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King: *Evolution of Chumash Society, A Comparative Study of Artifacts Used for Social System Maintenance in the Santa Barbara Channel Region before A.D. 1894*

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REVIEW

Evolution of Chumash Society, A Comparative Study of Artifacts Used for Social System Maintenance in the Santa Barbara Channel Region before A.D. 1894. Chester D. King.

New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990, xxiv + 296 pp., 22 tables, 36 figs., 3 maps, 2 graphs, bibliography, 2 appendices, \$65.00 (hardbound).

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As one of 31 dissertations recently published by Garland Publishing under the editorship of David H. Thomas, this volume is a welcome addition to California archaeological literature. Indeed, it should have been available in published form much earlier. The text is essentially the same as King's 1981 dissertation, the only difference being minor editorial changes and the addition of a preface and occasional footnotes that refer to data and literature that became available since 1981. The artifact illustrations, an important aspect of King's data presentation, are nearly as clear as in a high-quality copy of his dissertation and far better than in the University Microfilm version.

Most references to King's dissertation in the southern California archaeological literature have been to the chronological scheme presented in the dissertation. Since this scheme parallels that developed earlier in central California and is explicitly tied to radiocarbon dates and cross-dates to the Great Basin and the American Southwest, it has a number of advantages over earlier schemes. In fact, King's scheme began to be used by archaeologists working in the Santa Barbara Channel region even before the

dissertation was issued, when only parts of it were being distributed among King's colleagues.

However, the greater significance of King's volume lies in his consideration of social, political, and economic changes during Santa Barbara Channel prehistory. His analysis of these changes is based on mortuary data derived from museum collections. Nearly all of these collections were the results of cemetery excavations conducted prior to 1965, and many of the most important were obtained before 1935, when prehistoric California cemetery excavations were in their heyday. The basic unit of analysis was a group of artifacts associated with an individual burial (i.e., a burial lot). King was concerned with differences between these artifact groups within a cemetery, as well as differences in the distribution of artifact groups between cemeteries.

King includes several discussions that have a good deal of value beyond serving as underpinnings of his analysis. His review of theory as applied to the use of artifacts as symbols in the maintenance of social organization provides the basis for relating beads, ornaments, and other mortuary offerings to aspects of social and political organization. His summary of ethnohistoric and ethnographic data pertaining to Chumash subsistence and social organization, as well as his overview of changes in subsistence behavior and settlement patterns through the course of prehistory, relate to his argument that the rise of a Chumash sociopolitical hierarchy is associated with control of food stores. Each of these discussions can stand alone and undoubtedly will serve as fodder for research unrelated to the objectives of his analysis.

The core of King's study are two chapters, one of which presents his interpretations of

Chumash social and political organization and the other being a detailed discussion of changes in the types of beads and ornaments during each of the phases of his chronological sequence. King ends his dissertation with some thoughts about how his perspective might help to understand social evolution elsewhere in North America and how future research in both the Santa Barbara Channel region and beyond could yield interesting insights through consideration of the manner in which artifacts relate to social and political systems.

Those interested in the nuances of the analysis will be disappointed to find that his analytical procedures are described only in general terms. Although his typology of bead types follows closely those of earlier workers, particularly Gifford and Bennyhoff, it is apparent that King used specific attributes (e.g., disc bead diameter) to make relatively fine chronological distinctions. However, he does not present a quantitative analysis of the patterning in these attributes. Moreover, King does not present the details of the burial lot seriation upon which all of his inferences are based, although it is summarized in two graphs and the raw data are in a series of tables in an appendix. As a result of these problems, one wonders about the extent to which some of his chronological distinctions, as well as proposed changes in economic and sociopolitical systems, are supported by the data. More than likely, future evaluation of King's interpretation will be based on more formal presentations of data analysis.

King's preface reviews several definitive studies of social and economic organization of the Chumash and their prehistoric predecessors that became available since his dissertation was completed. He gives particular attention to the study of the Medea Creek cemetery mortuary practices (L. King 1982), the study of mortuary practices at several cemeteries in the eastern Chumash area (Martz 1984), and the study of Is-

land Chumash economic specialization (Arnold 1987). All three investigations consider Chumash sociopolitical evolution, and each views this evolution at least somewhat differently than does King. King defends his interpretations by indicating why he interprets data differently and by pointing out differences in theoretical positions.

King's interpretations of Chumash sociopolitical organization are in sharp contrast with those of Arnold. Whereas King believes that nonegalitarian social organization based on hereditary status ascription and hereditary political positions begins near the end of the Early Period, roughly 3,000 B.P., Arnold argued that such developments occurred quite late in prehistory, around 700 B.P., and that earlier social differentiation likely was associated with "Big Man" forms of political control. Furthermore, Arnold saw environmental perturbations as playing a significant role inducing relatively rapid changes at this time, whereas King sees environmental change playing no significant role and views cultural changes as relatively gradual. Thus we have two fundamentally different perspectives on the nature of Chumash sociopolitical evolution. (Those interested in this developing controversy also should consult the more recent publications of Arnold [1992a, 1992b].)

The truth actually may lie somewhere between these two positions. It is possible that sociopolitical evolution in the Santa Barbara Channel region was a good deal more complex, both spatially and temporally, than either King or Arnold currently recognize. King's interpretation of the early development of hereditary political positions is based primarily of his observations of variability in mortuary treatment in two cemeteries of at site on western Santa Cruz Island. One could argue that King's interpretations of these data are essentially correct, but that this development was localized and temporary, and that political systems involv-

ing hereditary status differentiation came and went during the next few thousand years. Conversely, Arnold clearly has documented that some rather profound economic changes indeed did take place sometime after ca. A.D. 1200, at which time a chiefdom form of sociopolitical organization may have become more formally institutionalized and a good deal more stable than before.

The differences between King's and Arnold's positions also revolve around how one goes about defining terms such as "Big Man" and "Chiefdom." If one adopts the position of Johnson and Earle (1987), for instance, one might argue that even the Chumash at the time of European contact probably were a series of Big Man collectivities. Interestingly, Johnson and Earle did not place great emphasis on hereditary leadership as a critical characteristic in distinguishing leadership Big Man collectivities and Chiefdoms, although they argued that the power of a Big Man is "conditional and transitory" (1987:317). Presumably "transitory" leadership could reside within one lineage over as many as two or three generations.

Regardless of the position one might choose to take with respect to this emerging controversy, King must be credited with focusing our attention on the possibilities of investigating the development of economic and sociopolitical analysis of mortuary goods, particularly beads and ornaments. Not only has he developed a methodology for generating information on these systems, he has proposed an integrated series of

hypotheses—a theory in essence—concerning how these systems developed. King's dissertation already has, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the practice of archaeology in the Santa Barbara Channel region, and we can expect that its publication will stimulate interest in the archaeological community at large.

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