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REVIEWS

Ancient Peoples of the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau

Steven R. Simms

Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008, 383 pp., 76 figures, preface, prologue, epilogue, extensive notes, references, index, \$65 (hard cover), \$26.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Amy J. Gilreath

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There is much to like about this book and little to dislike. Until now, there has not been a book-length overview of the archaeology of the Great Basin that the public can enjoy. Simms has done a masterful and admirable job of providing one. He engagingly synthesizes the most recent findings from diverse sources, scholars, and sites, and he does so using a structure that allows, even encourages, readers to plug-in at a level that matches their interest and expertise. For readers drawn to sound-bites, succinct, well-written sidebars bring us up to date on a number of popular topics. But rather than rehashing conventional, somewhat musty, perspectives on topics like Pleistocene megafaunal extinction, pine-nut use, and the Numic spread, Simms makes great use of recent developments to bring resolution to some long-standing debates (e.g., Pleistocene megafaunal extinction), and to give us a better informed and more nuanced understanding of others. For those with more time to invest, a clean read-through of the chapters will reward them with a well-rounded appreciation and understanding of Great Basin prehistory. And for those with some familiarity with this part of the world, a strong archaeological background, and a tendency to want to discern for themselves, his extensive notes provide the references containing the scientific basis for his interpretations.

Chapter 1 orients us to the topics that commonly organize an archaeological overview: technology, mobility and settlement, subsistence, social and political organization, and ideology. Chapter 2 reviews the climate and natural habitat of the Great Basin over the last 16,000 years, working us from the present back to 16,000 years ago, and dividing that span of time into seven intervals.

The chronological order is then reversed for Chapters 3 through 6, which characterize prehistoric existence for the Paleoindian/Paleoarchaic, Archaic, Fremont, and Late Prehistoric peoples, respectively. Chapter 3 presents what we now know about the colonizing Paleoindians and subsequent Paleoarchaic settlers in the Great Basin. Chapter 4 addresses Archaic adaptations that persisted for nine millennia, with consideration given to variations in foraging practices. Chapter 5 reviews the farming Fremont people who supplanted the Archaic foragers in Utah's portion of the Colorado Plateau, and then expanded into the eastern edge of the Great Basin. Chapter 6 addresses the post-Fremont developments of the last 1,000 years.

Themes that run through the narrative and give it cohesion revolve around the cultures' varying sense of place and use of landscape; public vs. private control of exploited resources; indigenes and immigrants; foragers and farmers; and desert-mountain and wetland adaptations/settlement patterning. Throughout, emphasis is given to the dynamics of change—the natural environmental changes and processes behind cultural changes. There is an even-handed consideration of the social/cultural conventions that are discerned and inferred, and of the material evidence that we rely on to distinguish different cultural traditions. As a consequence of this balanced consideration, a mild, humanitarian tone pervades the book.

I have only two criticisms to level at the book, one of which is petulant, and neither of which is the fault of the author. First, I had to use a penknife to separate a number of the pages in my paperback copy. The first few times I was amused by this downright Victorian exercise, but by about the fifth time it was annoying. Second, I was repeatedly struck by how much of the Great Basin's natural and cultural history is necessarily based on evidence from its perimeter. Environmental data sets are primarily drawn from the base of the Wasatch Range (Lake Bonneville), settings that front the Sierra Nevada (Owens Valley, the White Mountains, Lake Lahontan), and southeast Oregon (Malheur Marsh). The cultures that tend to stand out the most were situated out near the perimeter: the Lovelock Culture, the Fremont,

the Promontory Culture, and the Paleoindian/archaic manifestations in northwestern Utah and southwestern California. Yes, the book is unambiguously a study of the prehistoric peoples of the Great Basin, but given that Nevada covers half or more of the Great Basin, and is at its center, it is curious just how inappropriate it would be if it were entitled the *Prehistory of Nevada*. This observation is not meant to detract from Simms' wonderful overview.

Rather, it underscores one of his main points, which is that the history of humans in the Great Basin is an exquisite tapestry that becomes more splendid as the decades roll by and new evidence comes to light.

This is a must-read for those with an appreciation of and an interest in the prehistory of the West. It succeeds in being a rewarding read for the general public as well as for the serious student of Great Basin archaeology.



The Chumash World at European Contact: Power, Trade and Feasting Among Complex Hunter-Gatherers

Lynn H. Gamble

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008
376 pp., 50 figures, 23 tables, notes, bibliography,
index; \$49.95 (cloth)
ISBN: 978-0-520-25441-1

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In a state renowned for the complexity, sophistication, and elaboration of its hunter-gatherer cultures before the time of European contact, no California tribe has seen more attention from archaeologists and anthropologists than the Chumash, especially those coastal groups who lived in the larger Santa Barbara Channel area. Since the early 1900s, in fact, it seems likely that more ink has been applied to pages dedicated to the ethnohistory and archaeology of the maritime Chumash than almost any other tribe in North America (e.g., Arnold 2001, 2004; Benson 1997; Blackburn 1975; Braje 2009; Erlandson et al. 2008; Glassow 1996; Heye 1921; Hudson and Blackburn 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987; Hudson et al. 1978; Kennett 2005; King 1990; Landberg 1965; Librado 1979, 1981; Orr 1968; Rick 2007; Rogers 1929; Walker and Hudson 1993). Numerous other books, theses and dissertations, journal

articles, and book chapters have also been dedicated to the Chumash (see Holmes and Johnson 1998), many of them focused on the development of cultural complexity among the Chumash.

To this monumental literature, we can add a fine new book—*The Chumash World at European Contact: Power, Trade and Feasting Among Complex Hunter-Gatherers*—written by Lynn Gamble and published in a smart hard-cover format by the University of California Press in 2008. By now, some readers both inside and outside of California might wonder what could possibly be new about this intensely studied tribe and area. However, this remarkable region and those who study the people who lived here for over 13,000 years continue to produce important new discoveries and interpretations, raising fundamental questions about notions of sampling and redundancy that permeated the “new” (now old) archaeology of the 1960s and many of the basic tenets of cultural resource management and historic preservation practices that grew out of them. Virtually every time I go to the Channel Islands with students and colleagues, we find something that amazes me, often something completely unexpected, despite my 30 years of research in the area.

In this book, my old U.C. Santa Barbara (UCSB) graduate school compatriot takes aim at the dominance of the northern Channel Islands in recent literature discussing the evolution of sociopolitical and economic complexity among the Chumash. Gamble does this by reviewing the archaeology of the historic Chumash who occupied the mainland coast of the Santa Barbara