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# Serrano

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## Language, Territory, and Environment

The small ethnic nationality called Serrano (sə'rā,nō), from a Spanish term meaning 'mountaineer, highlander', aboriginally occupied an area east of present-day Los Angeles. The name Serrano has also been used, in a broader sense, for a group of languages in the Takic family: Serrano, Kitanemuk, probably Vanyume, and just possibly Tataviam. The term Serran has been introduced (Bright 1975) for the linguistic group consisting of Serrano and Kitanemuk, as contrasted to the other, more distantly related Takic languages Gabrielino, Luiseño, Cahuilla, and Cupeño (a group Bright calls Cupan).\*

It is nearly impossible to assign definitive boundaries for Serrano territory due both to Serrano sociopolitical organizational features and to a lack of reliable data. As Strong (1929) noted, the Serrano were organized into autonomous localized lineages occupying definite, favored territories, but rarely claiming any territory far removed from the lineage's home base. Since the entire dialectical group was neither politically united nor amalgamated into supralineage groups, as many of their neighbors were, one must speak in terms of generalized areas of usage rather than pan-tribal holdings (Strong 1929).

Very little is known of the Vanyume, a sparse and poor population living along the Mojave River. Whether they spoke a dialect of Serrano or a separate Takic language cannot be determined from the brief word list available (Bright 1975; Kroeber 1907b:139-140). Politically they seem to have differed from the Serrano proper, for example, in enjoying friendly relations with the Mohave and Chemehuevi, who were enemies of the Serrano (Kroeber 1925:614-615). The number of Vanyume, never large, dwindled rapidly between 1820 and 1834 as the Spanish collected southern California Indians in various *asistencias* and missions (Beattie and Beattie 1939); well before 1900 the group was extinct.

Most researchers place Serrano groups in the San Bernardino Mountains east of Cajon Pass, at the base and north of these mountains in the desert near Victor-

\* Italicized Serrano words have been rewritten by Kenneth C. Hill in the phonemic orthography he developed (K.C. Hill 1969), with a few symbol substitutions in accord with Handbook standards:  $\chi$  is here written  $x$ ,  $\chi^w$  is  $x^w$ ,  $\tilde{n}$  is  $nr$ ,  $\tilde{l}$  is  $l$  and  $v$  is  $\beta$ . Vowels with a dot beneath are retroflex.

ville, eastward as far as Twentynine Palms, and south to and in the Yucaipa Valley (fig. 1). The area thus described varies considerably topographically (elevations ranging from about 1,500 feet in the desert to over 11,000 feet in the mountains) and in plant-animal community associations. The desert floor and valley region passes from Lower Sonoran through Upper Sonoran, the latter region being confined to a narrow strip on the mountains' eastern slopes, and above 5,000-6,000 feet the forest Transition life-zone predominates. Rainfall varies as does topography with water almost nonexistent in the desert areas while in the lower foothills are found perennial seeps, streams, and occasionally small lakes. Available foods include, but are not restricted to, mountain sheep, deer, rabbits, acorns, seeds of various grasses, piñon nuts, bulbs and tubers, shoots and roots, berries, mesquite. The principal vegetation at lower elevations on the mountains' southern sides is coastal sagebrush and chaparral while to the east and north in the desert there is a sparse covering of edible plants, the most important being barrel cacti and Joshua trees. The mountains' inland slopes support, at successively higher elevations, Great Basin sagebrush, juniper, piñon pine (whose nuts provided a valuable food resource), and minor conifers, types of relatively little value in the dietary plans of the Serrano (Kroeber 1925; Strong 1929).

Most village-hamlets were in the foothill Upper Sonoran life-zone while a few were out on the desert floor (near permanent water sources) or in the forest Transition zone. As Benedict (1924:368) points out the availability of water on a year-round basis was, to a large



Fig. 1. Tribal territory.