Many excavations at Mission Santa Cruz have found glass beads, shell beads, lithics, ceramic fragments, animal bone, macrofloral and pollen evidence, metal artifacts, and a long list of other small items. Such things are commonly recovered from Spanish colonial sites in California. Over the past 40 years, archaeologists have ascribed the small detritus of everyday life to Native American inhabitants of the mission. Although the interpretation of these artifacts points to Native American residents, archaeological and historical discussions of mission life still often misses a fundamental point: California missions were and are Native American places. There is great potential for small things to serve as reference points against which to understand the complex social relationships that constituted Spanish missionization and colonization, and more importantly, what constituted the Native experience in historic and modern California.

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