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The Chumash Revolt of 1824:

A Native Account

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Although the mission system established by the Spanish in California has been a topic of considerable interest to both scholars and students alike for many years, and a great deal of information is available on certain specific aspects of mission life, it remains regrettably true that no phase of native history of comparable significance is more poorly represented in terms of primary documentation. With a few notable exceptions (such as a Boscana, Arroyo de la Cuesta, or Longinos Martínez), the participants and observers of the tragic events of the mission period seem to have seen little of intrinsic value or interest in native culture *per se*, or indeed in the people themselves as human beings, rather than simply converts or laborers. Consequently, the kinds of data available for anthropological or historic analysis are limited, sparse, systematically biased, and usually fail to provide the type of in-depth perspective that can sometimes be extracted from such sources. The publication of a native account of an important historic incident during the mission period—the Chumash revolt of 1824—should therefore be of particular interest to many, since it does supply a rare glimpse of native responses and attitudes toward the system which exploited them economically and destroyed them culturally.

The account that follows has been extracted, with minor editorial changes, from the ethnographic notes of John P. Harrington, on file at the Smithsonian Institution (specifically

Ms. 6017, Box 5, Folder 3). It was obtained in 1914 from María Solares, Harrington's primary Ineseño informant, some 90 years after the events which it describes. María did not personally participate in the 1824 revolt, but she had numerous opportunities as a girl to hear about it from those who did. Her story adds an unusual dimension to what little is presently known about the Chumash response to, and attitudes toward, missionization (see Stickel and Cooper [1969] for a summary of the 1824 revolt, and Blackburn [1975] for biographical data on María Solares and other stories from the mission period).

MARIA SOLARES' ACCOUNT

There was a sacristan, or page of the mission, at Santa Inés. After supper those more learned in the Indian religion would pound up *pespibata* in order to eat it. They would take the pith of tule and make it like a tassel and dip this in the *pespibata* and then suck it. Valiant ones could endure three sucks before they staggered down.

The sacristan arrived and informed them, "Do you know what is up? All of you will be punished next Sunday. The priest has made a statement that he will punish you all." The men were sad. They said, "Why, what have we done?" "They are going to punish all the women and men and all," the sacristan said. Then he went to the priest and told the priest that the natives were going to shoot the priests with ar-

rows the following Sunday. "What have we done?" asked the priest. The priest, being alarmed, held no mass at all that Sunday. He got soldiers to guard the mission.

The sacristan then went back to the Indians and told them not to go near the church since the priest was very angry and had put soldiers on guard duty who would kill any Indians who went over there. The Indians began to prepare themselves and they did not go to bed that night. Some of the Indians said, "The priest can not hurt me—I am a medicine man." Many Indians said thus. The Indians, therefore, became divided into two groups: those who said that the priests could not hurt them and those who said that they wished to investigate to see if there was any truth in the report. One of the latter group passed by the church and was shot in the left thigh by the soldiers. Then the Indians revolted and an Indian messenger (*štowič*) went to La Purísima to announce that there was to be a war. The Purismeño Indians armed themselves and so did the Spaniards at La Purísima. The soldiers at La Purísima were more fierce and they captured seven Purismeño Indians, tied their hands behind their backs and blindfolded them, and then shot them. One of them got up after they were shot. The soldiers shot again and he fell. The priest prayed while the soldiers shot. It was in the afternoon. The Indian who got up again was still not quite dead. Some of the soldiers said, "What is the matter with this man that he does not die?" They examined him and found that he had an *?atišwin* [amulet] of woven human hair about his neck, and that was the reason he did not die. They broke this and all shot at him again and then the man died.

At Santa Inés also the Spaniards captured some Indians supposedly for the purpose of shooting them. The *wot* [chief] of La Purísima sent a messenger to Santa Inés asking that all the Ineseño men and women come to La Purísima so that if they were all to be killed they would all die together. The Ineseños were

all saying something like this: "If they shoot at me, water will come out of the cannon; if they shoot at me, the bullet will not enter my flesh."

On his way to Santa Inés, the messenger from the Purismeño captain met a Spaniard on a fine horse, and he thought to himself, "This man must be on his way to La Purísima to join the other soldiers. They are going to kill us." And so that Indian messenger killed the Spaniard. The messenger was carrying his bow in order to defend himself against possible danger. He surprised the Spaniard and commanded him to dismount and undress, and then the Indian killed him naked. He then took the clothing and put it on, hat and all, and came riding on the dead man's horse. On nearing Santa Inés, the Indian brought the band of horses from the field near the mission into the adobe corral just as they do in order to get a fresh horse. As soon as he got in the corral he lassoed a horse. He was about to change his saddle from the horse he had been riding to this fresh horse when he was accosted by a man named Valentín, one of the bravest of the Spanish soldiers. Valentín asked the Indian, "Who ordered you to take this horse?" "My horse is tired and I have to get a fresh one. I have to go back." Valentín said, "Take that suit off so that it will not get stained with blood." The Indian replied, "I have killed a man, that is why this suit is not stained with blood, but you will have to take it off as I will not take it off myself!" Valentín had a shield in his hand, made of leather and provided with a handle. He said, "Take it off!" At this the Indian jumped on the horse even though the cinch was not yet fastened. Valentín got the horse by the bridle and ordered the Indian to take off the saddle. The soldiers were all around the corral, but the Indian had disappeared when he jumped on the horse, giving a cry as he did so. Horse and rider had disappeared, and Valentín was holding pure air. The Indian and horse appeared on a hilltop and the Indian yelled, "Here I am. Take it from me!" Valentín told the priest what the Indian

had done—that he was holding the horse firmly, yet horse and rider had disappeared.

The Indian went and told all the Santa Inés Indians to go to La Purísima as there was no hope for them. At that, one of the Ineseños said, "It is not right for us to go to La Purísima and leave those seven poor men here to be shot. We had better stay here and die together with them." Now there were two brothers there: Marcos, who was the elder, and Andrés, who was the younger of the two. Marcos said, "I will go and get the men out." Valentín happened to be just at that time in the prison, which was not far from the corral, guarding the prisoners. Marcos and Andrés set out with the intention of freeing the men. They entered the door of the prison through the keyhole—they were armed. When Valentín looked up he saw Marcos and Andrés standing between him and the prisoners. He trembled, but did not say a word. He opened the door and went out silently. He and the others who had been watching the prisoners went over to the house of one of the Spaniards there. Marcos took the ropes off the prisoners' hands and told them, "Go—we are all going to die together. As soon as we arrive there we shall know whether we are to live or not." Marcos ran the prisoners out but on the way out they saw a keg of brandy. Marcos asked what it was and they said, "Roll it out!" So they rolled it out. They rolled it to the house of one Estevan, Marcos' paternal grandfather, where there were many Indians assembled waiting to start for La Purísima. Many Indian men and women were strung out along the road but Estevan and some others were waiting for Marcos and Andrés and the prisoners. Bienvenuto was a little child then. Ularia, his mother, wrapped him in an *ʔaxwi* [blanket] made of sheep wool (thick, of Spanish make), and then got on a horse and rode after the other people.

A good many people threw their children away on the journey. Mothers said, "I am suffering and they are going to kill me and the child—I will throw the child away." Teopista

was one of the children thrown away on this journey. A different group of Indians, including Teopista's father, found her eating dirt, abandoned there, and Teopista's aunt took her with her to La Purísima.

It got dark. Estevan was older than Marcos and Andrés. The *takulšoxšinaš* is the woven band such as Coyote used. Indians used to have many of these for the Indian religion. Estevan had one of these, guarded away in his house. This band was worn on the head when at war. Now the keg of brandy had not been taken to Estevan's house but to another man's house. The prisoners were already out of prison. Marcos asked Estevan to give him one half of his magic string. Marcos wanted to find out by means of it whether he would live or die. Estevan told Marcos that he must be crazy, that Estevan could not cut it in two, for if he did it would be like stabbing his own heart. Estevan said that he could lend it to Marcos but that Marcos must take good care of it, for to cut it would be like cutting the veins of his, Estevan's, own heart. It was dark and they did not know the fate of Bienvenuto.

Bienvenuto was a little boy and was placed on horseback by his mother. A blanket of wool was tucked in about his feet and he went to La Purísima on horseback with the other people. When he arrived there he was unable to get off the horse, and his horse was wandering around with him on it among the other horses in the confusion. His mother was still at Santa Inés with Estevan and the rest.

Šaxlapš is a person who divines where a child is by means of arrows. Women by a tray, men by an arrow, not a tray. Marcos wanted the string in order to divine with it. Marcos went over to a place where there was quite a gathering of small sorcerers, but he made a mistake. Andrés was standing there watching him. When Marcos made the mistake, Andrés said, "My brother, I do not want to live alone—we will both perish together." Marcos returned the string to Estevan. When they divine by means



Fig. 1. An early photograph showing María Solares (second from left). At the left is Rafael Solares. To the right are Jasper Miranda (in the carriage), Clara Miranda, and Isabel Miranda.

of a string, they place it on the ground in the shape of a cross and erect an arrow in the middle; María does not know exactly how. Marcos told Estevan, "Brother, we are lost, we shall perish." Estevan replied, "I will perish where you do," but he tried to persuade all of them to start for La Purísima to join the other Indians. But since Marcos was a married man he did not want to go to La Purísima, for his wife was still at Santa Inés. When Estevan was not watching, Marcos tapped the brandy keg and he and the others drank. Estevan tried hard to persuade them to go to La Purísima but they all said, "I am going to die where I am." And they would not go with Estevan.

While the people at Santa Inés were thus quarreling among themselves, the Indians at La Purísima go hold of Prisca, a Spanish girl, grandmother of Ebaristo Valencia. They took her clothes off and put her in the same room

with Bienvenuto, to keep her until the next day, at which time they intended to kill her with arrows in order to show the Spaniards how deeply they felt resentment that the seven Indians had been killed. Some of the La Purísima Indians had seen Bienvenuto on horseback and had wondered what the boy was doing at that time of day, so one of them had pulled him off the horse and thrown him into a room. He had crawled into a corner and slept there. The girl was thrown into the same room and came across to where the boy was and covered herself with his blanket. In the morning the girl was weeping and Bienvenuto heard the Indians come to the door and open it. They were going to get the girl in order to shoot her. One Indian said, "*Maldita*, where are you?" Another said, "There she is, she had a blanket on." Another said, "Take it off her." They took her and threw her naked outside.

In the middle of the night Estevan thought of Bienvenuto for the first time and resolved to go to La Purísima to see what had become of the boy. He had already lost all hope of inducing the others to go. He asked, "Who will be brave enough to accompany me to La Purísima and see what has become of my boy? If I find out that my boy has been killed, I will revenge myself by killing every woman and man of the Spanish race there!" The others were still half drunk. Estevan left with two companions. Afterwards, the tallow candle that was standing on a large canoe-like box of tallow caught on fire and burned up, and the house and all the drunken men burned up as well. The whole adobe house-row burned up.

Estevan arrived at La Purísima just at dawn. The boy and girl were clinging to each other and the Purismeño Indians were having a discussion as to whether they should shoot the girl before separating her from the boy or not, some saying that they did not know whose boy he was. Just then Estevan and his two companions arrived and said, "Stop!" The boy called to his father and Estevan ordered the Indians to bring the girl's clothing and put it on her and let her loose, which they did.

Captain José Noriega started from Santa Barbara for Santa Inés with a number of soldiers. When they reached Santa Inés they found not a trace of Indians. They continued on to La Purísima where they found the revolt still in progress. They carried a sign of truce. Noriega got a Spaniard who understood Chu-

mash to tell them that the peace would be in favor of the Indians. But the Indians did not believe it and one of them took a shot at the captain's head and hit his hat. The force of the shot knocked the captain off his horse but did not kill him. In spite of this Captain Noriega told the soldier to go ahead and tell the Indians that they would make peace on terms in their favor. It was only then discovered that all the trouble was due to the misrepresentations of the sacristan.

The Indians remained peaceably with the priest at La Purísima Mission, and the Ineseños returned to Santa Inés. Captain Noriega returned to Santa Barbara with his soldiers. María never heard what was done with the sacristan except that they imprisoned him. He was not burned, as far as María heard. The girl Prisca looked upon Bienvenuto as her brother and rescuer. María knows nothing about the revolution at Santa Barbara.

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