

Wimat Island of California

Where It All Began

[Commentary by Dr. John Anderson]

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A Mythological Place of Origin

Wimat island is called *Santa Rosa* by the Americans. For thousands of years, Wimat and nearby islands were occupied by the Chumash Indians. *Wimat* and *Tukan* islands became the socio-political center of the islanders, and they enjoyed considerable influence through trading with the nearby seaports on the mainland.

The Chumash Indians are no longer permitted to live on any of their islands, due to private and federal policies excluding them from federal recognition and thereby blocking them from reclaiming their ancestral lands.

F. L. Kitsepawit

The Chumash historian F .L. Kitsepawit confirmed the mythological importance of Wimat island to Chumash traditionalists in the historical period. In a folk tale about a cultural hero named *Ciqneq*, Kitsepawit chronicled a delightfully enigmatic Chumash myth in which *Wimat* island is described reverently as a place of origin (a place of beginnings).

The hero is facing "the devil" in this narrative, and they are having a debate over death and the decay of the human body. The hero challenges the devil by accusing him of dispossessing people. The context of the argument suggests that *Ciqneq* is accusing the devil of causing the decay of the physical body, thereby causing death in the world.

The devil does not defend himself directly but instead asks a question: "Where should we look?" The hero answers that anyone trying to understand these mysteries should look to the south to Wimat island. "That is where it began. Always it will continue."¹

¹ You can read the original Kitsepawit version of this important passage in Thomas Blackburn's *December's Child*, 240.

Are the Oldest Peoples of North America Buried on Wimat Island?

The Chumash veneration of Wimat island as a place of beginning, may find archaeological confirmation at a spring located in the foothills above island's northern coast. This site is called Arlington Springs by contemporary American researchers.

Here, at one of the most important historical areas of the island during the last Chumash defense of Wimat in the nineteenth century, archaeologists have uncovered the bones of a native woman who may be older than the oldest known human burials in America. Previously, the oldest burials were presumed to be located in the American Northwest and in Texas. See "Bones May Be the Oldest In North America" (San Luis Obispo Tribune, April 2, 1999) for a newspaper article with additional information on this fascinating topic. The newspaper article quotes Dr. John Johnson, of the Museum of Natural History in Santa Barbara, as confirming that: "It's a find of national significance."

Related references: Johnson, J. R., Morris, D. P., Rockwell, T., De Niro, M., and Agie, H., 1994, "Arlington Springs Revisited", Forth Channel Islands Symposium, Abstracts With Programs.

The Wimat Origin Myth

You can find my commentary on Kitsepawit narrative and the cultural hero's (Ciqniq) origin speech, in A Chumash Christmas (Anderson, 1995).

Footnote fifty four of this small book reads: "In this Chumash passage *Ciqneq* identifies the 'south' and specifically the island of Santa Rosa as the place where the devil... began"² My assumption is that Kitsepawit used the Christian term 'devil' to represent the cosmic forces championing the material world, which are represented in Chumash lore as the stars of the southern sky.

*This web page presents the views of the author, and does not necessarily represent
the views of the Chumash Indians, either individually or as a group*

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² (December's Child, Blackburn, page 33).