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# The Bodega Miwok as seen by M.T. Tikhanov in 1818

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(Paper presented at the California Indian Conference, UCLA, October 7, 1995)

## ABSTRACT

In 1818 a Russian scientific expedition under the direction of Vasili Golovnin visited Bodega Bay (called by the Russians, Port Rumiantsev). Apart from the written accounts of at least three members of the expedition concerning the people there, the expedition artist, Mikhail Tikhonovich Tikhanov, produced five known paintings picturing the life of the people. These remarkable paintings are the only ones known of the Bay Miwok people near the time of early contact with Europeans. What makes the drawings even more valuable is that they were done by an artist specifically commissioned to render detailed ethnographic drawings of peoples encountered on the expedition. Because of their association with the Russians headquartered at Fort Ross, some authors have mistakenly identified the individuals pictured as Pomo.

Thanks to some contemporary Spanish accounts and mission records, we can piece together additional details of the individuals and what was going on at the time, especially the fact that the expedition was at Bodega Bay at the time of a shif in the leadership of the Bodega Miwok people due to the death of the old chief.

## INTRODUCTION

On September 21, 1818, the Russian naval ship, Kamchatka, under the command of Vasili Golovnin, arrived at Bodega Bay (renamed by the Russians Port Rumiantsev). It was bound around the world on a scientific expedition. Several of the junior officers on the voyage later were quite successful in the Russian Navy and Russian-American Company Administration (Matvei Muraviev, Fedor Lütke and Baron Ferdinand Wrangel). Apart from the account rendered by Captain Golovnin (1979), there were three other detailed journals by Lieutenant Fedor Lütke (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:257-

285), Collegiate Secretary Fedor Matiushkin (1971) and Baron Ferdinand Wrangel (Safaraliev 1990:35).

However, of greatest importance to the subject at hand was the presence on the expedition of a freed serf named Mikhail Tikhonovich Tikhanov, born about 1789, who had been sent to the Russian Academy of Arts in 1806 to be trained as a painter thanks to the patronage of his owner, Prince D. N. Golitsyn (Safaraliev 1990:33). After his painting, "The Shooting of Russian Patriots by the French in 1812" had been awarded a gold medal, in 1815 he finished his academic training and was put on a state stipend. In recognition of this, he was freed from serfdom by his owner (Pierce 1990:506). Two years later he was recommended to the Golovnin Expedition and sailed from Cronstadt in August 1817 on the Kamchatka.

Tikhanov's assigned duty was to record in drawings native peoples of the various places visited. Paintings of indigenous peoples were to be done both full face and profile to fully capture the dress, ornaments, tattoos, etc. The five drawings known from the visit to Bodega Bay are particularly notable because they are the only known drawings of Bodega Miwok people (in contrast to other, better known drawings of Coast Miwok people by Louis Choris in 1816). At the time of the Golovnin visit the Spanish *asistencia* of San Rafael had only been started and had not gathered in the people of Bodega Bay.

The five paintings by Tikhanov included two portrayals of a young man identified only

as Baltazar. In one scene he is seated and in the other he is standing, bow and arrow in hand. In both he is wearing a fur headpiece, probably of sea otter skin, with a pair of feathered bird wings sticking up at the right rear held in place by a thong. A loin cloth girds his waist. He is standing on the beach very near to the waterline with a pelican playfully included in the water. A third painting is of a comely young woman holding a large carrying basket apparently filled with fish, probably surf smelt, freshly netted. In addition to wearing dangling earrings, she also has two strands of a clam shell bead necklace and a skin wrap draped around her hips. A small child is pictured in the background, crouched down on his hands and knees seemingly by a bush.

In addition, there are two remarkable views set in the interiors of houses. One of these is a composite of "everyday life" showing many activities which may or may not have gone on simultaneously. These included a man holding a straight pipe, a woman using a pestle to pound wild rye apparently in a hopper mortar and another woman nursing a child with a second child in a cradleboard behind her. In front of this woman is a basket of mush or *pinole* being stone boiled in a basket and a fire for heating the rocks nearby.

The second interior drawing is of a more serious subject, the death of the old chief. In it we see the back of a head and form of the body lying on its side with a woman in grief next to him. Her hair is cut short in apparent mourning and around her shoulders is a rabbit skin blanket. In the foreground are two men squatting down on their

haunches. One of them is wearing a hairnet and in his hands he holds with apparent reverence a feathered headdress, very possibly that of the dying (or deceased) chief.

By great good luck we have a description of Tikhanov at work on these drawings by his expedition mate, Matiushkin (1971) who said he went ashore at Bodega Bay and walked along the shoreline.

About a mile beyond the anchorage I saw a puff of smoke from behind a small promontory. I climbed it and saw a band of New Albion nomads. They all looked at me, but since I was aware of their peace-loving nature and special affection toward Russians, I approached them boldly and soon noticed our painter in their midst. Surrounded by savages, he laughed and played with them, while drawing their pictures. Most of all, he amused them when they saw some one of them on paper. Mikhail Tikhonovich drew many of them just for pleasure, and from these he made two paintings. One represents their chief, lying in a hut of branches and reeds, at the point of death. His wife is in tears, and several men surround his bed. One of them, with a bunch of feathers, seems to be acting both as a physician (for he is pulling straps across the sick man's stomach) [sic ?] and as a priest, telling the sick man's fortune. The other painting shows a woman cooking food.

Although I do not believe that the version of the death scene which has come down to us is the exact one that Matiushkin saw and described, it is clearly based on the same event. Several points in Matiushkin's description are particularly important to us. He identified the individual in the death scene shown lying down with his back to the viewer as none other than the old chief. In fact, given the sad look on the face of his wife and her short, disheveled hair, this painting is probably a remarkable rendering of a scene closely following his death. As we all know, it was common for California Indian women to cut their hair short in mourning at such a time. Two men shown in the drawing seem

to be reverently witnessing the event with the one wearing the hairnet holding a plume of feathers and strings of black, white and yellow cylindrical beads. This individual may possibly be Vallí-éla, the man about to replace the dying Tolló as chief (cf. Payeras 1995).

#### BALTHAZAR, TOLLO AND VALLI:ELA

The young man shown in two of the drawings was identified by Tikhanov as having the name Balthazar. It is intriguing to note that in December 1821, a young man of 18 years of age was baptized at Mission San Rafael under this same name, Balthazar. He was said to come from the village of Tauyomi (San Rafael baptism 627). His parents' Miwok names were Catcat (SRb 625) and Bohomen (SRb 626). They were baptized at the same time, whereas his sister was baptized about two years earlier in February 1820 (SRb 370). Although I do not have a positive identification of where the village of Tauyomi was, it may well have been associated with a campsite about 3/4 of a mile north of Bodega Bay calle *Tauwakpulok* (Kelly 1991:74).

Two Bodega Bay Miwok men, Vicente and Rufino are shown in the San Rafael *asistencia* records as having been baptized in 1819 and 1821, respectively. Thus they may well have been at their village on Bodega Bay at the time of Golovnin's visit. They were certainly at San Rafael at the time that Fr. Payeras interviewed them in October 1822 (Payeras 1995:335; SBMA n.d.). It is interesting to note that each one had a child, both of whom were baptized simultaneously (SRb's 79 and 80) on April 5, 1818, about five

months before the arrival of the Golovnin expedition at Bodega Bay. The account provided by Vicente and Rufino identifies the chief of the village near Bodega as being named Tóllo at the time the first Russian representative, Timofei Tarakanov, arrive circa 1807 (Farris 1993), but having died in 1818, Vallí:éla, had succeeded him. This latter chief, identified as *Valenila* by Golovnin (1979:165) in 1818, is undoubtedly the same one. Golovnin reported his interaction with the Bodega Miwok chief as follows:

The chief of the people living next to Port Rumiantsev came to see me when my sloop was anchored there. He brought gifts consisting of various parts of their regalia, arrow, and household items, and asked to be taken under Russian protection. An Aleut who had lived over a year among these people acted as interpreter<sup>1</sup>. This chief, called Valenila, definitely wanted more Russians to settle among them in order to protect them from Spanish oppression. He begged me for a Russian flag, explaining that he wanted to raise it as a sign of friendship and peace whenever Russian ships should appear near the shore. In view of all this, it would be contrary to justice and reason to assert that the Russians occupied land belonging to someone else and settled on the shores of New Albion without having the right to do so.

Another, more jaundiced, description of the chief comes from Fedor Lütke (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:275-276):

There is no evidence that they [the Indians of Bodega Bay] revere God, and in general it seems that not only do they have no understanding of God, but that they never even wonder how and for what purpose they and everything else around them were created [!]. Nevertheless there was one among them who called himself their leader, and whom our people by custom refer to as a *toion*. But we could not determine how extensive his power is over all the others. We did not even see any exterior indications of respect shown him by the others, and he would not have looked any different from the others if some of our people had not given him two shirts the day before, both of

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This Aleut is not otherwise identified, but is very likely the individual mentioned in another contemporary (1818) account by Fedor Lütke (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:275).

which he wasted no time in putting on. It appears that this position is hereditary, because his father was also a *toion*.

In a separate account of Golovnin's visit (Matiushkin 1971:66-70) we learn more of "Valenila".

The very day we weighed anchor the Indian chief sought to pay us a visit. He came out to us in a longboat, wearing two shirts (given as a present to him for some service) and a garland of intertwined grasses. Looking over our ship, he was impressed by its size. Although our captain [Golovnin] gave him some axes, knives, etc., most important of all for him was a Russian military flag, which he was told to raise as soon as he saw a ship like ours. On such occasions he was promised valuable gifts from our fellow countrymen. This Indian, Valennoela, who visited us, is not an elder of the settlement here, but because of the chief's illness, he was chosen by his comrades on account of his bravery.

*Vallí-éla* appears again in the historical record in a lengthy report by Mariano Vallejo (1833) of his visit to Fort Ross and to Bodega Bay in late April and early May of 1833.

At Bodega Bay Vallejo encountered the chief of the Indian village across the bay from the Russian port establishment. He gives the name of the chief as Gualinela.

A chief of the Christian Indians lives nearby [the Russian settlement at Bodega Bay] on his rancheria, Tiutume. At present his band numbers only 43 men and women. Their objective is to guard the Russian buildings because the Russians ensure that they are not to be bothered by outsiders while they remain on their rancheria. Before the arrival of the Russians, it was the opposite case. Gualinela is the name of the chief of the rancheria. He told me that a few days prior to my arrival there were 200 armed men, some heathen Indians and some Christians from [Mission] San Rafael. They had banded together to discourage any troops of soldiers from passing through their area. This information was confirmed by a Christian Indian from the mission San Rafael named Toribio. Toribio had informed the Indians that they would be killed or taken to San Francisco and that they would be beaten and kidnapped by a "fierce captain of soldiers." Captain is what they call all of our commissioned officers. By saying these things, Toribio managed to



alarm all the Indians. The Christian Indians and the heathen alike responded to him saying that they were a united people, armed, brave, and ready to die. They agreed that they were tired of suffering the cunning and treacherous lies of the soldiers, who said one thing, then did another. The soldiers, they said always promised friendship but as soon as their confidence had been gained, the soldiers would violently imprison them and take them to the Missions San Rafael or San Francisco Solano. There they would be forcibly converted to Christianity. The Indians also said they would not allow themselves to be taken, as was common before Toribio arrived.

Essentially this is the statement verified by the Christian Indians and by Gualinela, chief of the Tiutume rancheria.

The name given to the chief of the village at Bodega Bay at the time of the purchase, *Tóllo*, does not have a known meaning in the Bodega Bay Miwok language (Catherine Callaghan 1970; personal communication 1993). It must be a variant of *toion*, a Siberian term often used by the Russians for "chief" (and known to have been later applied to the Kashaya Pomo chief at Fort Ross). On the other hand, the name *Vallí-éla* is interpreted by Catherine Callaghan (personal communication 1993) as being properly "*wállin ?éla*, roughly 'Great Water Spirit'." Isabel Kelly (1991:342) reports a shift in moieties from generation to generation among the Bodega Miwok. According to her main consultant, Tom Smith, a Bodega Miwok, "I am Land; my boy gets a Water name" (Kelly 1991:342). Kelly (1991:342) then goes on to point out a number of cases where the model does not hold, but it may have been due to a breakdown in customs in the modern period. At any rate, it could be that if *Vallí-éla* would be a name derived from the Water moiety, *Tóllo* would probably have had a Land moiety name. The suffix "-éla" (translated by Callaghan as "Water Spirit") appears in several instances in Indian names of the San Rafael mission

records. Rufino Ottacaliva died and was buried in May 1835. His wife, Rufina (Bapt. No. 536) is shown in a subsequent marriage (San Rafael Marriages Number 538) to have the native name, *Tole-éla*. This may suggest a moiety link with Vallí-éla.

Another contemporary description of the village from the 1818 visit is provided by Fedor Lütke (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:275):

September 22 [(October 3), 1818]. We went ashore to an Indian settlement some distance to the north. I believe it would be difficult to find a people who have less political comprehension than these Indians. Their living quarters are more like beehives or anthills than human habitations. They are made of sticks stuck in the ground in a semicircle about one and one-half arshins [42 inches] high; these are fastened together and then covered with dry grass or tree branches. These dwellings do not give them shelter from rain or foul weather, which, fortunately for them, is quite rare in the area where they live.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paintings of the people at Bodega Bay in 1818 by Mikhail Tikhonovich Tikhanov are notable in their own right. However, when elucidated by the accounts of other members of the Golovnin Expedition, as well as the reminiscences of two men from a village at Bodega Bay recorded by the Spanish priest, Fr. Mariano Payeras, a better understanding of the full import of these paintings is developed. There is a tragic epilogue to the story of this remarkable painter. Later in the expedition after leaving the Philippines, Tikhanov began showing signs of mental disturbance which only grew worse, becoming very severe by the time the Kamchatka arrived at the Azores. He never was

able to recapture his creative abilities even though he lived to the considerable age of 73.

The 43 known paintings by Tikhanov from this voyage are now in the Museum of the Russian Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg (Pierce 1990:507; Safaralieva 1990:38-39).

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Lyn Kalani  
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19005 Coast Highway One  
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Dear Lyn,

Enclosed is a copy of the Tikhanov paper (TIKHANOV.951) on Wordperfect 5.1 along with a hardcopy of the paper. Ideally this item would come across best if illustrated. I really consider the paper a work in progress and hope some day to run out the various leads to other information that would complete the story.

Hope all is well there. I was envious of your description of the beautiful weather there when I called this morning.

All the Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glenn".

Glenn Farris, Associate State Archeologist  
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Encl.