

Handbook of North American Indians

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VOLUME 8

California

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

WASHINGTON

1978

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For sale by the Superintendent of Documents,
U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.
Stock Number: 047-000-00347-4

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Handbook of North American Indians.

Bibliography: pp. 721-768

Includes index.

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v. 8. California.

1. Indians of North America. 2. Eskimos.

I. Sturtevant, William C.

E77.H25 970.004'97 77-17162

Chumash: Introduction

CAMPBELL GRANT

Language and Territory

The Chumash (¹chōō,māsh) were known to Henshaw and other early investigators as the Santa Barbara Indians. The first reference to their language (Latham 1856) noted that the dialects of Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez, and San Luis Obispo were related. Powell (1891) later referred to the dialects of the region as Chumashan.

Beginning in 1878 with the Chumash vocabularies collected by Alphonse Pinart (Heizer 1952), considerable information on their languages was recorded from surviving Chumash. There were at least six Chumash languages (fig. 1): Ventureño (probably including Castac), Barbareño (probably including Emigdiano), Ynezeño, Purisimeño (these four forming a Central group of more closely related languages), Obispeño, and the Island language. Whether the interior Cuyama spoke a different Chumash language is uncertain (Beeler 1970:14, Beeler and Klar 1974).*

Geographically, the Chumash occupied the region from San Luis Obispo to Malibu Canyon on the coast and inland as far as the western edge of the San Joaquin valley. In addition, they occupied the Santa Barbara Channel Islands—San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, and Anacapa.

History

For such a large and important tribe, there is remarkably little documented history. The Chumash were docile and friendly to the Spanish and readily went into the

* All the Chumash languages have been extinct since the death of Mary Yee, the last native speaker of Barbareño, in 1965. Materials on most or all the languages were provided by late 19th- and early 20th-century investigators, especially John P. Harrington, and by the work of Madison S. Beeler with Yee during her last year. According to Beeler (personal communication 1974), "the differences among the various Chumash languages, at least those that constitute the Central group, were lexical and inflectional rather than phonological." Thus a single orthography should suffice for all of them—that of Beeler (1970:15-16), which conforms to Handbook standards if *h* is substituted for the raised comma, and *ɨ* replaces *i*. The italicized Chumash words in the following chapters have been rewritten by Beeler in this orthography; the spellings of those with a question mark following are less certain. The principal difficulties are that early recorders rarely recognized glottalization and did not hear the difference between *k* and *q*, so that words from sources other than Harrington and Beeler cannot be accurately transliterated in these regards. Most of the Chumash words that Beeler was unable to identify are written in a Spanish-based orthography.

mission system that ended their native culture. Before anthropologists became interested in them, there were few Chumash left with any knowledge of the ancient life patterns; therefore, the ethnological record is slim.

The diaries and journals of the Spanish explorers who passed through the Chumash territory do remain, and in their writings can be glimpsed these interesting Indians before their destruction. The Chumash were the first major group of California Indians to be discovered by Europeans. On October 10, 1542, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, on an exploring trip up the coast, landed near the present site of Ventura. Cabrillo visited many points on the mainland and on the Channel Islands and noted the names of many of the settlements. The next brief contact was 60 years later when Sebastián Vizcaino entered and named the Santa Barbara Channel.

In 1769 an expedition under the command of Capt. Gaspar de Portolá passed through the Chumash coastal region heading north to find Monterey Bay, reported by Vizcaino in 1602. With him were Lt. Pedro Fages, the engineer Miguel Constansó, and the Friar Juan Crespi. All four wrote valuable accounts of the appearance and activities of the Indians. There are several more contemporary accounts before the turn of the nineteenth century: the 1775 diary of Father Pedro Font, diarist of the Juan Bautista de Anza expedition; Father Francisco Paulou's account of 1778; the 1791-1792 journal of the naturalist José Longinos Martínez; and in 1793 the first account of the Chumash in English by Archibald Menzies, the naturalist of the George Vancouver expedition.

Those early historical accounts describe only the heavily populated Santa Barbara Channel coast. For all other areas in the Chumash territory, the scanty references to Chumash people and places in the mission records must be used in combination with the archeological evidence for a picture of Chumash life.

In 1772, San Luis Obispo, the first of the Franciscan missions in Chumash territory, was founded. Four others soon followed: San Buenaventura (1782), Santa Barbara (1786), La Purísima Concepción (1787), and Santa Ynez (1804). By the early 1800s, the entire Chumash population, with the exception of those who had fled into the mountains and the inland valleys, had come into the mission system. The Spanish missionaries were determined to make industrious farmers and artisans of the Chumash and taught them the trades that made the

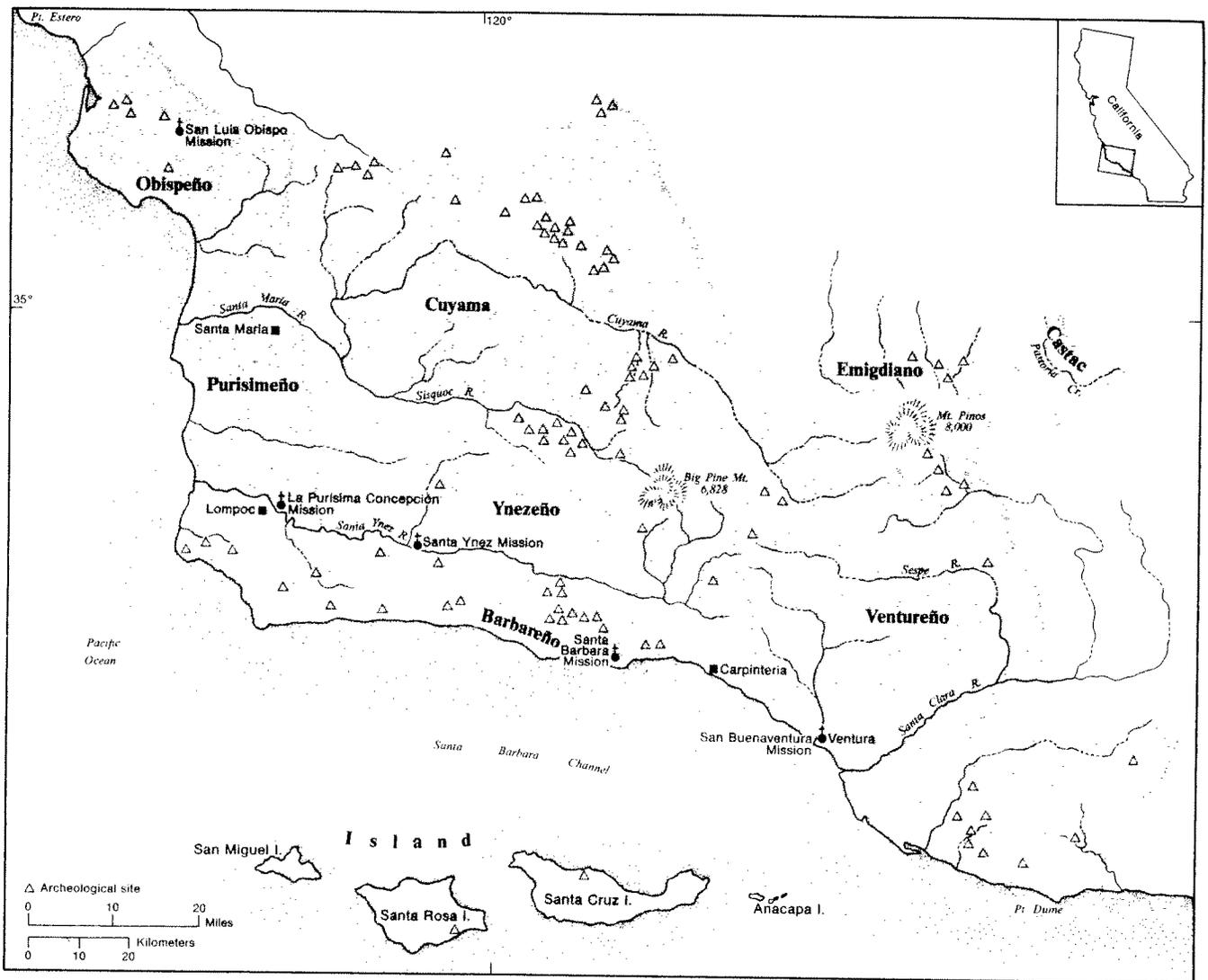


Fig. 1. Tribal territory with dialect areas and rock-art sites indicated. After Kroeber 1925; Grant 1965.

building and maintenance of the great mission establishments possible.

One-fourth of the 21 missions in California were devoted to the spiritual welfare of the large Chumash population, yet further historical reference to them is mainly confined to vital statistics in the mission registers. Some information on the Chumash during the mission period is found in the *interrogatorios*, or questionnaires, that the mission padres were required to send to the civil authorities in Mexico.

The mission period in the Chumash region lasted from 1772 until 1834, when the missions were secularized. In 1831 the Chumash registered at the five missions numbered 2,788, with 726 at the Santa Barbara mission (A. Forbes 1839). This was a great decline from the large population described by the explorers. Many of the original Chumash, of course, had simply migrated into the interior to escape the tedious mission life; but the basic cause for the population decline was the mission system itself, which crowded the neophytes into com-

pounds near the presidios and mission buildings, where they were daily exposed to the European diseases for which they had no immunity. Smallpox and syphilis were the major killers but even the common cold would rapidly develop into some deadly form of pulmonary disease.

Kroeber (1925:551) thought that the original population might have been between 8,000 and 10,000 for the entire Chumash area, including the interior and the islands. Cook and Heizer (1965:21) considered Kroeber's figures far too low and estimated (on the basis of 15 people in a house and 46 villages) that the 1770 population of the mainland channel area was between 18,000 and 22,000. In their village count, Cook and Heizer included 22 archeological Chumash sites (Rogers 1929) not mentioned by the explorers. Brown (1967:79) places the figure at 7,000 for the coastal region with 15,000 for the entire Chumash area. According to King (1969:map 1) the 1770 Barbareño population in 26 rancherias was between 4,300 and 6,700. The same map gives a total

Chumash population for all areas at between 10,700 and 17,250.

The Chumash made one attempt to escape the deadly benevolence of their Spanish masters. In 1824, driven to desperation by mistreatment by the mission soldiers and the endless toil, the neophytes revolted at Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez, and La Purísima. After brief hostilities in which several Indians and Spanish were killed, many natives fled to the Tulares (the lower San Joaquin valley) to take refuge with the Yokuts (Cooper 1969). Numbers were subsequently persuaded to return to the missions, but in 1833 a party of American fur trappers found a village of the renegade Spanish-speaking Chumash living near Walker Pass in Kern County raising corn and riding horses (Leonard 1839).

The intention of the secularization of the California missions in 1834 was to transform the mission centers into Pueblos; the Indians, with their knowledge of trade and agriculture, would become Mexican citizens in these Pueblos. Civil administrators would oversee the orderly changeover and allot land to all the former neophytes. What actually happened was far different. With the removal of authority, many Chumash fled to the interior and others refused to labor for the Mexican rancheros. Those who attempted to farm for themselves were harassed by the Whites and driven off the land. Those that remained at the missions were enslaved by the administrators (P. Wallace 1971:3).

In effect, the missionary system, having destroyed the native culture, now turned the survivors loose to fend for themselves. There is no record that the promised land or property was given to the Indians at the time of secularization, although in the 1840s some small parcels were given to individual Chumash. This land was soon lost through gambling or traded to Whites for whiskey and blankets. By 1838 drunkenness among the Chumash was widespread and continued to be a problem for many years (P. Wallace 1971:5). Many finally found work on the large ranches acquired by Mexican citizens through grant or by purchase from the mission administrators.

Disease continued to decimate the remaining Chumash and in 1844 a serious epidemic caused the death of most of the Purísima Indians. From the earliest Spanish contact the Chumash blood had been mixed with that of the Spanish and particularly the mestizos, so that by 1900 very few full-blooded Chumash were alive.

With the coming of the Anglo-Americans in 1847, the lot of the Chumash continued to deteriorate. They were exploited as cheap labor or ignored except when drunk and disorderly or when caught stealing horses. The Chumash that remained near the settlements worked as vaqueros, house servants, or farm laborers.

In 1855 a small piece of land (120 acres) was set aside on a creek near Santa Ynez Mission and 109 Chumash were settled there. This reserve, known as the Zanja de Cota (now reduced to 75 acres), eventually became the

Mission Chumash Population Following Secularization

	<i>San Buenaventura</i>	<i>Santa Barbara</i>	<i>La Purísima</i>	<i>San Luis Obispo</i>
1834	636	556	900	264
1835			400	
1839	300			
1840	180	250	170	170
1842				100
1844		300	200	
1845	200		50	60
1854		117		
1856			55	

SOURCE: P. Wallace (1971:48-50).

Mission Records

<i>Mission</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Baptisms</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Santa Barbara	1834-1842	109	360	- 251
Santa Ynez	1834-1850	265	401	- 136
La Purísima	1835-1845	56	284	- 228

SOURCE: Engelhardt (in P. Wallace 1971:48-50).

Chumash Population Since Contact

<i>Date</i>	<i>Population</i>
1770	8,000
1832	2,471
1842	1,656
1852	1,107
1865	659
1880	336
1920	74

SOURCE: Cook (1943a:40). Estimates based on 1832 mission records with the assumption that birth rate was 4% a year and death rate was 8%.

smallest official Indian reservation in the state. In 1972 about 40 mixed-blood Chumash occupied the land, with doubtless many more scattered about in southern California who have no knowledge of their ancestors or traditional culture (Lloyd 1955; Gardner 1965; Heizer 1970).

Synonymy

The name Chumash was arbitrarily chosen by Powell (1891) from the word used by the Coastal Chumash for Santa Cruz Island and its inhabitants, Mi-tcú-mac, or the Coastal Chumash word for the Santa Rosa Indians, Tcú-mac. Each regional group had its own name for itself. The Santa Rosa Islanders called themselves Hël-a-wac-skú-yu; the Barbareño, Wal-wa-ren-na; the Yneze-

ño, A-la-hu-la-po; and the Ventureño, Mitc-ka-na-kan (Heizer 1955:115).

Sources

Source materials covering the first contacts between the Spanish explorers and the Chumash are abundant. These original accounts are available: Cabrillo (Wagner 1929), Vizcaíno (Wagner 1929), Fages (1937), Constansó (1911), Crespí (1927), Font (1930), Palóu (1926), Longinos Martínez (1961), Vancouver (Menziés 1924).

The Pinart and Henshaw Chumash vocabularies are published in the University of California Anthropological Records (Heizer 1952, 1955). Linguistic research on Chumash is surveyed in Beeler (1970) and Harrington

(1974). There is a chapter on the Chumash in Kroeber (1925). Landberg (1965) contains a valuable study of the Chumash subsistence patterns. There is much ethnological information in the culture element distribution lists of Harrington (1942). Rogers (1929) describes many archaeological sites along the channel. Drawings and photographs of paintings from all Chumash areas are available in Grant (1965). Father Engelhardt of Santa Barbara Mission wrote the histories of the five Chumash missions (1923, 1930, 1932, 1932a, 1933). They contain several of the early eighteenth-century Spanish *interrogatorios* with ethnographic information.

Extensive Chumash bibliographies are found in Landberg (1965), Grant (1965), E.N. Anderson (1964), and Heizer, Elsasser, and Clewlow (1970).