California has a lot to offer. Our golden beaches and towering mountains were home to some of the most linguistically and culturally diverse groups in the prehistory of North America. The state's history includes the arrival of some of North America's first settlers, and the development of several of the world's most complex hunter-gatherer societies. By any standard, California's past has the potential to illuminate many issues of interest to contemporary anthropology, ranging from human-environment interactions to the origins of social complexity. Recent scholarship in coastal California has done much to advance our understandings of the theoretical and material bases for the region's dynamic history. Compared to other regions of North America, however, comparative archaeological case studies drawn from California are still relatively rare, and there is a lack of appreciation and understanding of the area among the wider public. Considering our state's rich heritage, it is thus imperative to bring California archaeology to as broad an audience as possible. First Coastal Californians, edited by Lynn Gamble, concisely overviews cutting-edge research on California coastal archaeology in a way that will be immediately accessible to a general audience. Each of the volume's seventeen chapters is written by leading scholars who provide excellent discussions of their respective areas of expertise. Although they present summaries of recent research, the content of each chapter is not watered-down. Rather, they present some of the most up-to-date interpretations and data on a range of topics relevant to California coastal archaeology. As such, the volume should be of interest to local archaeologists who wish to review current approaches and models for understanding the prehistory of the state's coastal regions, as well as to archaeologists from other parts of the world looking for an introduction to California coastal archaeology. The book would also be excellent as a classroom resource for upper-level undergraduates, as well as for any other non-specialists interested in learning more about California's past. The volume's seventeen chapters cover California prehistory from the first occupations of the coast into the modern era. Early coastal adaptations are well covered, with chapters summarizing recent evidence for coastal migrations into the Americas as well as models for the impact of climate change on coastal populations. Geographically, contributions include discussions of the Bay Area, the central coast and Ballona Bay, and both the northern and southern Channel Islands. Chapters covering the central coast and Ballona Bay were especially interesting as they present material not widely covered in similar volumes. The state's more recent history is also reviewed, with sections on both the formation and economic underpinnings of the mission system, as well as indigenous attempts to resist and disrupt it. California's current anthropological climate is represented by an excellent chapter on modern basket weaving, as well as numerous chapters referencing the pressing need to preserve our coast in the face of advancing shorelines and anthropogenic climate change. In addition to a breadth of geographic and chronological contributions, chapters in the volume provide an overview of a number of unique technological, artistic, and religious practices that represent California's
indigenous heritage. A chapter on indigenous watercraft provides a useful summary of the many different kinds of aquatic transportation used by California’s pre-Hispanic coastal residents. Chapters on ritual traditions and rock art draw on both ethnohistory and archaeology to discuss traditions in both northern and southern California. A discussion of shell beads, one of the most emblematic trade goods of coastal Californian traditions, also provides an excellent overview of the importance of wearable wealth for coastal peoples. Additionally, a chapter on controlled burning emphasizes the fact that native populations have been actively managing their landscapes for thousands of years, while also highlighting the importance of working together with modern-day descendant communities in order to preserve and understand California’s heritage.

Like many other recent volumes dealing with coastal California archaeology, there is a noticeable focus on the archaeology of the northern Channel Islands. This is unfortunate, but is probably unavoidable considering that this is where the majority of recent research has taken place. It is noteworthy that this emphasis is not as heavy as it has been in many other volumes, and much effort seems to have been made to include chapters on areas from up and down California’s coast. Additionally, while the volume is focused on the coast, the book might have been improved with a greater discussion of coastal Californian traditions. A discussion of shell beads, one of the most emblematic trade goods of coastal Californian traditions, also provides an excellent overview of the importance of wearable wealth for coastal peoples. Additionally, a chapter on controlled burning emphasizes the fact that native populations have been actively managing their landscapes for thousands of years, while also highlighting the importance of working together with modern-day descendant communities in order to preserve and understand California’s heritage.

This book offers one of the most significant theoretical contributions to California and Great Basin anthropology since Steward’s (1938) ambitious explanatory project. As the title suggests, the central theme of this work is focused on understanding the formulation of ‘orderly anarchy.’ While many unilinear evolutionary thinkers believed some form of anarchy was the foundation from which other political organizations emerged, Bettinger is perhaps the first to illustrate that orderly anarchy is itself an evolutionarily stable adaptation to particular social and environmental circumstances, not merely a starting point. Kropotkin (1899, 1902), who argued for constructive anarchism through mutual aid, would be pleased. Far from nineteenth century evolutionary thinking, Bettingger’s arguments are structured by twentieth and twenty-first century frameworks, including Cultural Ecology, Behavioral Ecology, and other Neo-Darwinian approaches such as Dual-Inheritance Theory. Sure to become known as a classic application of the U.C. Davis school of evolutionary anthropology, these theoretical approaches give Bettinger the tools needed to offer a truly novel and powerful explanation for California and Great Basin sociopolitical organization.

The central question guiding this inquiry asks why California and Great Basin aboriginal societies trended away from hierarchical structures. On my read, the central explanation can be summarized as follows: the chance introduction of the bow and arrow increased men’s hunting success; with fewer acquisition failures per capita, fewer individual hunters could acquire and share enough food to provision families through a pattern of risk-reduction reciprocity. These conditions allowed smaller groups of more closely related individuals to function relatively autonomously.

Eventually, individuals in these small groups experienced declines in their encounters with high-value prey items. While men may have continued to search for larger game, women responded adaptively by broadening their diet to include lower-value plant resources. Because individuals in these small groups were closely related, they avoided the collective action (or free-rider) problems associated with low-profitability but storable resources while free-riding family members still might burden producers, the lost food went to related kin, thereby increasing the harvester’s inclusive fitness.

This shift occurred first with nuts, which have high variance resources (Kaplan et al. 2012). However, in such an argument (see Hawkes 1992), it is theoretically impossible that it will be adopted wherever it is introduced, but the bow and arrow is not a superior technology for all forms of hunting and may provide an advantage only for the hunting of smaller prey (Tomka 2013). This suggests that hunters should only adopt the bow once they experience a decline in their encounters with larger resources. If this is true, the bow may be more a consequence of resource intensification than a primary cause, which may help explain variations in the timing of its adoption across California (Kennett et al. 2013).

Second, Bettinger suggests that increased hunting success should reduce the need for a large pool of hunters who reciprocally share game in order to lower the risk of shortfall. Ignoring the collective action problems inherent in such an argument (see Hawkes 1992), it is theoretically possible for sharing to reduce the risk of shortfall with high variance resources (Kaplan et al. 2012). However,