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REVIEWS

Tomol: Chumash Watercraft as Described in the Ethnographic Notes of John P. Harrington. Edited and annotated by Travis Hudson, Janice Timbrook and Melissa Rempe; art work by Jane Jolley Howarth. Ballena Press *Anthropological Papers* No. 9, 1978. 190 pp., 5 figs., 12 pls., 1 map. \$8.95 (paper).

Reviewed by ROBERT F. HEIZER
University of California, Berkeley

A lot has been affirmed or alleged about John P. Harrington since he died 17 years ago, but until now nobody knew he was a closet Chumash canoe expert. In *Tomol* we have, from Harrington's hand (and attributed to him as so much of his data have *not* been) an extraordinarily detailed record of what is surely the most outstanding technological achievement of Native Californians, the Chumash *tomol* or plank canoe. In its extraordinarily fine-cut detail this volume is decidedly reminiscent of Harrington's monograph on Karuk tobacco, a monograph of 284 pages on this single subject. Harrington's *Tomol* draft has been expertly annotated in the greatest detail, and the editorial notes themselves represent a major contribution to the subject. Harrington himself could scarcely have hoped for a more considerate group of editors, or a more able one.

The unusual Chumash canoe was admired by many early observers, but their descriptions were tantalizingly brief, and earlier efforts to divine its construction principles and form have not told us much. Now comes Harrington who mined the lode of Chumash knowledge (especially that of Fernando Librado) in such

detail that it occurs to the reader that the informant must have felt he was going through a third-degree examination in the soundproof room at a police station. It is all here, and very skillfully presented by the three editors who spared no effort at digging to the very heart of meanings—theirs is a substantial contribution to the neglected field of California ethno-history.

Beyond the solid ethnographic reporting on the construction and use of the *tomol*, a body of data we had no anticipation of possessing, there is in this work a valuable roster of Chumash individuals, as well as folklore and circumstantial accounts of the *tomol*.

Some elements of the *tomol* complex are probably the result of Hispano-Indian culture contact. Among these is the use of pegs, wash strakes, ribs, the compass stone, and the adze. Regarding the latter, we have no details on hafting of the blade.

With the detail presented here, some scholar can finally make a careful comparative study of Oceanian canoes using Haddon and Hornell's *Canoes of Oceania* as a main reference. I do not think drift canoes can be ruled out as the stimulus for the *tomol*.

It is quite obvious that the *tomol* was a very cranky boat, and also that many of them broke up in rough water with the result that their occupants drowned. The reader keeps wondering why the Chumash with all their ingenuity did not invent some kind of lifesaving float. The fragility of the *tomol* may account for the weeping salutation whenever a *tomol* landed (p. 150). If this greeting applied only when canoes from other villages landed, we could interpret this as fitting the standard

explanation of the weeping salutation.

The best evidence for the reliability of the native accounts recorded by Harrington lies in the recently reconstructed canoe (named *Helek*) and its performance.

One can only observe how remarkable it is to have brought to life, almost literally, this truly unique example of Native Californian achievement in technology. I repeat that Harrington could not have wished for a better group of redactors.



Tailholt Tales as Related to Frank F. Latta by Thomas Jefferson Mayfield. Frank F. Latta. Santa Cruz, California: Bear State Books, 1976. 323 pp., including 91 illustrations.

Reviewed by FRANKLIN FENENGA
California State University, Long Beach

Frank F. Latta's *Tailholt Tales* is a new and enlarged edition of the author's scarce but oft-cited account of the reminiscences of a San Joaquin Valley pioneer, first published as *Uncle Jeff's Story*. The pioneer, Thomas Jefferson Mayfield, spent his later childhood, from 1850-1859, in close association with the Choinimni Yokuts, inhabitants of a village on the Kings River across from the mouth of Sycamore Creek. The site is now covered by the Pine Flat Reservoir.

The first 150 pages of the present edition deal with Mayfield's memories of his experiences living with the Indians. It is a sympathetic account which reflects extraordinary recall of technological detail for manufactures, games, food harvest and preparation, but an absolute disinterest in social, political, or religious aspects of the native culture or such specifics as personal names. The professional reader will react negatively to the appearance of over-directed questioning which led to such selective responses.

When it was first published in 1929, many of the details had not yet been recorded, and some—e.g., the salt stick and the outsize balsa rafts—are still best reported by Mayfield. The account certainly will be used to augment the more organized accounts of Yokuts material culture and economy by Gayton, and Latta's own *Handbook of the Yokuts Indians*.

None of the reservations I have expressed about the ethnographic section of the book applies to its second half. The local historian will find rich details of place and time and persona in Mayfield's lusty and candid reporting of late nineteenth century events centered at White River on the Kern but extending into Death Valley and the Mojave Desert. His good-humored judgments about who were the good guys and who the bad reflect a refreshing folk value system denied us in a degree, by cultural relativism on the one hand and "western" stereotypes on the other.

The principal additions to this new edition consist of a substantial number of Choinimni words for items in the environment (the orthography is non-professional, and unexplained) and some 90 photographic illustrations (several of which are important documents, the majority are stills from a movie about the Yokuts which Latta supervised). There is also a foreword by John P. Harrington and some biographical notes on Harrington by Latta.

Frank Latta's long sustained contributions to the ethnohistory of the southern San Joaquin Valley are rich in substance, and it is encouraging to see that Bear State Books is continuing to bring out new editions of these works.

