



MARINGAYAM METAPHYSICS

An unpublished Research Project

By Dr. John M. Anderson

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In the year 2000 the Malki Museum in Banning, California published *Always Believe* by Dorothy Ramon. This text contributed to the revival of public interest in the culture of the Maringayam people of southern California. My research on the Kitanemuk people of the Tejon Indian Reservation was deeply enriched by Ramon's commentary. The Kitanemuk were the most western of the speakers of Maringayam (Serrano) in California. But genocidal death rates and dispossession by American conquest meant that much of the Kitanemuk lore had been lost to the academic world. Ramon's remarkable narratives have done much to fill in the gaps in our understanding, especially in the fields of metaphysics and ethics.

Eagle As the Dying God

An internet search of California native religion and the Dying God concept will generate many web pages of interest. This general topic is infused with multicultural references, many of which are of European Christian sources. To understand Dorothy Ramon's commentary, however, European references to a dying deity are not essential. Native Californian theology recognized many supernaturals such as the sun, moon, morning star, etc. Each of them is a dying god in the sense that their powers waned in cyclical patterns. The Sun grows in power after rising in the east and reaches its apex of heat between noon and three in the afternoon. At that time it is moving in a path of descent towards the portal of the setting sun. By midnight, the sun dies in the underworld

and is miraculously reincarnated, growing in power as it ascends towards the portal of the rising sun in the east.

The Moon, Morning Star, Evening Star, and numerous other deities also went through cycles of growth and death. Each was a dying deity. But the key deity in understanding Ramon's commentary is the Eagle whose home (nest) was in the North Star. In this case, the Eagle does not move or go through periodic growth and decline. The difference is that Ramon's narratives about the Eagle do not take place in mundane space/time. They occur in mythic space/time, and Eagle's role as a dying god is linked to the great transformations of life on the surface of the earth back in ancient times. Eagle descends from above and rules the supernatural First People who lived with him on the surface of the earth. They rebel and kill Eagle, provoking a transition from mythic space/time to mundane space/time. It is this transition which is the key to understanding the metaphysics of *Wayta'Yawa'*

Divine Knowledge, Not Belief

Excerpts from research files, 2020

The title of Dorothy Ramon's text is translated as "Always Believe". After many readings of this inspiring text, I have come to the conclusion that *Wayta'yawa'* was chosen by Ramon as a general plea for preserving knowledge of and respect for her ancestral religion. It was not meant, perhaps, as an endorsement of belief in the sense of Catholicism with which she was familiar.

Direct experience of the divine, not a belief in the divine, is the true source of Maringayam religion and culture. And the role of *datura* in gaining access to the divine must be considered in understanding the important role of the vision quest in Maringayam cultural practices. Dogmatic religions run by an organized priesthood, such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, or Islam place the highest emphasis on belief, while many native American religions reject religious dogma and rely upon direct experience, leading to knowledge of the divine. In this sense, Maringayam traditionalists are much closer to the Gnostics of Europe than to the Catholics who conquered coastal California in the eighteenth century. Carl Jung offers more solace to Maringayam traditionalists, therefore, than did Junipero Serra who founded the Spanish system of forced native labor and the systematic dismantling of all aspects of native California culture.

A useful preinstruction for newcomers to Ramon's text might be *'Mit wi'wan me'enaniktii* which means "if you want to know".¹ The implication, in this suggestion, is that the readers have to experience the divine directly through vision if they are serious about understanding traditional Maringayam religion.

Creation of the First Dry Land

The translations of Ramon's Maringayam commentary in this text can be confusing in places. In understanding traditional Maringayam metaphysics, for example, the translations are not consistent and/or specific enough to construct a working cosmological model. This can be seen in the translations of key words in the narrative called "More on the Three Wise Men" (583-

1 (Ramon, Always Believe, 455).

585). The purpose of this narrative was to explain the role Eagle, Coyote, and the Primordial One² played in creating the first dry land in mythic time when the whole world was flooded. Unfortunately, the translation reads: “how they created the world long ago” (583). This is misleading since the flooded earth already existed as did the rest of the physical cosmos. Instead of *World* the translation would have been more useful if it read *Dry Land*. Such a translation would have helped immensely in avoiding a mistaken claim that these three deities created all of the cosmos. It was the Maringayam supreme deity who created the cosmos, and these three deities were transformers not creators.

Reissuing Ramon’s Narratives

Wayta’yawa (“Always Believe”) is a massive resource of nearly nine hundred pages. Dorothy Ramon and her editor Eric Elliot deserve praise for the years of hard work in producing this invaluable text. Linguists have found the translations of Ramon’s Maringayam narrations of great value in studying this native language.

It is now three decades since Dorothy Ramon first began to work with Elliot on *Wayta’yawa*. While I recognize that recovering the Maringayam language is a top priority and that *Wayta’yawa* is a primary resource for that goal, this book is almost insurmountably complex for most people to get through. It contains an incredible richness of topics in many hundreds of pages. Perhaps it is now time to consider a series of derivative publications based on information Mrs. Ramon provided through Elliot’s translations. These could be focused on topics such as myth, metaphysics, history, physical culture, botany, etc.

In these derivative publications, reader comprehension would be helped considerably if Mrs. Ramon’s Maringayam references to the gods were clarified in each passage. For example, passages in which she used phrases such as ‘our lord’ and ‘their lord’ should specifically identify the deity under discussion. Direct references to Eagle, Coyote, the lord of the underground, the Sun, Moon, and others would go a long way in making Ramon’s narratives accessible to the general public.³

2 The introduction to this text is confusing in its references to the *Maarrenga’yam*. It refers to them as originating in another “planet” (Ramon, *Wayta’Yawa*, xxix). It is not made clear, however, that they were a supernatural First People and not the humans who later called themselves the *Maarenga’yam*. (called Serrano by the Spanish). Clarity on this issue would have made subsequent texts more understandable.

3 The narrative entitled “The Three Wise Men” contains important references to the Maringayam gods acting at the time of creation of the first dry land on the flooded earth. Ramon identified them as Coyote, Wild Cat, and *Parqerktak* who is described as the ‘lord of the underworld’ (141). In one passage Mountain Lion seems to be substituted for Wild Cat without a specific explanation. In other passages *Peenep* (‘their lord’) appears as a major actor without specifically identifying him. Sorting out these references was a preliminary task for the research which went into the first draft of *Maringayam Cosmology*. (Anderson).