

The *Datura* Cult Among the Chumash

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IN their quest for visions and for supernatural power, the Chumash of the Santa Barbara region were one of many tribes throughout North and South America that resorted to the use of hallucinogenic plants. *Datura* was one of the most widely known of these hallucinogens (cf. Schultes 1972; La Barre 1972; Bean and Saubel 1972); Indians of an area from Chile to the American Southwest made ritual use of several species of *Datura*. In her dissertation on *Datura* in aboriginal America, Anna Gayton (1928) suggests that its use may have diffused from a single point of origin, since local adaptations of the *Datura* cult all show the common themes of divination and contact with the spirits of the dead. At one extreme limit of this area, the peoples of southern California used *Datura meteloides* A. DC.—more commonly known as Jimsonweed or *toloache* (the Spanish rendering of Aztec *toloatzin*). They elaborated the *Datura* cult and integrated it thoroughly into their vision quest and their ceremonial life.

Until recently, references to *Datura* in the literature on the Chumash have been brief and largely conjectural. Now contemporary workers are synthesizing the unpublished manuscripts of John P. Harrington's ethnographic work among the Chumash between 1912 and 1922. In particular, Thomas Blackburn (1974) has done a cultural analysis of Chumash narrative texts in which *Datura* figures prominently (I refer to myths and stories in Blackburn's dissertation by number when-

ever possible). I am also indebted to Santa Barbara historian Russell Ruiz for lore about *Datura* which he heard from old people no longer living.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BACKGROUND

The *Datura* cult among the Chumash incorporated a number of features which had a broad distribution in southern California. Even the word for *Datura* appeared in much the same form in a number of unrelated but geographically contiguous languages (Gamble n.d.). According to Gayton (1928:27-28), common features of southern California *Datura* use were "that it was not taken before puberty, that it was usually administered to a group, and that a supernatural helper was sought." This supernatural helper was the individual's life-long guardian spirit or dream helper. Beyond these common features, Gayton noted three major differentiations in ceremonial usage.

First, on the South Coast among the Gabrielino, Luiseño, and others, youths took *Datura* as part of a puberty ritual integrated into a much broader ceremonial complex, the Chingichnich cult. The initiates underwent ordeals and received esoteric instruction. Women never took it; men took it only once, in groups, primarily to make contact with a dream helper. There were no seasonal restrictions on its use (Gayton 1928:28). Almost exactly this same pattern prevailed among the Salinans, on the coast north of

the Chumash (Harrington 1942:39; Mason 1912:162).

Second, further north among the southern Yokuts and Western Mono, a *Datura* drinking ritual was held every spring. It was optional, with no initiatory aspect, and it did not change a participant's social status. Both men and women could take *Datura*, repeating the experience if they chose (Gayton 1928:31).

Third, in the east among the Mohave, Yuma, and Desert Cahuilla, there was no well-developed *Datura* ceremony. *Datura* was taken by individuals, at any season, as often as they chose. These eastern groups relied on dreams for supernatural power; they usually took *Datura* for other reasons, such as luck in gambling (Gayton 1928:37; Drucker 1937:34-36).

The Chumash version of the *Datura* cult agrees most closely with the Yokuts pattern discussed second by Gayton. As with the Yokuts, both men and women took *Datura*, any time after puberty, and it was not incorporated into any initiation rite. Many took *Datura* only once, but those with a stronger affinity for the supernatural took it several times. Unlike their immediate neighbors, the Chumash drank *Datura* individually rather than in groups, and right in the village rather than at a special camp. Like the Yokuts, the Chumash may once have had seasonal restrictions on *Datura* use, since the Ventureño Chumash called January "the month of *Datura*." But the Chumash took *Datura* as medicine any time of the year, and there is no mention of seasonal restrictions when it was taken for visions. So the year-round use of *Datura* by the Chumash agrees with the Gabrielino and Salinan patterns.

It is not at all clear how uniform the *Datura* cult was from one Chumash group to another. Certainly among the various Yokuts groups minor and even major differences appeared (cf. Gayton 1948; Driver 1937:98-99). Most information on the Chu-

mash—not only about the *Datura* cult but about any facet of Chumash life—comes from the Ventureño, Barbareño, and Ineseño Chumash; we know much less about other Chumash groups. Fernando Librado of Ventura furnished Harrington with the most detailed account of *Datura* use, while María Solares of Santa Ynez knew the mythological aspects of *Datura* best. The available details of the Barbareño and Ineseño usage agree in nearly all respects with the Ventureño data reported by Fernando Librado.

REASONS FOR TAKING *DATURA*

The most important reason for taking *Datura* was to establish contact with a supernatural guardian: the *?atišwin* or dream helper. The Chumash believed that the dream helper came only to a person who had drunk *Datura*; this was always the purpose of an individual's first *Datura* experience. One might take *Datura* later to strengthen one's bond with the dream helper, or to meet yet another helper, or for supernatural power in general. A person might also take it for some more specific purpose. Simplicio Pico of Ventura said:

When a person took *toloache* and he had visions, he prayed in his visions to the *toloache* and it would say to him, "What do you want?" The person would answer, "I want to have power in games," or "I want to be a good horseman," or some such request. And he would get good luck from the *toloache*.

A person might take *Datura* to communicate with the spirits of the dead; those who still missed some loved one, particularly a dead child, sometimes took *Datura* for this reason. The drinker might want to see his or her future life; one young woman saw herself rich in her vision and later she married a chief. When a person was unhappy, or not doing well in life, he might take *Datura*. *Datura* could show a man his true name, ignorant

of which he could never hope to prosper in this world.

The Chumash also took *Datura* on something of an emergency basis at times, to cure serious wounds and illnesses or to counter the effects of ill omens and breaches of tabu. These reasons for taking *Datura* were not necessarily mutually exclusive; a Ventureño named Winai is said to have prayed for success at billiards when he took *Datura* for a broken leg. But the Chumash believed that *Datura* taken on this basis was primarily a cure: it was not likely to grant the drinker lasting access to supernatural power.

The Chumash reasons for taking *Datura* were all individual rather than collective. This contrasts strongly with the southern pattern that Gayton recognized. Among the Mountain Cahuilla, for example, the group initiation with *Datura* was held either when enough boys had reached an age suitable for initiation, or when the rite was necessary as a collective prayer against epidemics and shortages of food or water (Gayton 1928:29).

The Chumash did not view *Datura* drinking as obligatory. But they did feel that it gave the individual access to supernatural power and hence engendered strength, courage, and success in later life. In one myth (Blackburn 1974:myth 19), a boy being given *Datura* is told, "Now I'm going to give you a medicine so that you may be braver and manlier and more courageous." As for women, the Chumash felt that *Datura* gave them courage—particularly in childbirth—and immunity from danger: if a woman who had drunk *Datura* was out seed-gathering and a bear came along, the bear would not harm her. In one myth (Blackburn 1974:myth 20), not even the strongest dose of *Datura* affects a supernatural youth who eats only tobacco, and he ends up a recluse—wild, mean, and an intemperate hunter who kills for the joy of killing. This theme parallels a Western Mono belief that Rattlesnake and Grizzly Bear were vicious be-

cause they had not taken *Datura* (Gayton 1928:36-37). So evidently *Datura* (in moderation) was thought to have a stabilizing and socializing effect.

RESTRICTIONS ON THE *DATURA* DRINKER

Along with other southern California tribes, the Chumash believed that an individual had to observe a number of tabus if he was to acquire supernatural power through *Datura*. The spirit of *Datura* was hostile to any impurity or lack of self-control, and it was not only fruitless but actually harmful to take it without observing these restrictions. One had to abstain from sex for some time before and after drinking *Datura*. One also had to fast or else eat very moderately, taking only thin, unsalted acorn gruel. Salt and sweet things were occasionally specified as foods forbidden to the *Datura* drinker. "*Toloache* is hostile to blood," the Chumash said; abstinence from meat and grease in any form was one of the strictest tabus on the *Datura* drinker. The intensity of these restrictions depended on how much power an individual wanted from *Datura*. An adult seeking shamanistic powers observed them longer than an adolescent taking *Datura* for the first time; preliminary observances were minimal when *Datura* was taken as medicine.

A menstruating woman could not have anything to do with *Datura*; menstruants were excluded from ritual activity throughout aboriginal California. Even consumptives, because of "the excess of blood in their chests," were advised against taking *Datura*. A prospective drinker's attitude had to be reverent and concentrated, and afterward he had to be careful not to offend the *Datura* spirit by talking too freely about his experiences.

These restrictions were not unique to the *Datura* cult, either among the Chumash or in southern California generally. They were integral to the vision quest as practiced over most

of North America (cf. Benedict 1923). Evidently, when the peoples of southern California began to use *Datura*, they incorporated it as one more element of a pre-existing vision-seeking complex. But since a decoction of *Datura* is almost certain to produce hallucinations, the vision quest in southern California did not include some of the more extreme practices found elsewhere in North America, like self-torture, mutilation, or solitary vigils at some remote spot.

The Chumash observances differ in some respects from those of other southern California peoples. The Shoshonean tribes to the south used *Datura* in a puberty initiation in which the initiates ran races or danced all night while fasting, or were stung by ants and whipped with nettles (Drucker 1937:35-36). There is no record of such practices among the Chumash. The Chumash relied entirely on *Datura* in seeking supernatural power, while the Yokuts also got power from dreams. To induce dreams, the Yokuts might bask in the sun for hours or get up three or four times during the night in the winter to bathe in icy water (Gayton 1928:54, 1948:246). Again, there is no mention of such practices among the Chumash in connection with the *Datura* cult.

THE *DATURA* SPECIALIST

Usually a specialist prepared and administered *Datura*; he was called in Ventureño Chumash *'alšukayavič*, 'one who causes intoxication.' Harrington's informants sometimes rendered this into Spanish as *toloachero*, '*Datura* giver.' Coyote was the *Datura* giver in the old days when the animals were still people (Blackburn 1974:myth 29). Among the Tachi Yokuts, the giver had to have *Datura* as his dream helper (Gayton 1948:38), but among the Chumash and most other tribes, skill in the use of *Datura* seems to have been the primary requirement.

In Ventura, the *Datura* givers were five

old men who assembled to administer *Datura* and to question the drinker afterward about his visions. It is not certain that the office required a fixed number, but it is quite possible: initiates into the elite *'antap* society in larger villages usually numbered twelve or twenty. There is no evidence of such an elaborate organization of *Datura* givers among Chumash groups north of the Ventureño.

Primarily the *Datura* giver administered *Datura* to adolescents taking it for the first time; he was paid for his services. But a relative might also prepare the *Datura* decoction, especially the mother or grandmother. Even a married man might go to his mother when he felt the need to take *Datura* (Blackburn 1974: texts 93, 98). The preparation by a relative rather than by one of the specialists was most common when a person drank *Datura* on an emergency basis as medicine or to counteract an ill omen.

PREPARING *DATURA* – THE DANGERS

The Chumash attributed different strengths and different virtues to various parts of the *Datura* plant; they used the root because it was strongest. One who went out to dig *Datura* roots purified himself first; otherwise he would offend the *Datura* spirit and destroy the efficacy of the drug. He abstained from sex, meat, and grease for some time before (three days among the Tachi Yokuts [Gayton 1948:39]). He approached the *Datura* plant respectfully, praying to the *Datura* spirit, "Grandmother, I've come to beg of you one of your roots." Taking care not to injure the plant itself, he dug under the plant from one side and took a root, and then filled the hole back up. One Chumash claimed that the old people knew just which root to pick, a root which would be sure to induce a vision. To prepare the drink, the Chumash mashed the *Datura* root in a special ceremonial mortar and steeped it in cold water. Occasionally they roasted it slightly first.

The preparation of *Datura* required great skill. *Datura* is dangerous. It is not only hallucinogenic, but also highly poisonous. A dosage large enough to induce hallucinations has very toxic effects on the body; the effective dose is only a little less than the lethal dose. The *Datura* giver had to calculate the dose according to what sort of soil the plant had grown in, the age of the plant (*Datura* is a perennial), the size of the roots, and the concentration of the finished brew. The Yokuts and the Kitanemuk drank *Datura* only during the winter and early spring; later in the year they thought it too strong. The Chumash and the Shoshonean groups to the south drank it at any season, compounding their risk: here the *Datura* giver also had to take the time of year into account in measuring the dosage.

Deaths from *Datura* were not unknown among the Chumash, despite their long familiarity with the plant. Responsibility for a death fell on the drinker rather than the *Datura* giver, according to Russell Ruiz (personal communication). The Chumash believed that the *Datura* drinker who died had violated one of the tabus against sex or meat and hence aroused the animosity of the *Datura* spirit, or else he simply did not return from the spirit world. He might have "lost the trail" (as the idiom went) and not found his way back to this world, or he might have been so caught up in what he saw that he chose not to return. The choice not to return was supposed to be most likely when a person had taken *Datura* in order to see the dead.

But the Chumash were well aware of the lethal aspects of *Datura*, as bits of lore about the plant indicate. It was a common ingredient in the poisons made by sorcerers. The intended victim did not have to ingest such a poison or even come in contact with it; he would sicken and die if the sorcerer merely painted the *Datura* poison on some

article he owned. The Chumash also believed that when a rattlesnake had decided in advance to kill someone (rather than just striking in self-defense), it sank its fangs into a *Datura* root and sucked in the poison before biting the person. Death was certain, and the victim died immediately.

Many aspects of the *Datura* cult, from the *Datura* giver's circumspection in gathering roots to the drinker's rigorous observance of the preliminary tabus, reflect a profound desire not to offend the *Datura* spirit. Gayton (1928:40) suggests that the propitiation of the *Datura* spirit was due to fear of its lethal potential as well as to veneration of its hallucinogenic properties. Among the Wak-sachi Mono, the man giving the drink first prayed to the *Datura* spirit "not to hurt these people who are going to drink you" (Gayton 1928:40 fn.).

TAKING DATURA

The first *Datura* experience was the most important, and it was apparently the most closely controlled. When adolescents had arrived at an age when they were considered strong enough to stand the treatment, they were given *Datura*. This was probably a few years after puberty, but before marriage and before sexual experience. The age fifteen is mentioned, though not as a fixed point. The adolescent observed the dietary tabus for twenty-one days before drinking *Datura*. Both Ineseño and Ventureño informants said that occasionally more than one girl might be given *Datura* at a time, but the Ventureño specifically denied that boys were ever given *Datura* in pairs or groups.

Among the Ineseño, the young man or woman who was going to drink *Datura* went in the evening to the house of the *Datura* giver, accompanied by parents and perhaps by other relatives. Further south among the Ventureño, the five *Datura* givers assembled and went to the house of the

drinker. There is no mention of any ceremony or invocation at this point, as among some neighboring tribes. Soon after drinking the *Datura* decoction, the drinker began to experience dizziness and trembling. As he began to lose consciousness of the external world, the *Datura* giver told him to go to sleep and pay careful attention to his dreams. The parents and relatives all went out, leaving the drinker alone with the *Datura* giver. Among the Ventureño, at least one of the five *Datura* givers was in constant attendance.

Eighteen to twenty-four hours later the drinker revived. One who was strong of spirit revived at noon the next day, while those of weaker spirit would revive that night or even the following day. Larger doses might result in an even longer period of unconsciousness. When he first awoke, the *Datura* drinker was still hallucinating, but gradually he became more and more clearly conscious of the external world. The behavior of a person just recovering from *Datura* was erratic and unpredictable. A linguistic reflection of this is the verbal derivative *momoyič*, 'to be affected by *momoy-Datura*,' which had a connotation of aberrant behavior in the sense of 'to be or act crazy.' In post-contact times, after the introduction of alcohol, *momoyič* also came to mean 'to be drunk.' Harrington's informants frequently referred to those intoxicated with *Datura* as 'drunk.'

The drinker just emerging from the effects of *Datura* was sometimes taken out of the house, perhaps down to the beach or somewhere away from the village. One of the *Datura* givers among the Ventureño specialized in singing to the drinker at this point, but there is no hint what the songs were about. Among the Wukchumni Yokuts (Gayton 1948:119), such songs were simply repetitions of lines such as, "You drank *Datura*; you should wake up," and "Get up and drink more *Datura*."

THE *DATURA* VISION

The Chumash believed that if the drinker had prepared himself in advance by observing all of the restrictions on diet and sex, and if he approached the experience with a calm mind, then *Datura* put him in contact with the supernatural. "*Toloache* teaches you all things," one Chumash said. It enabled a man to see beyond surface appearances into the true nature of things, to see "the other world" beyond "this world," as the Chumash put it. But if a man had not prepared himself, then he perceived only illusion—exaggerated reflections of his own fears and weaknesses (Russell Ruiz, personal communication).

When one took *Datura* for the first time, the most coveted vision was that of the *?atišwin* or dream helper—usually an animal spirit like Hawk or Coyote. The helper offered the novitiate life-long protection and guidance, conferred on him some specific boon—like prowess in hunting or skill in curing, and left him with a talisman, also called *?atišwin*. Not everyone succeeded in this first *Datura* experience; there were those who saw nothing. They usually tried again. A good many people, especially women, took *Datura* only once. Some individuals never did gain the favor of a dream helper.

The *Datura* drinker might see many other things besides a dream helper. Gayton (1928:40-41) points out two beliefs common to all of the tribes which used *Datura*: under the influence of *Datura* one could contact the spirits of the dead, and one could detect lost or stolen articles.

The *Datura* drinker could see the spirits of the dead, and he might speak with them. Certain spots were particularly auspicious for contacting the dead in a *Datura* trance; the best known of these was *ka?aqtaḡaq* 'north wind,' north of Ventura, an ancient sycamore tree in whose rustling leaves the *Datura* drinker could hear the voices of the dead. *Datura* also en-

abled a person to see the supernatural creatures thought to inhabit various places. For example, a person who took *Datura* at a certain shrine-hill just south of the Santa Ynez River might see the huge serpent which lived in a cave in the bluff below the shrine.

The *Datura* drinker could see lost or stolen articles, even far away. His visions compressed time and space, so that he could see distant places and events there; he could see into the past and future. Any prediction a person made under the influence of *Datura* was supposed to come true. Since the *Datura* drinker could see beyond surface appearances, he could tell who his true friends and enemies were, and he could perceive any attempt to trick him.

When the *Datura* drinker was fully conscious again, the old *Datura* givers gathered and asked him about what he had seen in his visions. They interpreted the visions for him. There was no formal instruction at this point (as in the Gabrielino and Luiseño initiation), but the elders took advantage of the opportunity for a little moralizing. Fernando Librado recalled some of these interpretations. If in the dream a bear attacks, it is a sign that the dreamer must respect every creature in the world. If the dreamer kills the bear, then he will always be a victor. If one dreams of a knife, it is a bad sign, and he must never use a knife. If he dreams that he has given the knife to someone, it is a sign that this same person will kill him with a knife. The dream of an eagle or a hawk is good luck. Any being one sees—no matter how dangerous—will do no harm as long as it is not molested, and this too is a good sign.

If the dream was unfavorable, the old men advised the dreamer what to guard against in time of danger. One young woman dreamed of the ocean. She was told, "The ocean is a dream, but don't you ever enter it. And if you come across a man with a quiet heart, never disturb him."

TAKING DATURA TO AVERT MISFORTUNE

The Chumash often took *Datura* to avert the misfortune foretold by some ill omen. Thus, an owl or coyote calling out near a house, especially at night, announced that some member of the household was soon to die. Similarly, for a bird to fly into a house foretold death or misfortune, just as it did for a bird to fall fluttering at one's feet. It was a particularly bad omen to be seen as the victim of a misfortune in someone's *Datura* visions. When *Datura* was taken to avert misfortune, there may have been a stereotyped vision in which the agent responsible for the omen appeared to the dreamer and reassured him. In one story (Blackburn 1974:text 98), the words used were "Don't be sad; I will do nothing to harm you."

Drinking *Datura* could prevent soul loss. The spirit of a person soon to die often left the body while the person slept; the spirit might appear to others either in its human form or as a ball of light. A coyote or some supernatural creature might also assume the form of a living person and appear to others. A person whose spirit was seen straying or who was impersonated by a coyote was in grave danger; he might be able to avert death by taking *Datura*. To a lesser degree, the person who saw these apparitions was also in danger, and might well take *Datura* himself. *Datura* countered the ill effects of breaking some tabu. In one story (Blackburn 1974:text 62), a boy out hunting trespasses on a sacred place and encounters a gigantic serpent. When the boy returns home, his parents know that he has met with misfortune, and they give him *Datura*.

In all of these cases, the individual took *Datura* on an emergency basis. The strict observances which usually preceded *Datura* drinking were relaxed or omitted altogether. But drinkers were careful to fast and observe the tabu on sex for a while afterward.

DATURA AS MEDICINE

Datura was commonly taken as a medicine for serious injuries and illnesses. For broken bones and wounds, *Datura* was an anesthetic as well as a charm. Some Yokuts groups thought *Datura* caused broken bones to set by themselves (Driver 1937:99). For such purposes, *Datura* might also be applied externally as a poultice. In one story, a desperately wounded man asks his friends to roast *Datura* roots for him. He eats them "like roast potatoes" and then lies as if dead for three days. He is well on his way to recovery when he comes to. Recovery was supposed to be complete and rapid after a dose of *Datura*; complications were blamed on the intervention of an evil shaman.

The Chumash might resort to *Datura* to cure a lingering illness. In this case, the patient took *Datura* after all lesser treatments had failed; a shaman sometimes gave a patient *Datura* when the shaman had not been able to discover the cure by taking it himself. When a gravely ill patient recovered, the shaman might give him *Datura* to counter the ill effects of his narrow escape from death. After her cure, a Barbareño woman quoted the shaman as saying, "You were going to die and now got well, and so it is good that I give you *toloache* soon. When you are a little stronger, I will give you *toloache*." But *Datura* was not necessarily a medicine just for serious illness; *Datura* and seawater were supposed to be the two best tonics for freshening the blood.

The Chumash credited this dangerous and powerful drug with supreme curative virtues. Schultes sheds some light on how they made such a connection:

In almost all primitive cultures, sickness and death are believed to be due to interference from supernatural spheres. For this reason, the psychic effects of drugs are often far more important in primitive medical practice than the purely physical ones. Consequently,

hallucinogens above all other plants are found to be closely connected with magic and sorcery in the treatment of disease and the struggle against death . . . [1972:5].

SHAMANISTIC USES OF *DATURA*

An individual who wanted shamanistic power took *Datura* many times in order to become "a knower of spirits." He was likely to acquire a number of dream helpers. The shaman had ready access to the supernatural through repeated experiences with *Datura* and habitual observance of the restrictions on sex and diet necessary to gain the *Datura* spirit's favor. He exploited the powers of *Datura* more fully than did the layman. In trying to effect a difficult cure, the shaman might use *Datura*. The *Datura* spirit would reveal to him the cause of the illness and the cure to follow. The shaman saw in his visions by the inner glow of a plant whether it was wholesome or poisonous as a medicine. Shamans may have taken *Datura* before important ceremonies, such as the snake dance, which the rattlesnake shaman conducted every spring when the snakes came out of hibernation, to protect participants from snakebite during the coming year.

A malevolent shaman might also use *Datura* to cause illness and even death to others. In his visions he might divine a man's true name to use in an incantation; he might find out a man's secret weaknesses and work on these. Even drought, famine, and other natural disasters were attributed to evil shamans. According to Russell Ruiz, repeated use of *Datura* brought on pronounced changes in character; the user became more and more antisocial. Those with great shamanistic power acquired through years of *Datura* drinking frequently lived apart from other people (cf. Blackburn 1974:text 78), and they often had reputations for capricious malevolence.

Datura and shamanism are mentioned in

connection with charmstones—also called “plummet stones” or “sinkers” in the literature (cf. Henshaw 1885; Yates 1889). Charmstones were highly prized as magical aids in curing illness, bringing rain, putting out fires in the mountains, finding lost objects, or calling up fish in the streams. In battle, a charmstone worn around the neck rendered a man invisible to his enemies and invulnerable to arrows. The account of charmstones given by Yates differs from that of Fernando Librado in the Harrington manuscript. According to Yates (1889:304), the shaman’s standard equipment included a set of either 12 or 20 charmstones. The shaman handled the charmstones only after fasting for a month and taking *Datura*. He took part in a dance on awaking; at his approach, a charmstone would elevate itself on one end off the dancing ground for him to pick up. The Harrington manuscript’s references to charmstones and the shaman do not indicate that the shaman necessarily took *Datura* before using them.

Fernando Librado gave a detailed account of a layman’s quest for the vision of a charmstone. To see a charmstone, a man had to abstain from sex for six months, and for the last month he avoided meat, grease, and salt as well. For the last three days, both he and his family fasted completely. Friends and relatives gathered at his house on the eve of the drinking with gifts of food and money; they sang all night and kept the man from sleeping. *Datura* was usually drunk in the evening, but here the man drank it at dawn. He hoped to see a charmstone in his visions, and he would pray for the particular power which the charmstone should confer on him. For the ordinary man, the preliminary austerities and *Datura* were indispensable in raising him to the proper state of power to handle a charmstone. A charmstone acquired in such a way was usually considered the property of the chief, and a man had to pay for its use.

It is possible that the rock paintings found at remote and rugged sites in Chumash territory are of shamanistic origin, and inspired by *Datura* (cf. Grant 1965). Originally in brilliant color, these paintings show non-representational patterns as well as figures of beings that are often quite fantastic. These might well depict the contents of a *Datura* vision. Thomas Blackburn (personal communication) points out that at least a third of the Chumash motifs are common phosphenes: the visual patterns seen behind closed eyes, which hallucinogens intensify greatly (Oster 1970).

Kroeber (1925:938) notes that the distribution of rock paintings in California coincides fairly closely with the area in which the *Datura* cult was strongest. The Chumash paintings may have been executed by or for youths taking *Datura* for the first time, just as the Luiseño initiation used sand paintings. But the remoteness of the sites and the generally non-initiatory aspect of what we know of the Chumash *Datura* cult makes this seem unlikely. It is more likely that shamans made the paintings in the course of working magic, perhaps in connection with *Datura*. The Harrington manuscript refers to a powerful shaman painting on a rock as part of his sorcery in causing a drought; María Solares of Santa Ynez mentioned two old men who retired into the mountains at the time of the winter solstice to make paintings. Among the Yokuts, too, petroglyphs were popularly associated with shamanism (Gayton 1948:113).

DATURA IN CHUMASH MYTHOLOGY

The Chumash integrated *Datura* thoroughly into their mythology. *Datura*’s mythical importance to the Chumash, according to Blackburn (1974:100), is all the more striking because its role among neighboring California tribes was peripheral. The neighbors of the Chumash sometimes personified *Datura* as a pair of brothers or sisters. Among the Chunut Yokuts, *Datura* was two beautiful girls decked

with flowers who danced over the plains in the spring, and to the Western Mono, *Datura* was two brothers who started out as grass in the pre-human era (Gayton 1928:37). The Chumash saw *Datura* as the powerful old woman *Momoy*; *momoy* is, of course, also the Chumash word for the plant *Datura*. *Momoy* turned into the plant *Datura* after the flood which marked the transition between mythical times "when the animals were still people" (as myths often begin) and the advent of the world order familiar to the Chumash.

The old woman *Momoy* was a rich widow who lived apart from other people, perhaps with a daughter or a grandchild. In one myth (Blackburn 1974:myth 18), *Momoy's* grandson turned into a fly; in another (Blackburn 1974:myth 15), her granddaughter married Thunder and gave birth to the twin Thunders who make thunder in the world today. *Momoy* was very wise; those who drank water in which she had washed her hands could share her wisdom to some degree. Like many other supernatural beings, *Momoy* ate nothing but tobacco. According to one version of the creation myth, *Momoy* made man from the hairs and grime which she removed from her comb. From her sweat Coyote came into existence. Coyote was a trickster, but he was also a wise old man very adept at sorcery. In many myths (Blackburn 1974:myths 15-20), he treated *Momoy* as an aunt, and he was the *Datura* giver in the old days.

The old woman *Momoy* was the spirit of *Datura*, and much of the lore about her reflects specific details of the Chumash *Datura* cult. The Chumash addressed her as "Grandmother" when they dug *Datura* roots. *Momoy* was old and wise, and when one approached *Datura* properly, the Chumash said, it would "teach you all things." *Momoy* was rich, and in his visions a person might pray to her for wealth, luck, or power. One had to abstain from sex for some time before and after drinking *Datura*, just as *Momoy*

herself was a widow and had no partner. *Momoy* ate only tobacco, and the *Datura* drinker had to fast completely or at least avoid meat and grease, but even on a total fast the Chumash still might take tobacco.

Momoy knew what happened in distant places, and she could see into the future, just as the *Datura* drinker could. She shared this power with others by giving them water in which she had washed her hands. The dangers of too much *Datura* are explicit in a myth (Blackburn 1974:myth 19) in which *Momoy* washes first just her hands and then up to her elbows; these doses put her grandson to sleep, but he has no visions. He begs her to bathe and give him the water, but she answers, "If I took a bath, you'd turn into a devil or die." *Momoy* lived apart from other people, just as the person who drank *Datura* was believed to transcend the ordinary world, and just as the shaman who drank *Datura* repeatedly stood apart from ordinary individuals—respected for his power, but also feared and suspected.

Datura is mentioned in another mythological context. There was a long pole, alternately rising and falling, which was the bridge from this world to *šimilaqša*, the land of the dead in the west. The souls of those who had drunk *Datura* passed safely across the pole because they were strong of spirit. Those who had not drunk *Datura*, and who had no dream helpers, fell into the sea to become fish or snakes or turtles. Telling of this (Blackburn 1974:myth 12), María Solares added with conviction that those people lived in ignorance who did not know the old Indian religion and who did not drink *Datura*.

CONCLUSION

The *Datura* cult was an essential part of Chumash culture, although it surely did not originate among the Chumash. It appeared in much the same basic form over much of southern California, but its diffusion through this area must have been long enough ago that

neighboring groups had time to differentiate details of the cult.

Of all of the peoples of southern California, perhaps the Chumash accorded *Datura* the highest place. They relied entirely on *Datura* in the quest for a dream helper; they regarded it as the source of all supernatural power. As a medicine, they attributed to *Datura* curative powers both physical and psychic. In consonance with the many virtues they saw in it as well as the very real dangers, the Chumash wove around *Datura* a mythology unique in southern California.

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