
Many, probably most, readers of this journal knew this book was in progress and have been eagerly awaiting it. They will not be disappointed. As expected, it is a superb work of scholarship. Jan Timbrook has searched through thousands of notes by the brilliant but eccentric ethnographer John Peabody Harrington; has worked through the specimens he collected and identified; and has correlated all this with more recent work on the Chumash. Harrington was obsessed with recording what he could of dying languages and cultures, and he became especially fascinated with the Chumash. The result is an amazing amount of material on a group that tragically declined (because of disease and hard life during the mission period) from some 25,000 to a tiny handful, losing most of their culture in the process.

The Chumash, as the term is now used, comprise a group of languages formerly spoken in Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties, California. (The name “Chumash” comes from one of the island communities.) This language family was possibly in the Hokan phylum, but may well have been an isolate, the last of a very ancient and separate stock. Chumash society reached the “chiefdom level” in Julian Steward’s terms, thus making it unusual among nonagricultural peoples. The Chumash had sophisticated plank canoes, spectacular art, rich folklore and religion, a structured society with hereditary rank and with many specialists, and much else. Like the Northwest Coast