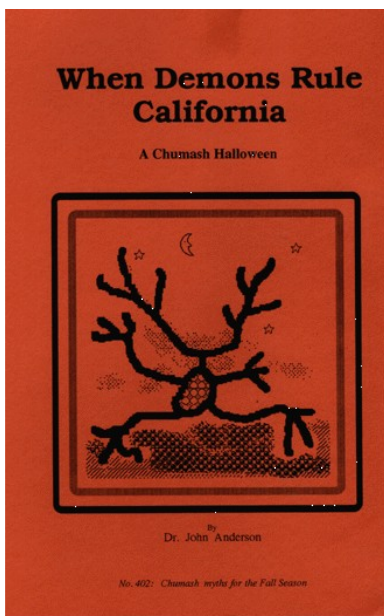


A CHUMASH HALLOWEEN

By Dr. John M. Anderson

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Introduction



The Chumash have a fascinating legacy of prayers, songs, poems, folk tales, and other sources of commentary on their ancient traditions related to the demons active in the fall and winter seasons. As the largest population group in California, prior to the invasion of Europeans, their culture is of special interest to many people.

For a number of years now, I have wanted to publish a short reference book based on my research notes on the Chumash demons. They are of particular importance for the public's understanding of Chumash myths which have been passed down to us. These stories have appeared in previous publications, but always without extensive glossary and footnote commentary. Hopefully, the following notes will be of help to readers wanting to expand their understanding of Chumash demonology."

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"The first part of this book provides commentary on the role played by demons in the Chumash religion. Readers with an extensive background on native California culture may want to skip right into the alphabetical glossary. But for many readers, the four introductory chapters will be of help in orienting themselves to the rich vocabulary and cosmological lore associated with Chumash demonology.

Hopefully this commentary will also make the reader aware of the many similarities between Christian demonology and the Chumash variety. If successful, the following text will not 'demonize' either tradition but rather demonstrate to the reader that demons are part of the cultural heritage of all contemporary societies." (Introduction, September 1996).

Examples of Glossary Listings

Demon: One Leg

A one-legged demon of the middle world, who utilizes a stick (crutch) to roam about. The Chumash call him the *Paka Asil* and he is presumably one-legged because the other half of him is in the supernatural realm. Compare *Demon: Spear-throwing*. Terms: *Pa'ka As'i'l* means 'a one-legged being'. *Pak'a* means 'one' (Tsmuwich dictionary, 22; "one-legged spook" and "another name for *Xuy*"). *'l* means 'a leg' (12; also means 'a foot'). Compare *Xuy*.

Demon: Cat

A number of Chumash demons are in the cat family. The *Maxulaw* (Crying demon) looks like a cat (Blackburn, December, 94; Qilikutayiwit) and is presumably a mountain lion. [The root term is *Xu'la'* meaning 'to cry a lot' like a child' (Samala, 451; '*Alxu'la'* mens 'a crybaby'].

Poxono

The *Poxono* demon wore woman's clothing and carried a walking stick which he threw to kill from a great distance. The *Poxono*... caused earthquakes. Kwan Xustu explained that: "You thought it was a woman, but it's a man! It only dresses like a woman..."¹ In Another tale by M.S. Qilikutayiwit, the Poxono tried to get two brothers to believe it was their parental aunt, while it tried to seize them and throw them into its boiling basket of tar. This demon had its back open between the shoulder-blades so that its heart was visible.²

Witch

The Chumash, like many of the European Christians who invaded California, believed in witchcraft (which often occurred within one's own family, or among neighbors). The Chumash cultural hero often confronts a "witch" who was killing the people, as in *A Chumash Christmas* (Anderson, 1995). Some witches are blind [their vision is directed to the supernatural world] as in Qilikutayiwit's grabbing witch.³ See *Two Hearts* and *Demon: Grabbing* for related discussion. Compare *Warlock* (male witch).

1 (Blackburn, December, 222).

2 (Blackburn, December, 111).

3 (Blackburn, December, 107)

Mosquitoes: Heavenly.

One of the guardians of the 'portal' located in the central sky [an entrance into the supernatural realm] were giant mosquitoes, which attacked unwelcomed visitors to the heavens and sucked their blood until they died. Terms: *Pi'wi* means 'a mosquito' (Tsmuwich, 23); one root may be *'U'w* meaning 'to take a bite' (53).

Night

Qiliqutayiwit explained that the demons came out only "after night falls" (Blackburn, December, 93). They cease their demonic activity before dusk, when they enter the streams of the earth (middle world) to cleanse themselves and thereby made these bodies of water steam in the early morning light. The *Nunashish* faded away at daybreak because they were stars outshone by the rising brilliance of the Sun (compare the stars which dip below the horizon at some point in their rotations). See *Supernatural* for related discussion. Compare *Moon* for the neutral supernatural who serves as a judge (referee) in the nightly competition (gambling) of the other gods. Terms: *Ulkuw* means 'to be night' (Tsmuwich, 35; also means 'to be worldly', as in '*Alulkuy* which means 'to be of the spirit world').

Atishwin

The term *Atishwin* means 'power' in Chumash, and refers specifically to supernatural power of the spirit. Humans, who dwell in the Middle World have relatively little spiritual power, as compared to the powerful supernaturals of the Upper and Lower Worlds.

To understand the Chumash demons (*Nunashish*) and other frightening beings such as ghosts, one needs to understand the nature of '*Atishwin*, or power. Applegate argues that power is a "dangerously amoral force" in the cosmology of the native Californians (Atishwin, 15). Blackburn repeats this cosmology, in his argument that power is amoral. "Morality is egotistic and essentially situational in nature" (December, 68). But both Applegate and Blackburn are probably incorrect, in that power obtained by humans from the supernaturals of the Upper world apparently differs from power obtained from the supernaturals of the Lower World. The supernaturals of the Upper world (upper heavens, consisting of stars which rotate around the pole star and never touch the earth during their rotation) do obey 'rules.' These beings, however, are withdrawn from normal human contact.

Thus, it is the supernaturals of the Lower world (lower heavens, consisting of stars which rotate in the heavens and touch the earth's horizon) which demonstrate relatively egotistic and essentially situational ethical behavior. Unfortunately for mankind, these are the supernaturals which are the most accessible to humans, causing great joy and pain. The demons called the *Nunashish* are the most damaging of these lower heaven supernaturals (stars). They have great '*Atishwinic* power, but it is damaging to mankind.

Flute

The flute is the preeminent Chumash musical instrument, capable of white magic. It

could chase away demons, and resurrect the dead.⁴ See the flute-playing demon slayer.⁵ See Lizard in *Enememe's Friends* (Anderson, 1998) for further discussion. Also see *Tales For the Christmas Season* (Anderson 1996) for narratives about the Mohave and Chumash flute-playing heroes. Compare *Demon: Medicine to Counteract*.

Commentary on this Web Page

Onokok Qiliqutayiwit

Onokok is the granddaughter of M.S. Qilikutyaiwit, a leading Chumash historian who is best known by her Spanish name Maria Solares. Onokok is a Samala (Inezeno) Chumash and the director of the Inezeno Chumash Revitalization Project.

Onokok emailed me to say that some of the titles of my web pages "made me cringe." One of these cringing titles was this web page on Halloween. She wrote: "Those stories [from her ancestors] have passed down through many generations orally, and never has the content or meaning been misconstrued until the last thirty years or so. You see [they have not been misconstrued before that] because they have been passed the way they have been [originally told]. That is what has kept them alive, kept us alive, kept us with an understanding of who we are and what we are supposed to do and say and feel. When you twist them, to make them user friendly, what do you think you are doing? Those stories are for our teachings. And we understand them. We don't need translations; it wasn't meant for anyone else to understand, but us... All we have left as Indian people is what could be told orally. Please don't white-wash it. For example- if a Chumash person was trying to find more out about who they were and looked at your page, they would come to believe we celebrate X-mas or Halloween. They wouldn't be learning the real reasons why these stories are told. They would settle for something they read instead of seeking out a Chumash person to find out the real stuff. People believe in what people write, especially authors with degrees. There is a whole other world, separate from that which is written about us. I mean this on a spiritual level..." [December 31, 1998, email]

Response: Onokok has made some good points here, and she is not the first Chumash person to contact me to discuss these and related matters. One of the problems is that the focus of most of my books is on a non-Indian readership. The books with Chumash themes are meant to speak to people who have little, and often virtually no, background information about the Chumash. Yet they are interested in learning more, and are willing to overcome the prejudices embodied in the curriculum of California schools for generations.

4 (Blackburn, December, 108; Qiliqutayiwit).

5 (Blackburn, December, 110, Qiliqutayiwit).

Given the fact that most of us who went to high school and college in California were taught that the Chumash were extinct, very often we have shown indifference to their culture out of programmed ignorance. But times are changing, and I get letters and emails from non-Chumash who feel they need some interpretative help in understanding the old songs, poems, folk tales, speeches, and histories written down by anthropologists and other scholars who have worked with the Chumash. Hopefully, my writing provide some help.

The problem goes deeper. Onokok speaks with great sensitivity of the importance of accurate preservation of the Chumash oral heritage. And, as she points out, growing up in a Chumash family gives her and others like her a unique insight into her ancestral heritage. I acknowledge that I cannot partake of this unique insight, but what I can do is present a view of Chumash traditional culture that is unique to my 'outsider' background.

Actually, many Chumash have struggled with this type of problem for the last two hundred years as they have been forced through a series of European invasions to adjust to an dual cultural existence. Kitsepawit, for example, discussed the participation of Chumash in All Saints Day celebrations at the missions. In Ventura, for example, the Lulapin Chumash "placed candles on all of the graves in the cemetery. "The cemetery outside was a blaze of light." The Chumash paid the priest twenty-five cents for each requiem song that the three singers performed for the repose of someone's departed ancestor.⁶ So we can see that, for some Chumash, Halloween was an active part of their lives. 'Alls Saints Day is a commemorative holiday for all the saints of the church, celebrated on November 1. By the medieval ages of Europe, the festival was known as All Hallows, and its eve came to be known as Halloween.

A CHUMASH HALLOWEEN: EVIL AND GOOD DEEDS



Excerpts From Chapter Two

6 (Hudson, Breath, 74)

"A comprehensive discussion of Chumash ethical theory must, by necessity, include cosmology. Life for humans on the earth is impacted by influences from supernatural forces, from both above and below.

Humans are often morally corrupted and overwhelmed by these forces which impact both the physical body and the mind. Too often, the craving for food, sex, and other affairs of the body override our better moral judgment. We succumb to the influence of related 'demons' throughout our lives. But the wise Chumash knew that the demons even threatened us after death. The soul outlives the physical body, and begins a celestial journey to the Land of the Dead. By overcoming the celestial demons that await among the stars, the soul can achieve reincarnation."

When Is a Good Deed Is Repaid By A Bad Deed

"But what becomes of the Chumash soul, after it is reborn into another human body? Is it not once again plagued by demons? A number of Chumash narrative explore these problems in discussions of ethical pessimism. This is a viewpoint held by many Protestant Americans. In some sects, traditions of negativity and pessimism go back to the Puritans, Calvinist obsessions with personal sin, and stern New England consciousness. And it also appeared in the teachings of early Protestant ministers who came to California in the Gold Rush of the 1850's.

L.Y. Nutu, who was from the Santa Barbara area, provides some interesting commentary on the problem of evil and spiritual pessimism. She tells a story about the Tiger of the Sea. The species of this saltwater 'tiger' is not identified directly but is presumably a shark. This fierce ocean beast had been washed upon the shore and was found by a Chumash man. Feeling benevolent, the human pushed the Tiger back into the water so that he could regain his strength. Instead of thanking the man and swimming away happily, the demon seized the man's hand and threatened to eat him, explaining "Well, it is like this, a good deed is repaid with evil." [Nutu's narrative goes on to tell how, after a number of misadventures, Coyote tricks the demon to release the man. The man takes Coyote home and feeds him, as a reward for saving his life. But he then turns his dogs on Coyote, who runs for his life. Nutu concluded her story with the moral that a good deed is repaid with evil].

To Laugh at a Demon

"The lighter side of Chumash stories involved the audience, soliciting laughter at the frailties of human existence. Typically, comic Chumash narratives involve the antics of Coyote, but other tales taught the importance of laughing at ourselves and the need for overcoming our fears.

A story about the one-legged *Paka Asil* demon, for example, teaches a related moral. In this classic demon narrative, an old woman finds herself lost on a trail, all alone in the night. But this tenacious grandmother refuses to be frightened, when she first hears the thumping sounds of the approaching *Paka Asil* devil. She hold her own against seemingly overwhelming odds and would not stand aside from the path to allow the monster to proceed on its journey. Through the heroics of this decrepit old woman, the audience learns not only to laugh at the predicaments of others, but also recognize similar dilemmas in their own lives. Laughter lightens the burden of human travail." (Anderson, page 19)

References:

- Applegate, R. B. *Atishwin*, Ballena Press, 1978.
Blackburn, Thomas *December's Child*, University of California Press, 1975.
Santa Ynez Band *Samala-English Dictionary*, in collaboration with R. B. Applegate, 2007.
 Cited above as Samala.
Yee, Mary *Barbareno Chumash Dictionary*, compiled by K. Whistler, Smithsonian
 Institution, 1980. Cited above as Tsmuwich, followed by a page
number.

A Chumash Halloween is no longer in print. It will eventually be entered in full text
for free download through the John M. Anderson Library Project.

Email: jandersonlibrary@gmail.com