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A CALIFORNIAN MESSIANIC MOVEMENT OF 1801 AMONG THE CHUMASH

Recently while engaged in a search through the Spanish California Mission archives of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, I happened upon an interesting, very brief account of a messianic movement. Because its availability may be of future value, I reproduce it in translation below.¹

So far as I know, this is the earliest historical record of such a movement in California, and is chiefly of value by reason of its early date. Although much has been written on the Ghost Dance in California,² we have little or no knowledge of defeatist cults which originated in the State. It is possible that this type of reaction, explainable as a desperate expedient to seek relief from oppression, was fairly common in the mission district of California in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. There are certain indications that the major revolt, in 1824, of the Santa Barbara Channel missions is explainable in these terms. It is to be hoped that the mission archives will some day be searched for evidence of this sort.

The account, given below, is an excerpt of a letter from Fr. Estevan Tapis to Jose Joaquin Arrillaga, Gobernador de la N. California, March 1, 1805. It may be found in the Bancroft Library, University of California, in the *Archivo de la Mision de Santa Barbara, Papeles Miscelaneos VI*: pp. 33-34.

"In the year 1801, when an epidemic of pneumonia and a waist ailment [pleurisy?] caused the death of many pagans and Christians, a single female neophyte succeeded in deceiving the Christian Indians of Santa Barbara. It happened that after a pretended trance she said that Chupu (an idol worshipped in the Channel region)³ appeared to her and told her that the pagan Indians were to die if they were baptized, and that the same fate was to befall the Christian Indians who would not give alms [offerings] to Chupu, and who would refuse to wash their heads with a certain water. At the very time it occurred, that is to say midnight, the news of the revelation spread immediately through all the houses of the Mission; almost all the neophytes, the *alcaldes* included, went to the house of the visionary to present beads and seeds, and to go through the rite of renouncing Christianity. The particular point of the intrigue, and that which matters, is that the fashion extended to all the Indian settlements of the Channel and of the Sierra, and that the missionaries did not know about it. Chupu had revealed at the same time that all those who would report

¹ I wish to express my indebtedness to Dr A. Métraux for assistance in translating this rather difficult passage.

² Cora Du Bois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance* (University of California Anthropological Records 3, No. 1, 1939) has treated this cult in detail. See also A. H. Gayton, *The Ghost Dance of 1870 in South-Central California*. (University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 28, pp. 57-82, 1930.)

³ A. L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 78, 1925, p. 567) mentions a god *Achup* or *Chupu* whose "worship" a missionary report of 1810 describes as being broken up among the Purisima natives. In the 1824 revolt the Purisima neophytes were the worst offenders. All this may indicate a persistent antagonism among the Chumash toward the Spanish.

the affair to the missionaries would die immediately. For three days we remained ignorant of the event until a neophyte, overcoming his fears, told us what was happening. If the Indian woman had added, that in order to stop the epidemics, it was necessary to kill the missionaries and the soldiers of the guard, the alcaldes and the rest of the natives would have believed it too, as they did the first part of the revelation. Who would have escaped death, and who would have warned the Presidio, though it is only half a league away? This did not happen, thanks to God, but it is enough that such a thing might have happened, and that the neophytes know how to scheme their plots at night with such a secrecy and reserve so that the custody of the missions with a thousand neophytes altogether should not be entrusted to two, three, or a few more soldiers who compose their guard."

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THE CHOCTAW WORD FOR "RATTLESNAKE"

In a recent issue of the *ANTHROPOLOGIST*, Professor William A. Read has described an anonymous French manuscript containing grammatical and lexical materials on the Choctaw language.¹ An interesting point contained in the manuscript pertains to the etymology of the Choctaw word *saintioulou* (*sintullo* in Byington)² "rattlesnake." The anonymous author connects the latter part of this word with Choctaw *hullo* or *hollo* (By.)³ "sacred" and concludes that the basic meaning of the word is "supernatural snake." Professor Read points out that this etymology differs from that given by Gatschet who believes the word to be built up of *sinti* "snake" plus *ola* which he translates as "rattling."⁴

In my own brief researches on the Choctaw language⁵ I have recorded the word for rattlesnake as [*sintollo*]⁶ and consider the etymology given by the anonymous French author to be the correct one since that provided by Gatschet is untenable on phonetic grounds and also, evidently, on semantic grounds. As to the phonetic evidence, it has been found that the Choctaw word *ola* is properly [*o-la*] and cannot be contained in [*sintollo*] since it has a long *o* rather than a short one, has a single *l* in place of the geminate *ll*,⁷ and ends in *a* rather than *o*. On the other hand [*sinti*] plus

¹ William A. Read, *Notes on an Opelousas Manuscript of 1862* (*American Anthropologist*, Vol. 42), pp. 546-548.

² Cyrus Byington (ed. John R. Swanton and Henry S. Halbert), *A Dictionary of the Choctaw Language* (Bulletin, Bureau of American Ethnology, 46, 1915).

³ Byington, *op. cit.*

⁴ Albert S. Gatschet, *A Migration Legend of the Creek Indians*, Vol. II (St. Louis, 1888), p. 193.

⁵ Work on Choctaw comprised a part of my work on Muskogean languages financed by the Department of Anthropology, Yale University, in 1937.

⁶ My own recordings of Choctaw (and also of Koasati, quoted later) are placed in brackets to distinguish them from other recordings.

⁷ Geminate consonant clusters are characteristic of all Muskogean languages. For a description of those found in one of these, see my *Geminant Consonant Clusters in Muskogee* (*Language*, Vol. 14), pp. 61-65.