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## Review Essay

### *A Review of The Material Culture of the Chumash Interaction Sphere*

CHESTER D. KING

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**The Material Culture of the Chumash Interaction Sphere.** By Travis Hudson and Thomas C. Blackburn. Los Altos, Calif.: Ballena Press Anthropological Papers, Nos. 25, 27, 28, 30, and 31, 1979-1986. 5 Volumes 2038 pages. Volume 1: \$34.95 Cloth, \$19.95 Paper; Volumes 2 and 3: \$39.95 Cloth, \$24.95 Paper; Volume 4: \$47.95 Cloth, \$29.95 Paper; Volume 5: \$41.95, Paper \$28.95. Five volume set: \$190.00 Cloth, \$120.00 Paper.

The five volumes of *The Material Culture of the Chumash Interaction Sphere* present a compilation of all discovered ethnographic notes concerning the traditional material culture of several native southern California societies. The ethnographic notes of John Peabody Harrington represent the largest portion of the data. Other ethnographic sources are incorporated, and photographs of many ethnographic and some archaeological specimens are used to illustrate many artifact types. Most of the ethnographic data were previously available only as unpublished notes. Hudson and Blackburn have carefully organized these notes and incorporated most published references to artifacts. Photographs of many of the numerous ethnographic specimens illustrated in

these volumes have never been published previously and they provide important documentation of Chumash material culture.

Most of the ethnographic descriptions of material culture in *The Material Culture of the Chumash Interaction Sphere* were obtained by John Peabody Harrington. Harrington's dedication to the preservation of information concerning Native American cultures resulted in his compilation of a larger body of information concerning the ethnography of California Indians than that compiled by any other anthropologist. His work with the Chumash began in 1912 and ended with his death in 1961. Harrington was an advocate of social justice for Indian people, generous to his consultants, and obsessed with obtaining data concerning languages, stories, songs, dances, and other knowledge possessed by native cultures which were apt to change or be lost. His concern with data collection often took precedence over what most people believed were more important immediate concerns, such as eating and interaction with his family.

During his life, Harrington was able to publish only a small portion of his ethnographic notes. The task of making the ethnographic information in his notes available to students of native societies and the public has been taken up by many scholars specializing in the analysis of ancient Chumash society. Travis Hudson and Thomas Blackburn have made the most important contributions toward the publication of the notes Harrington collected from the Chumash and their neighbors. Travis Hudson was the senior author or editor of many publications which include information contained in Harrington's notes. Prior to his death in 1985, Dr. Hudson was curator of anthropology at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to coauthoring works with Travis Hudson, Thomas Blackburn edited and published Harrington's transcriptions of Chumash oral tradition.<sup>7</sup> Before editing Harrington's material culture notes, Hudson and Blackburn had obtained the necessary familiarity with both the scope and the peculiarities of Harrington's notes. In the course of their project, they became thoroughly familiar with published and unpublished ethnographic literature concerning the Chumash and their neighbors.

The volumes reviewed here demonstrated that Harrington and others were able to gather an extensive body of detailed knowledge concerning the material culture of the Chumash and their

neighbors. The degree of ethnographic detail concerning artifacts used by the Chumash prior to colonization was made possible by both the persistence of many aspects of pre-mission Chumash culture through the Spanish mission period into the present century and Harrington's persistence in seeking information others had assumed was lost.

At the time of Spanish colonization, the Chumash occupied most or all of present San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties, the western part of Los Angeles County, and a portion of southwestern Kern County. Virtually all of the Chumash and neighboring groups to their east were incorporated into Spanish missions by the 1820s.

Chumash material culture was described by early Spanish explorers as more elaborate than that of neighboring groups. Chumash craftsmen were noted for their manufacturing skills and the quality of their products. The importance of maintaining their economic systems provided motivation for the Chumash to both own and produce finely made and often decorated artifacts.<sup>8</sup> The Santa Barbara Channel Chumash relied on ocean fishing, in which they were said to use all of the fishing techniques known by the Spanish. The plank boat used by the Chumash and Gabrieliño was noted for the craftsmanship involved in its manufacture.

Because of its similarity the material culture of the Kitanemuk, Tataviam, and Gabrieliño, the eastern neighbors of the Chumash, is also documented in these volumes. At the time of colonization, these three nationalities spoke distantly related languages of the Uto-Aztecan language family. The Tataviam and Gabrieliño of Los Angeles County were recruited into Spanish missions by 1805. The Kitanemuk lived in the area of Kern County which became the Tejon Reservation and later the Tejon Ranch. Few Kitanemuk were recruited into the Spanish missions, and they described material culture as they remembered it prior to the time of abandonment of native settlements. Discussions of Kitanemuk material culture are more detailed than descriptions of Tataviam and Gabrieliño material culture and provide insights into aspects of traditional Chumash material culture.

Hudson and Blackburn have made accessible in a convenient-to-use format most of the known ethnographic data concerning the material culture of the Chumash, Kitanemuk, Tataviam, and

Gabrieliño Indians of southern California. Before publication of these five volumes, there was no similar compilation of information concerning the traditional material culture of native societies in southern California.

Before these volumes were produced, Barrett and Gifford's descriptions of material culture of the Miwok of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Pomo of the North Coast Ranges were the most detailed descriptions of California Indian material culture. Their descriptions are summaries of information gathered during their ethnographic field work.<sup>9,10</sup> These descriptions of traditional material culture relate to native societies which were not colonized until around 1849. Barrett and Gifford and other ethnographers who conducted field work during the first half of this century in areas first colonized by the United States were able to interview people who lived before colonization. They were also able to observe the continued use and manufacture of many traditional artifacts.

Hudson and Blackburn present all of the detail of Harrington's (and others') original notes. Harrington's task, and hence their task, of reconstructing traditional Chumash material culture was more difficult than that of most California ethnographers because of the length of time between colonization and Harrington's interviews with Chumash speakers. Harrington's consultants fortunately had learned much concerning traditional culture from elders who had lived in native villages prior to recruitment into Spanish missions.

The native villages of the mainland coast were terminated before 1804. Most Chumash living on the islands and in the far interior were recruited into missions by 1820. At the missions, the Chumash were able to maintain many aspects of their native culture. However, they depended on herds of introduced domestic grazing animals and grains of introduced plants. These changes in subsistence resulted in marked changes in tools used to acquire and process food. The introduction of iron tools and other new technologies resulted in abandonment of some traditional technologies which relied on materials available locally. Because of these changes and the length of time involved, Harrington occasionally collected conflicting information. Sometimes, Harrington asked his consultants to provide Chumash translations describing artifacts or the motions involved in using artifacts. He obtained this linguistic data even in cases where no one could confirm the

use of artifacts either described in historic documents or thought to have been used.

Hudson and Blackburn wanted to provide all the information in Harrington's notes concerning material culture for use by others in reconstruction of the traditional cultures of the Chumash and their eastern neighbors. They have included discussions of categories of artifacts and manufacturing processes which were probably not used but whose use should be considered as a possibility during research. The use of historic sources, artifacts in museum collections, and ethnographic descriptions collected by scholars other than Harrington was necessary to provide evidence independent of Harrington's notes. The photographs of ethnographic specimens often provide details not included in Harrington's notes.

Hudson and Blackburn organized the data concerning Chumash material culture into categories of artifacts used for food procurement, transportation (Vol. 1), food preparation, shelter (Vol. 2), clothing, ornamentation, grooming (Vol. 3), ceremonies, games, amusements (Vol. 4), manufacturing, measuring, and trade (Vol. 5). Their typology of artifacts relates to categories of behavior, as opposed to groupings based on materials (which are commonly used by archaeologists. The authors usually state their opinions when sources conflict or are ambiguous.

In all, 472 categories of material culture are described. The native names, unpublished ethnographic descriptions, and published historical references are given for each artifact type described. Vol. 1 contains descriptions of twenty types of traps, nets, disguises, and blinds; fifteen types of artifacts related to shooting animals; fifteen types of fishing tackle; seven types of artifacts used to gather plant foods; eight types of baskets used in transport; ten types of nets and bags; nine types of miscellaneous objects used to carry things; six types of canoes; and six canoe accessories. The other four volumes contain a similarly detailed breakdown of material culture items. In the foreword to the last volume, the general editors observe that the authors originally intended to produce one or two volumes which grew into five. In their introduction to Vol. 4 the authors note that many directions of research were discovered during the preparation of the five volumes which if followed would lead to further detail and accuracy of reconstruction.

Several lines of research will increase our knowledge of ancient Chumash material culture. One involves study of archaeological and ethnographic specimens contained in museum collections in terms of both original contexts and wear patterns. Replicative experiments involving both the manufacture and the use of artifacts are necessary to determine the actual effort expended conducting different tasks. Study of the writings of the Spanish priests and soldiers who participated in the colonization of California should also yield additional information concerning burning, harvest seasons, the times of major ritual events and other ethnographic detail.

The introductory sections included in each volume provide discussions of the significance of the study of material culture and major conclusions which the authors have arrived at in the process of their research. In the introduction to Vol. 1, the authors observe that material culture objects provide insights into the ways people interact with each other and their natural environment. In the introduction to Vol. 3, they conclude that the rich diversity of items associated with adornment for ritual indicate that the Chumash and their neighbors spent as much time making and using artifacts for ritual and other forms of social interaction as they spent making and using artifacts for obtaining, processing and storing food.

The authors conclude that much can be learned from the study of material culture:

The reader should keep in mind the fact that a considerable corpus of knowledge underlay many of the items that have been described in these monographs, and that both their existence and their employment depended upon a complex, interwoven understanding of the location, properties, and potentialities of various components of the natural environment, the variety of processes and techniques that could be used in fabricating needed items, and the circumstances under which they could most efficiently and effectively be applied to achieve a desired goal. We must continually remind ourselves that our goal should be the reconstruction of the entire system of knowledge of the environment and

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its potentialities for utilization that made the rich fabric of native culture possible in the first place (Vol. 5, 19).

The study of archaeological data concerning the distributions of artifacts at prehistoric settlements and activity locales will increase our knowledge of this entire system of knowledge and its application.

Hudson and Blackburn state that research into archaeological materials was beyond the scope of their study. They used archaeological artifacts to illustrate examples of artifacts described in ethnographic notes. In some cases they have been used incorrectly. I have noted a number of errors of identification and interpretation in a review of Vol. 1 and 2.<sup>10</sup> Archaeological specimens used to illustrate artifact types were chosen without regard to the contexts in which they were found. Stone knives and Early Period spear points are illustrated as wands, and an Early Period type of spatula-shaped bone pin is illustrated as an asphaltum scraper. The choice of artifacts from archaeological collections for illustrations also frequently was made without considering the time period in which the artifacts were used. Types of stone points, fishhooks, fishhook blanks, mano, metate, mortars, stone cups, bone pins, shell ornaments, bone pendants, stone ornaments, necklaces, stone pipes, bone tube beads with shell bead applique, crab shell rattle, and shaft wrenches used only during the Early and Middle Periods (pre-A.D. 1150) are illustrated. The time periods during which they were used are not mentioned in the text.

Perhaps one of the greatest errors involves the identification of a San Diego County hilltop fortification as the only known example of a Chumash hunting blind. Several types of artifacts are described which archaeological and ethnographic data indicate were not used by the Chumash or their eastern neighbors at the time of European contact and colonization. These include fish spears, toggle-tipped salmon harpoons, fish arrows, and probably manos and metates.

Reconstruction of Chumash society and the history of its development before Spanish colonization is a goal of current anthropological research. This research is following many lines of evidence, including historical research with documents produced during the period of Spanish colonization, including books of



baptisms, marriages, and burials. Other research involves study of museum collections, archaeological research, and consultation with contemporary Chumash, Gabrieliño and Kitanemuk. Information contained in the *The Material Culture of the Chumash Interaction Sphere* concerning the functions of artifacts and their social contexts will aid in the interpretation of archaeological features and collections. The information gathered by Harrington from the ancestors of living Chumash, Gabrieliño and Kitanemuk and organized and presented by Hudson and Blackburn will aid contemporary Indians in the maintenance and rediscovery of their traditional knowledge.

In conclusion, the degree of thoroughness of presentation of ethnographic data is extremely useful to everyone interested in Chumash ethnography and archaeology. It is especially useful to researchers who are working toward reconstructing the history and prehistory of the Chumash and their neighbors. *The Material Culture of the Chumash Interaction Sphere* is a basic source of information concerning traditional Chumash culture.

#### NOTES

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