph Snook (see following discussion), do not appear in the mission records.

As shown in Table 2, of the 41 burials known from mission death and burial records to be buried in the chapel overall, 14 were adult males including 12 Hispanics and two Indians from Baja California. One of the Native men was Fabian, a highly regarded Cochimi from San Fernando de Velicatá, who arrived in San Diego in 1769 and served for nearly 20 years as the valet of José de Zúñiga, the presidio commandant. Five adult females were buried in the chapel, including three Hispanic and two Indians.

Eleven children were buried in the chapel, although María Josepha Romero and Joseph María Romero, the young children of the presidio blacksmith and armorer, José Romero, were buried in the side chapel that extended from the north wall of the chapel proper (Table 3). Interestingly, none of the decedent children buried in the chapel were identified as Indio, although a mestizo boy, Nabor Antonio Cota, who was the son of a soldier and a Native woman from San Juan Capistrano/San Gabriel, was buried in the chapel.

Henry Delano Fitch, an important American merchant and sea captain, and his youngest daughter, Natalia, were buried in the front (western) entry to the presidio chapel nave after abandonment of the presidio. Unlike the Spanish and Mexican era burials, the Fitches were buried in redwood coffins with formal hinges, and their initials were carefully indicated on the coffin lids by brass tacks. Henry Fitch’s coffin was also clad in tooled leather.

It is probable that non-Christianized Indians who died in the presidio prison, including Naguasajo, and at least one Protestant fur trapper, Sylvester Pattie, were buried beyond the Catholic consecrated grounds. These areas were not subject to archaeological investigation, and, of course, their deaths do not appear in the mission death records.

Health of the Presidio Population

Arthritis was common among many of the occupants of the presidio, and some of the individuals experienced anemia and osteoporosis. A pathological forensic analysis was conducted by Jeffrey Howard on 91 of the burials (78 percent of the total) that had been excavated at the time of his research (Howard 1975). What follows is a brief discussion of the more outstanding pathologies and health issues noted by Howard.

Howard discovered that at least one individual (Burial 2) had lesions on the ectocranial (exterior of the cranium) surfaces of his frontal and parietal bones as well as abnormally formed femurs exhibiting differential torsion and arthritic lumbar vertebrae and scapulae. He was a short man at about 1.6m (5 ft., 3 in.) and died between the ages of 40 and 50. Burial 40, a male older
Table 2. Forty-One Named Persons Known with Certainty from Mission Burial Records to be Buried within the Presidio Chapel Including the Nave, Side Chapel, Sanctuary, Sacristy, and Baptistry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Burial Year</th>
<th>Sex/Age</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Arroyo (Burial 7)</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>M/Adult</td>
<td>Blacksmith killed by arrows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josef Urselino</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>M/Adult</td>
<td>Carpenter killed by arrows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>F/Adult</td>
<td>Indian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro Fages</td>
<td>1775 or 1777</td>
<td>M/Child</td>
<td>Small Indian child; parents are gentiles from the Mission San Diego.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Chilmiup</td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>F/Adult</td>
<td>Kumeyaay (Hilmeup clan).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregorio</td>
<td>1779</td>
<td>M/Adult</td>
<td>Cochimi from San Fernando de Velicatá.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Guadalupe de Lugo Berdugo</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>F/A</td>
<td>Husband is the corporal of the Presidio Mariano Berdugo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Angel Amarillas</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>M/Adult</td>
<td>Soldier of the garrison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonia Felix</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>F/Adult</td>
<td>Presumed Hispanic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Davila</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>F/Adult</td>
<td>Wife of Presidio carpenter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juachin Guerrero</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>M/Adult</td>
<td>Soldier of the Presidio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Camacho</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>Soldier from Magdalena Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaspar Lopez</td>
<td>1782</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>In the hut that serves as a church. Soldier from San Sebastian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guillermo Carrillo</td>
<td>1782</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>Sergeant of the Presidio. From Loreto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Manuel</td>
<td>1782</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>From Sinaloa. Soldier of the Presidio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Antonio Valenzuela</td>
<td>1783</td>
<td>M/C</td>
<td>From Sinaloa. Soldier of the Presidio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Maria Romero (Burial 15)</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>M/Child</td>
<td>Son of Felipe Romero, blacksmith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomas Canedo</td>
<td>1815</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>Predidario de este Presidio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomasa Lugo</td>
<td>1816</td>
<td>F/A</td>
<td>Widow of Raymundo Carrillo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis Mariano</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>M/C</td>
<td>Son of alferez de Presidio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeledonia</td>
<td>1827</td>
<td>F/C</td>
<td>Mother, Juana Arriola not married.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose Maria Estudillo</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>Jose Maria Estudillo Captain of horse company of Monterey. Wife is Getrudis Orcacitas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Sanchez</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>F/A</td>
<td>Husband is soldier, Julian Guerrero.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Faustina Alvarez</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>F/Child</td>
<td>Daughter of a garrison soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Maria Gloria</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>M/Child</td>
<td>Son of a garrison soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nabor Antonio Cota</td>
<td>1788</td>
<td>M/Child</td>
<td>Mestizo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabian</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>M/Adult</td>
<td>Cochimi from Velicatá.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Maria</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>M/Adult</td>
<td>From “antiqua de la sur.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximo Olivera</td>
<td>1791</td>
<td>M/Child</td>
<td>Son of Juan Maria Olivera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michaela Leyba</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>F/Child</td>
<td>Parents deceased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michaela Nicolasa Beltran</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>F/Adult</td>
<td>Wife of garrison soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domingo Yorba</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>M/Child</td>
<td>Son of garrison soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Josefa Romero (Burial 5)</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>F/Child</td>
<td>Daughter of Felipe Romero.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Truxillo</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>Married to Gertruid Belacque.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Burial Year</th>
<th>Sex/Age</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Baldes</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>Catalanian soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josefa Guillen</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>F/C</td>
<td>Mother is Maria Dolores Valencia. Father is Miguel Antonio Guillen, corporal of soldiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Ascens Sepulveda</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>F/C</td>
<td>Mother is María Antonia Sepulveda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tadeo Sanchez</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>M/A</td>
<td>Native of Sinaloa. Wife P. Montiel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Yorba</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>M/C</td>
<td>Mother is María Josefa Grijalva. Father is Antonio Yorba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susana Reyes</td>
<td>1814</td>
<td>F/A</td>
<td>Married to Diego Lisalde, a soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariano Mercado</td>
<td>1814</td>
<td>F/A</td>
<td>Married to Josefa Sal. Wife is from Monterey, California.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Some unnamed persons may have been buried in the chapel. Additionally, one name, Juan Ulloa, does not appear on this table because his burial status did not specify interment in the chapel. Although archaeological evidence would seem to indicate his burial in the chapel nave, historical records do not so state, leading to uncertainty. Luis Jayme had been buried in the chapel in 1775 but was later removed to Mission San Diego de Alcalá. Spelling and orthography is as provided in the mission death and baptismal records without corrections or changes.

Table 3. Names Ascribed to Specific Presidio Chapel Burials Based on Comparison of Mission Death Records and Archaeological Data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Burial No.</th>
<th>Age at Death</th>
<th>Death/Burial Date</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Maria Romero</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>October 3, 1785</td>
<td>Son of Felipe Romero. Buried in side chapel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Bernardino Ulloa</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>June 22, 1797</td>
<td>Caulker from Frigate Princesa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Josepha Romero</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>December 6, 1797</td>
<td>Daughter of Felipe Romero. Buried in side chapel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Some level of uncertainty is connected to Juan Ulloa (Burial 03) discovered in the side chapel. He is listed in church burial records only as interred at the Presidio. The Romero children were committed to the side chapel. The Fitches, Henry D. and Natalia, as well as José Francisco Snook, were laid to rest in the nave. José Arroyo’s remains were found in the sanctuary.
than 45 years of age, exhibited increased thickness of bone and a lesion on his left maxilla. Burial 80, a male in excess of 45 years of age, suffered from anemia and osteoporotic bone lesions. Number 81, a female between 25 and 35 years of age, suffered trauma to her right tibia and left fibula. Burial 83, a male approximately 30 years old, suffered from periodontal disease (see below) and also exhibited osteoporosis. Burial 28, an adult male, apparently suffered from congenital syphilis, only the second documented example in San Diego, the other being an Indian child at Mission San Diego de Alcalá (Carrico 2019). This low number of examples of syphilis is based on a quite low sample, less than 91 at the presidio and less than 50 from the mission, and is by no means a measure of the incidence of syphilis in the community.

As one might expect within a population that lived between 1770 and 1850, the average height of the adults for which we have accurate data (16 individuals, or only 13 percent of those excavated), was significantly less than current populations. The non-Indian male average was 1.65 m (5 ft., 5 in.), and the female was 1.63 m (5 ft., 4 in.). The tallest male stood about 1.7 m (5 ft., 7 in.), and the tallest female was about 1.68 m (5 ft., 6 in.). For the non-Indian population these heights are well within the norm for Hispanic and non-Nordic populations at the time. For the Indian population the average male was 1.63 m (5 ft., 4 in.). The one measurable female Indian was 1.65 m (5 ft., 5 in.).

Overall, dentition of the study group varied. Dental caries were common, and several individuals suffered from infections and periodontal disease. Adult tooth loss was noted on several of the skulls, with Burial 63, a female between 40 and 50 years of age, having lost most of her teeth prior to death. Burial 83, a male between the ages of 20 and 30 years, suffered dental abscesses and severe tooth loss.

The mortality rate and age of death for the occupants of the presidio is not clearly known, although given that most of the men were in the military and several married females a decade younger, the occupants would have been younger than a general village or pueblo population of the time. Of the burials observed for which age could be determined (Howard 1975:100), 10 persons were estimated to have died before the age of 18 years. This forensic data is consistent with a review of the mission death records which previously indicated that between 1780 and 1831, 38 children, ranging in age from 1 day to 11 were buried at the presidio (Carrico 1973:53). A more thorough examination of burial records indicates that, in total, 91 subadult persons were buried at the presidio. For the adult population it is likely that the majority of individuals at the presidio died in their mid-to-late thirties and early forties (Howard 1975:101).

**Funerary Items/Grave Goods**

**The Frequency of Supplies and Non-Utilitarian Goods**

When compared to the more successful presidios and missions at Santa Barbara, San Luis Rey, and San Francisco, San Diego, at least in the early years, may have endured shortages and struggled to maintain itself on La Frontera. The administrators and commanders of the San Diego Presidio frequently wrote to their superiors complaining of inadequate supplies and food stuffs. Additionally, the presidio competed with the nearby mission for supplies and resources, and the padres were notoriously parsimonious when it came to sharing goods with the military.

For this reason, when funerary goods occurred, they were simple rather than ornate and not in large numbers. Further, funeral goods were limited, probably owing to a general prohibition within the Catholic faith against burials with ornaments or specific funerary objects and to the ascribed low status of Indians within the Spanish class system.
A similar pattern of relatively sparse grave goods has been noted for nearby Mission San Diego de Alcalá (Carrico 2019) and at other California missions, including La Purísima (Humphrey 1965). As noted by Lorann Pendleton, when grave goods are present in Indian burials at mission sites, they may represent a loosening of Catholic policies for a variety of reasons (Blair et al 2009), including possibly to appease the potential or new Native converts whose traditional cultural roots allowed and possibly expected the addition of mortuary offerings.

**Funerary Furniture and Objects**

Burial associated goods were dominated by glass beads, particularly on female burials. In addition to glass beads, crucifixes, medallions, and rosary beads were also recovered from the general area of the chest regions. Because no attempt has been made to clean or restore the badly corroded metal objects, only a small portion of the crucifixes and medallions could be examined for diagnostic images and inscriptions. An x-ray technique previously attempted on two medallions holds some potential for further information (Lennert (1972:22–24).

The majority of the crucifixes recovered at the chapel complex are of the Latin style (a single bar crossing the upper fourth of the linear bar) and several carry representations of either the Virgin Mary (Figure 8) or Christ (Figure 9). Deagan (2002:54–56) and Chiou (2008:16) suggest that most crucifixes found in an archaeological context could be either personal devotional items or attached to rosaries. A Christ figure from Burial 4 (Figure 10) that may have been mounted on a rosary cross is similar to that identified by Deagan as a decade rosary that would have included ten glass or stone beads (2002:66; Figure 4.26).

Most of the funerary objects are not chronologically sensitive enough to date the presidio burials because they often span a relatively long period of time. Further, in some cases the original provenience of the artifacts has been compromised. As one would expect, the recovered crucifixes are consistent with religious icons associated with Franciscan rather than Jesuit or Dominican examples found in central and lower Baja California (Porcayo 2015).

There are, however, exceptions that allow some chronological ordering, including the medallion discovered in association with an adult male (Burial 2). This medallion depicts the Virgin Mary on the front with her arms at her side astride a globe (Figure 11). The words “La Milagrosa de Paris” embellish the outer edges of the front recalling the alleged 1830 Miracle of Paris, the Virgin Mary’s appearance to a French nun (Deagan 2002:56). Beginning in 1832,
these medallions were struck by the tens of thousands and were cherished by both men and women. A similar medallion carrying the raised date of 1830 (the date of the miracle, not of manufacture) on the bottom of the piece was found in what is assumed to be the priests’ quarters east of the sanctuary. The Miracle of Paris medallion appears in archaeological contexts from St. Augustine, Florida, to California (Deagan 2002:54).

A single higa, or fist-shaped metal amulet, was recovered in the general area of disturbed burials within the campo santo but is, unfortunately, lacking accurate provenience. Higas are amulets made of jet in the early Spanish colonial period and of glass and metal in later years. Higas are associated with folk superstition and magic rather than true religion (Deagan 2002:95–97; Chiou 2008:19–20). With the thumb protruding between the index finger and middle fingers of a closed fist (Figure 12), these objects were used to ward
off the *mal de ojo*, or evil eye. While not approved or sanctioned by the Catholic Church, *higas* nonetheless persisted throughout the Spanish Empire with special powers to protect especially young children.

**Buttons**

Buttons, while not actually burial offerings, were occasionally found. Buttons as fasteners were rare in this time period and possibly reflect the economic condition of the deceased. Shell, bone, metal, and wood were used to manufacture the presidio buttons, which include one-hole, two-hole, and four-hole varieties. The copper and brass military style buttons were, as one would expect, generally associated with military men. The exception to that is the presence of phoenix buttons (Figure 13).

One of the more intriguing button types recovered from archaeological excavations is the phoenix button. Given the paucity of formal clothing at the presidio, and in particular for the Indian population, it is unlikely that the phoenix buttons had actually served their last owners as fasteners on clothing, but rather the attractive brass buttons with a powerful appearing bird rising from tongues of flame very likely served as ornaments. Preliminary analysis of phoenix buttons from the presidio and from Mission San Diego (Carrico 2019) using a hand lens indicated wear on the button loop itself and not on the edges of the buttons. Typically, metal buttons used as fasteners exhibit edge wear from passage of the button through cloth, especially rough fibers and non-cottons.

These disk buttons were manufactured in England for the troops of Haitian King Henri Christophe, who emulated Napoleon’s armies. Dates of manufacture have been suggested as sometime between 1812 and 1830 (Strong 1960, 1975:74). The date is more likely 1812–1820 given that King Christophe committed suicide in October 1820 (Pechell 1824:8), and his successors sold off the court goods shortly after. Once thought to be rare in southern California, phoenix buttons are ubiquitous at mission period sites and at late contact period sites.

Phoenix buttons were produced in two different sizes and three different styles of bird designs. Each button portrays a legendary phoenix bird rising from a fringe of flames with the motto *Je Renais de Mes Cendres* (I am reborn from my ashes) in raised letters around the outer button edge. Individual regiment numbers (1 through 10, 14, 20, and 25 through 30) appear below the phoenix.

Thousands of crated phoenix buttons were purchased by seafaring traders, including Nathaniel Wyeth,
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(Strong 1975:77) and sold to both Native Americans and European settlers in the New World, especially in the Pacific Northwest, sometime after 1820 but before 1835 (Strong 1975:79). This date coincides with the opening of trade with non-Spanish merchants and sea farers after 1810 and the onset of the Mexican War for Independence. The cessation of regular supply ships from Mexico as a result of the war resulted in an increase of worldwide trade goods in Mexican California including the presidio and the mission.

Distribution of phoenix buttons in California has generally been restricted to mission sites or military posts, although their presence in contact period Indian sites is also documented (cf. Carrico 1982; Sprague 1991, 1998). Excavations at El Presidio de San Francisco (Voss 2008:420), Mission San Antonio de Padua (Hoover 1979; Hoover and Costello 1985:69, 70, 72), Mission San Juan Capistrano, Santa Barbara Presidio (Rudolph 1996), San Buenaventura (Kirk 1975, 1976), Santa Inés (Costello 1989), Carmel, and San Luis Rey have all produced phoenix buttons as have military installations at Fort Ross, the Monterey Presidio (Howard 1978), and Old Town San Diego (Farris et al. 2006).

Local Native American sites that have produced phoenix buttons include a Diegueño or Kumeyaay cemetery in the Cuyamaca Mountains of San Diego County (True 1970:44). There were two buttons from San Felipe Creek in Cahuilla territory in the eastern desert (Lee Bibb, personal communication 1996). Single phoenix buttons were recovered at Indian sites in northern San Diego County, including Warner’s Ranch (James R. Moriarty, personal communication 1979), at nearby Tahwi Village on Monkey Hill (Banks 1974), a contact period Luiseño site near Mission San Luis Rey (Carrico 1989), and in the Imperial Valley near Thermal (Trotter 1988).

The presence of phoenix buttons in approximate association with interments within the presidio chapel and campo santo dates them generally to post-1820. Seven of nine Phoenix buttons were recovered from the cemetery, and several were in direct association with burials. Buttons bearing regiment numbers 1, 5, 8, 29, and 30 were recorded for the chapel complex. Other regiments were present in other parts of the overall presidio (Barbolla 1992).

Brass or Copper Tacks

One of the remarkable discoveries associated with five of the burials was the use of brass or copper tacks to embellish coffin lids with hearts, initials, and crucifixes, e.g., the coffins of José Francisco Snook (Figure 14), Henry Delano Fitch, Natalia Fitch, and Joseph Arroyo. A fourth coffin (Burial 6) with the initials RC indicated in copper tacks cannot be associated with a named person.
The coffin of Natalia Fitch (Figure 15), her father’s coffin, and the coffin presumed to be that of Joseph Arroyo (Figure 16) also displayed brass or copper tacks that formed initials. In addition, Natalia Fitch’s coffin had carefully placed hearts and an elongated cross. Both Natalia and Henry Fitch were in hexagonal coffins.

José Francisco Snook, a Protestant Yankee, had converted to Catholicism and married María Antonia Alvarado in the chapel of the presidio in 1837. María’s roots to the presidio extended back to her birth and baptism there. In addition to their rancho near present-day Escondido, they maintained a home and store in the relatively new San Diego Pueblo. Henry Delano Fitch, a sea captain and store owner, and his wife became close friends with the Snooks who lived next door. When Snook died on February 23, 1848, he was buried at the presidio rather than at Mission San Diego, possibly because of the old chapel’s sentimental value to the Snooks and because it was less than a mile from their home.

In an account book of Henry Delano Fitch, the last entry for María Antonia Snook referenced both the sale of 400 metal tacks for $2.00 and $10.00 for a carpenter to build a coffin (Fitch 1848). Archaeological excavation in the front (western) area of the nave revealed Burial 91, which resided in a wooden coffin with the initials JFS embedded into the lid (Figure 14). Snook’s coffin lid also contained a small glass window. José F. Snook was buried approximately 3 m from Henry Delano Fitch, his friend and sometimes business partner.

**Beads**

Of the nearly 2,000 beads recovered from the site, more than 1,800 are European glass “trade beads,” most gifted rather than traded to Natives. The remaining beads were made of shell, typically *Olivella biplicata*, stone, and wood. Beginning in the seventeenth century and extending into the mid-nineteenth century, glass trade beads were manufactured almost as a monopoly of Murano, Italy, artisans. The distribution of
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Glass bead typologies seem to be in a constant state of flux. Terminology developed by Sprague (1985:Figure 1) and in use by others (cf. Deagan 1987) has been applied to the collection. In brief, the typology is based first on method of manufacture (drawn, wound, mold-pressed, fired, and blown), second on shape, third on color, and lastly on decoration.

Sprague’s (1985:87–88) conclusion that the most common bead from archaeological sites is the drawn bead and that the wound bead is second (1985:93–94) is supported by the presidio data, although the presidio collection has not been fully analyzed. In general, the presidio assemblage appears to mimic the large sample analyzed by Ross (1989:149–161) for Mission Santa Inés, Santa Barbara County.

Ross (1989:149) reported that for Mission Santa Inés trade beads appear to be predominantly Class II, Type IIa4, described as undecorated, single-layered, short, hot-tumbled, and drawn beads (Figure 17). Size parameters are also consistent with Ross’ data with a diameter of at least 3.0–3.7 mm and lengths from 1.76 to 2.6 mm. Green and blue were the predominant colors, although some ruby and white specimens were recovered. Drawn, faceted “Russian” beads were documented (Figure 18), as were tile beads, although in far less quantities than drawn beads.

Chronologically, it is difficult to ascertain specific periods of use or deposition of glass beads at the presidio. Deagan (1987:179) suggests that opaque, wire-wound beads of shiny white, black, gray, or pale turquoise glass are commonly found in post-1780 Spanish sites in the circum-Caribbean. Subject to additional study, this may also be true for the San Diego Presidio.

At the San Diego Presidio the majority of the beads appear more closely associated with the drawn bead class as defined by Kidd and Kidd (1970), Karklins (1985), and Sprague (1985). Ross speculates that the IIa beads are dated from roughly the 1820s to the turn-of-the-century and that overall the bead assemblage at Mission Santa Inés reflects the mid-to-latter decades of the 1800s rather than the early 1800s.
While speculative also for the San Diego Presidio, it seems that the Class IIa beads were found in context with burials from post-1820 and that here too there is little representation of beads from the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Ascribing Names to Specific Chapel Burials

As Costello and Walker (1987) have shown for the Santa Bárbara Mission and Carrico (1973) for the San Diego Presidio, names can be ascribed to some of the interments within Spanish colonial cemeteries. Table 3 lists those seven persons for whom it can be said, with some degree of certainty, are buried within the chapel itself.

The American merchant Henry Delano Fitch and his daughter were the first presidial burials to be named by Paul Ezell (1976) based on their initials on their coffin lids (Burials 12 and 16, HDF and NF) set into the lids with brass tacks (Figure 15 and Table 3). Carrico (1973:51–55) named Joseph Maria Romer- and Maria Josepha Romero, Burials 5 and 15, respectively, from the chapel’s side chapel (Figure 19). Similarly, José Francisco Snook, as described above, is probably associated with the remains resting in a coffin with the initials JFS in brass tacks on the lid (Figure 14). Joseph Arroyo is identified with the remains (Burial 7) beneath a coffin lid carrying the initials JA buried in the sanctuary (Figure 16).

Burial 3, an adult male (Figure 20), possessed brass buttons running the length of the chest that appeared to carry a naval insignia suggesting a maritime or navy association. The only naval personnel recorded as being buried at the presidio was Juan Bernardino Ulloa, who was listed as a married caulker from the frigate Princesa. Ulloa is not listed on Table 2 as being buried in the chapel based on mission records because there is uncertainty about his resting place within either the chapel or the campo santo. At the time of his burial in 1797, the officiant simply stated that he was buried in the “cementerio de Ingles del Presidio.” Little is known about Ulloa, but his presence in San Diego at the time of his death, June 22, 1797, is consistent with voyages of the Princesa. For this study, it is assumed (Table 3) that Ulloa is associated with Burial 3.

Names that cannot be inserted into Table 2 include two Native American adult male burials (Burial 87 and Burial 121) dispatched by lead musket balls.
Burial 87 has a musket ball on the right side of the thorax region just above the collar bone. Burial 121 has two musket balls lodged just below the neck region in the extreme upper chest and a crucifix near the chest. Burial 87 was situated beneath the subfloor on the south side of the nave near the entrance to the baptistry. The decedent was estimated to be between 25 and 35 years of age. Burial 121 was within the campo santo between the baptistry and the outer defense wall, and no estimate of age was provided. These burials represent two of the four Kumeyaay men who are known to have been executed between 1813 and 1826 and buried at the presidio.

These men, Anciento from Apta (San Bernardo), Tiburcio (Malquam) Cuilp from the rancheria of Qamatar (Hamatar), Juan Bautista Guaycupuchal from the rancheria of Guamasui (Huamasuy), and Vicente Meyapapuchal from Hapacuach, near Santa Ysabel, were all executed by musket fire. Except for Meyapapuchal, who had led an attack on soldiers at Asistencia

Figure 19. Burials 5 and 15 in the side chapel of the presidio church with the articulated skeleton with its head toward the east. The largely intact skeleton is thought to be María Josepha Romero (Carrico 1973), who died in December 1797, and when interred disturbed the remains of her brother Joseph María Romero, who had died in October 1785.

Figure 20. Burial 3 with its head toward the south and its feet toward the entrance to the side chapel. Buttons with apparent naval insignias on this burial may indicate that the deceased was a sailor, possibly Juan Bernardino Ulloa from the frigate Princesa, who died June 1797.
Santa Ysabel in the eastern mountains, the crimes that led to their deaths were not stated.

Given that the person associated with Burial 87 died at an age of between 25 and 35, it may be associated with Juan Bautista Guaycupuchal, age 30 years, or Tiburcio, age 30, or possibly Anciento for whom no data is available for his age at the time of death. At 46 years of age, Vicente Meyapapuchal is not a likely candidate to be Burial 87. Lacking solid forensic data for Burial 121, it is not possible to associate that burial with an individual, although, as with Burial 87, it is likely one of the four executed Kumeyaay men.

Conclusions

There is much yet to be done with the immense data sets from the archaeological excavations and archival materials relating to the church complex at the Royal Presidio de San Diego. This study has provided valuable insights into the nature and composition of the presidio’s historic burials. As would be expected, the deceased represent a multiethnic, multicultural cross section of the early colonial and post-colonial population.

That complex demographic included Spanish, mestizo, California (Alta and Baja) Indian, Anglo-American, and African-Indian persons. Low to moderate economic status and scarcity of raw materials at this remote presidio is reflected in the sparseness of burial goods and the preponderance of non-coffin burials. And yet, even on the oftentimes harsh frontier, the men, women, and children who came to their mortal end at the presidio were generally buried with respect and dignity.

The presence of a high percentage of child and youth burials attests to the harsh reality of the times. Evidence of social status is minimal based on funerary objects, particularly in the late 1700s, although clearly some families could embellish coffins and afford to bury beads, other ornamentation, and religious icons. The majority of the deceased, however, came to their final rest merely shrouded in blankets or simple burial cloths.

After 1825, with the exception of the years 1827–1828, which may be associated with a measles and/or smallpox epidemic, deaths and burials at the Royal Presidio de San Diego dropped off dramatically, reflecting the gradual movement of retired soldiers and their families to the new settlement at the foot of Presidio Hill and an overall decrease in the garrison at the presidio. Yet, because the presidio and its chapel still held deep meaning for some well after 1830, Alta California’s first Spanish settlement witnessed a wedding, the burial of American pioneers, and the mourning songs of Kumeyaay women as their loved ones were committed to previously consecrated ground.

Within the adobe walls of the Presidial church complex, the once living persons have stories to tell. It is a tale of colonial hopes and dreams, of suicide by hanging, of musket balls crashing through flesh, of children who died much too young, and of family members bidding their loved ones farewell. Be they local Kumeyaay people, Natives from throughout Mexico, Spaniards, mixed-blood Spaniards, African-Indians, or newly arrived Anglo-Americans, their story is that of early San Diego and continues to this day.

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