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A Rare Account of Gabrielino Shamanism from the Notes of John P. Harrington

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NARRATIVES which concern shamanism among the Gabrielino of southern California are always important, since so little of this aspect of their culture has survived. It was thus with great delight that I discovered one such narrative among some notes on Gabrielino material culture that I had ordered from the Smithsonian Institution. The account, recorded by John P. Harrington, pertains to shamanism at Mission San Gabriel and Santa Catalina Island, and its rich detail provides the opportunity to make comparative studies. I have lightly edited the account, and at the end of the narrative the reader will find a few notes made where confusion or contradiction existed, or elaboration was felt justified.

The original document consists of seven pages of standard-size paper in Harrington's own handwriting. At the top right of each page is written "Kuhn," which, in keeping with Harrington's secretiveness, designated the consultant as José de los Santos Juncos; another code used for this same man was "Kewen" (Walsh 1976:38). Harrington (1942: 5) worked with José de los Santos Juncos to record many details of Gabrielino culture, and wrote of him simply that the man was of

Juaneño descent, but reared at San Gabriel. Unfortunately, we know little more about him. There is reportedly a newspaper clipping, giving some biographical details about the man, at the Southwest Museum library (William Bright, personal communication). At the time of this writing the article cannot be found.

* * *

THE ACCOUNT FROM THE NOTES OF JOHN P. HARRINGTON

There was a captain at San Gabriel. K. has heard his name but forgets it. This captain had enemies, adversaries, here at San Gabriel, but he had none on the island.¹ He had succeeded in killing some of his enemies by witchery, but not all, and so when he had a fiesta (or there was a fiesta held) at San Gabriel the island Indians came. Among the islanders who came were two brothers, both *hechiceros*, who lived on the island. They became friendly with the captain, staying at the captain's house while at the fiesta. Just before they left, the captain paid them a lot of shell bead money, of course, so that they would perform magic rites when they returned to the island in order to kill all of the

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captain's enemies for him. They replied, "Sure, we will do it," to the captain's request. The captain added: "Only see to it that among those whom you kill there will be none of my family. Of this take care!"

When the two returned to the island, they did not let the islanders know what they were going to do. They parted company and went to a remote canyon on the island. With the two adult brothers was a boy who was being initiated into perpetuating the cult. This boy may have been a son or brother, but K. does not know. There in the canyon, where none save the three could see it, they painted the world on the level ground. They painted it like the world is, and they painted all, outdoors in the canyon.² This canyon was where these brothers and the boy lived.

When they were finished painting the world, they began to paint infirmities and blood, all in the world, as well as such dangerous animals that cause pain by biting, clawing, and so on, to occupy places in the world—all of these things for sickness.³ They also hung head downward twelve little figures. K. does not know what these figures were made of, maybe of rags.⁴

Then they got their power from the *Chachngicham*.⁵ The earth began to tremble like an earthquake, and the two wizards then gave three shrill cries—a descending tremble by slapping the mouth—and then the earth shook more.⁶ Then the two took down all the little figures and put up new ones and repeated the process. This they did all day long.

Meanwhile the people at San Gabriel were dying. They had headaches, and blood came out of the mouth, and so on.⁷ The priests at San Gabriel were concerned.⁸ At first only single graves were dug, but they could not keep up, so they later made big pits and would throw the bodies of the dead people in. When these were full they would cover it with earth and dig another pit. The priest enquired of the Indians as to what was making the people die so. The

Indians were enquiring too. The captain told them that it might be God, or it might be Indians, or it might be something else. Only the captain knew who was doing it—no one else knew.

At last a daughter of the captain, already a big girl, became sick. She gave notice to the people that she was dying, and they came to see her that night, crying. Then she died.⁹ The captain and the lesser captains around him were crying. Then the captain spoke: "I know who did this. I know who it is." "Say who it is," said the lesser captains. The captain replied: "It is *Papimaris* who are of the island."¹⁰ He called them by name and added: "I paid them for it, for I have many enemies here, and I am afraid of them."

The captain continued. "We must go to the island and kill them. If we drown during the crossing, then we must die, but we must cross the channel to the island." They prepared for the trip by making bows and arrows.¹¹ Then they started off for the coast.

When they reached the coast, they spoke to the Indians there who lived in the hills of the coast. They told these people that they had to cross the channel and that they might drown, but that they were going to cross, and if they were received they might be given food over there.¹² And so they made small canoes for one or two people at the shore which were to be paddled across to the island.¹³

Well armed, they crossed the channel and arrived at the island. K. does not know how long they were on the way, but he said they arrived at night. They went to certain houses on the island and the people gave signs. The captain spoke: "I am so-and-so, and I have come to see such-and-such who live here." The island captain replied: "They do not live here, but over there." "We do not come here to fight you," said the San Gabriel captain, "but only those that we seek." The mainland captain then told about how he had paid these men to kill his enemies, but that they were also killing

his own people. "I am very grieved and very angry from this," the San Gabriel captain said.

The island captain spoke: "They do not live here, but they are bad, and we will accompany you to help you kill them. Shall you not stop here for the night, or do you want to go immediately?" The San Gabriel captain replied that it would be well to have it over with. So they all set out at once with their arms, objects of wizardry, and other things.¹⁴

Now the two brothers more or less knew that the people were coming, for they were wizards themselves. When the people arrived at the house of the wizards, the two brothers were sleeping. The San Gabriel captain approached the house and said: "Come out of the house! I grieve for you. Come out of the house! You are the ones who killed my daughters. Come out and you shall die or I will!"

The party could hear *wh* (spitting sounds) coming from inside the house—the brothers were doing their witchcraft.¹⁵ But there were also wizards in the party outside the house, and when the two brothers found this out, they decided to come out and finish them.

Some of the party outside the house formed a circle nearer the house, and others formed farther away, for the brothers had said they would jump out of the house. Then one brother jumped. He went far in one jump and they all shot arrows at him. On his second jump he went further. They all raced after him. He darted into the prickly pear cactus, but they shot and killed him nevertheless. The captain of the island advised them to extract the victim's heart and burn it, for according to him if this was not done then his brother could revive him again.¹⁶ His brother had the power to revive him. So this was done and the heart was burned.

Then the party returned to the house, and from within the remaining brother told them to wait a little. They began to hear the *wh wh* sounds from inside, so the island captain told the men to spread out. Then the second

brother sprang out of the tule house from the smoke hole. When he fell to the ground he began to shoot his arrows, and the party shot at him in return. When his quiver was empty he ran, and the party followed and killed him. There were other islanders present there who could remove the wizardry that the brothers had made, so they opened him up and took out his heart to burn it.

With the two old men now dead, the island captain said that only the boy remains, and that the boy knows. "Is he old?" asked the San Gabriel captain. "Yes, he is ten years or more, and he has of course learned the wizardry that the two old men have taught him," replied the island captain.

The party then approached the house, and the boy said that there was no use to be made of wizardry or remedies and that he was coming out. He then led them to the earth painting, going ahead of the group and telling them not to come near, for it was dangerous. Then the boy blew to the four directions and above.¹⁷ He told the party that they could now approach, but that they could only look at the painting; they were not to touch it.

The island captain began talking to the boy, for he talked the island language which the San Gabriel captain did not understand.¹⁸ The boy pointed out the mountain lion, bear, snake, blood, and other things which were in the painting. The island captain asked the boy if he could work it, and the boy said maybe, but he didn't know for sure. Then the boy gave out a cry and the earth began to tremble. When the boy shouted the men thought that they might all be going to die at once. Upon his second cry the earth trembled more and the twelve little figures began to swing way over all the more. The boy then explained that when the little figures swung over, the people at San Gabriel died. "If you don't believe me, I will try it in 24 hours and you can see for yourselves!"

The island captain then asked the boy if he

had the power to stop this, and the boy replied no. But at last the boy consented to destroy the painting, and with it he also burned the little figures. Then the two, followed by the crowd, went over to the tule house and they destroyed it by burning too.

After this an argument followed as to whether or not they should kill the boy, since he had the power and he might do it again, even though he had destroyed the things. The boy was old enough to know how, and he had learned things. So they shot the boy as they had the other two old men.

The San Gabriel captain then paid the island captain in shell bead money for his assistance, explaining to him that it was all that he had with him, but that if the island captain was ever to come to San Gabriel, he would give him more, as he did when he first came, giving him clothes and everything. The San Gabriel captain then departed for home. The plague was over at San Gabriel.

NOTES

1. (the island). *Papimar* is the Gabrielino name for Santa Catalina Island (Kroeber 1925:621). Conceivably then, *Papimaris* may represent the Spanish plural, *Papimares*, thus "people of *Pipimar*" (William Bright, personal communication). See note 10.

2. (they painted). Since the work was made upon level ground, it must have been a ground painting; the practice is reported for the Gabrielino, even those on Santa Catalina Island (Burney 1806:248-249; Kroeber 1925:626). Unfortunately, descriptions of Gabrielino ground paintings are not detailed, but in Luiseño and Diegueño ground paintings the world is symbolized by the outer ring of the painting itself. Within are depicted various elements representing islands, major mountains, celestial objects, various animals, and ceremonial items (Kroeber 1925:662-663).

3. (animals that cause pain). It would appear that these were the *Chinigchinich* avenging animals: the rattlesnake, bear, mountain lion, and

wolf (DuBois 1908:83). Harrington (1978:129-132, note 54) lists the avengers as the raven, crow, hawk, eagle, black bear, mountain lion, rattlesnake, sting ray, wasp, black widow, garden spider, tarantula, trapdoor spider, tick, scorpion, and centipede. Later in the account, three of these animals—the rattlesnake, bear, and mountain lion—are specifically mentioned as being in the painting.

4. (twelve little figures). As pointed out elsewhere (Hudson and Blackburn 1978:239), the ritual number *twelve* is typical in Gabrielino and Chumash ceremonies, as for example *twelve 'antap*, or *twelve* charmstones, or *twelve* feather banners. Hudson and Underhay (1978:135-136) have reached the opinion that the *twelve* might be associated with the *twelve* lunations which make up the lunar year. Since this number is associated with ritual activities involving the entire community, it is most interesting to find it being expressed in the behavior of two shamans undertaking a private ceremony. Since we know that community ceremonies involving the *twelve* were sometimes made, to undertake ground paintings for bringing about earthquakes, sickness, or death (Kroeber 1925:626; Hudson and Blackburn 1978:239-240), it is conceivable that a similar ceremony was being undertaken by the two shamans in private.

The reference to little figures also brings up some rather interesting parallels in religious behavior among the neighboring Chumash, as recorded in some of the notes of John P. Harrington. For example, María Solares, an Ineseño Chumash, reported that wooden effigies called *Kalkuniha's* were made; when these were bewitched, the effigy would sway from side to side. Fernando Librado, a Ventureño Chumash, described a wooden figure which was cared for at the Wind Sycamore, a shrine site near modern Ventura. Whenever the limbs of the figure were twisted, sickness or injury would come to the corresponding part of the person to whom it was directed (Hudson 1978). Small figures of sticks and feathers, called *'Ishoyish*, were mentioned by Candalaria as being placed on Ventureño shrines; they represented gods, and offerings were made to them. Luisa Ygnacio, Barbareño Chumash, told Harrington that a Santa Barbara Indian shaman named

Andrés used to go up into a canyon behind the mission to paint figurines for the purpose of making his enemies sick. Last, one of Harrington's Gabrielino consultants, Jesus Javro, stated that some sort of idol, called *Maasharot*, was kept away in a cave until the time of a big fiesta. At that time, he said, it was brought out.

What is evident in these accounts is the association of supernatural power—either for positive or negative applications—with little figurines. In the text of this story, such figurines are symbolically hung “head downward.” Perhaps a similar motive is involved in Chumash rock art where figures were depicted upside down (Janice Timbrook, personal communication).

5. (*Chachngcham*). William Bright informs me that this is the plural of *Chingichngich*, or to use Boscana's spelling, *Chinigchinich*. Elsewhere in these same Harrington notes, his consultant, Kuhn, stated that *Chachngcham* was a stone that G. got over in back of the mountains at a place called Agua Mansa. Apparently it was a special stone used by a Pito Real bird to break into its nest site after it had been intentionally closed by a sorcerer seeking to trick the bird into using the stone to gain entry. Once the sorcerer had the stone he could use its supernatural powers. The consultant mentioned that it was placed in the mouth and spitting was done during the Fire Dance so that the fire would not burn the dancer. The Fire Dancers at Pala had these stones, as did the sorcerers at San Gabriel.

6. (earthquakes). The Gabrielino in particular were considered the “enlightened ones” who had the power to produce earthquakes by addressing their songs to *Panahutr*, the two large snakes which held up the earth (Hudson and Blackburn 1978: 232). Kroeber (1925:626) described one specific ceremony in which a ground painting was made and the end result was an earthquake and sickness. The association of painting with prayer to influence the supernatural among the Gabrielino and Chumash has been reported in other examples (Blackburn 1975:Narrative 79; Hudson and Underhay 1978:61-66).

7. (bleeding from mouth). It is interesting to note that this symptom is reported in another Gabrielino myth associated with the death of a

large number of Indians at San Gabriel; in this account, death is brought about by a sorcerer undertaking a rock painting which depicts “many figures of men and women bleeding from the mouth and falling down” (Blackburn 1975:Narrative 79).

8. (the priests). This statement suggests that the event being described took place sometime after the founding of Mission San Gabriel (1771) but before the Indians were removed from Santa Catalina Island (1835). Cook (1940:23-24; 1943: 21-22) noted that two sweeping epidemics struck in the years 1806 and 1828. For Mission San Gabriel in particular, he mentioned a series of “semi-epidemics” which broke out from about 1799 to 1805, with one in particular for the year 1803 described as “unknown” and “killing various Indians.” It would appear that if the narrative is based upon a factual epidemic or semi-epidemic at this mission, then it most likely took place between 1799 and 1805.

9. (then she died). Later in the narrative the reference is to the death of daughters.

10. (*Papimaris*). Again, Santa Catalina Island, but the original wording is confusing in this context: “Say, say, who it is [*unreadable*] is he *Papimaris*, he said, who are in the island and called them by name.” The suggestion is that the reference is to a Santa Catalina Islander. It is interesting to speculate at this point whether or not the name for the island is in some way connected with *Papamas*, the Swordfish supernatural brothers who were particularly important in Gabrielino, Fernandeno, and Chumash ritual and mythology (Hudson and Blackburn 1978:234). Could the etymology of the placename have some association with the Swordfish?

11. (they prepared). The original text is again unclear: “. . . and he [*unreadable*] a day and they made arrows and bows”

12. (were received). The meaning, perhaps, is that if they were able to cross, the islanders would provide food and shelter.

13. (small canoes). Or “*chalupas*”; unfortunately we are not told whether these were balsa or plank canoes.

14. (objects of wizardry). The use of supernatural power to counter that of an evil shaman, in order to kill him, is consistent with other southern California narratives; for example, Blackburn (1975:Narrative 78) reported a Chumash account in which powerful shamans took part in killing two evil shamans.

15. (spitting sound). Spitting is associated with ground paintings in both Luiseño and Diegueño boys' ceremonies. A central hole is made in the painting, and each candidate is required to spit a lump of sage-seed and salt into it at the conclusion of the ceremony. This is followed by the old men who carefully obliterate the painting (DuBois 1908:83; Waterman 1910:304).

16. (burn it). Destruction by fire of the body or of anything of supernatural use is consistent with the practice of the Gabrielino and their eastern and southern neighbors. In one Gabrielino myth a being named *Mactutu* so angered the elders and seers that they decided to kill him by burning him alive and then dissipating his ashes so that he could not ascend into the sky (Heizer 1968:52-54).

17. (the four directions). This suggests that the painting may have been quartered, as is recorded for one Luiseño ground painting (Kroeber 1925:663, Fig. 56*d*). A similar quartering, but using sacred cords to designate the directions, is reported in association with a Fernandeano ground painting. In this case, when the cords were shaken, the earth quaked, and whatever person they had in mind became sick (Kroeber 1925:626). It would appear that each of the cardinal directions was associated with *Chinigchinich* avengers. Among the Chumash, the cardinal directions were also of great ritual importance, and prayers and offerings were made to them (Hudson and Underhay 1978: 41-42).

18. (island language). This is considered a dialect of Gabrielino (Kroeber 1925:620), but perhaps this is evidence that "Catalineño" was a separate language (William Bright, personal communication).

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