

WHAT DRAWS THE NATIVE HUICHOL TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN?

The Ocean is the Source of Life:
Huichol accounts about Tatéi Haramara,
Our Mother Sea.

JUAN NEGRÍN FETTER

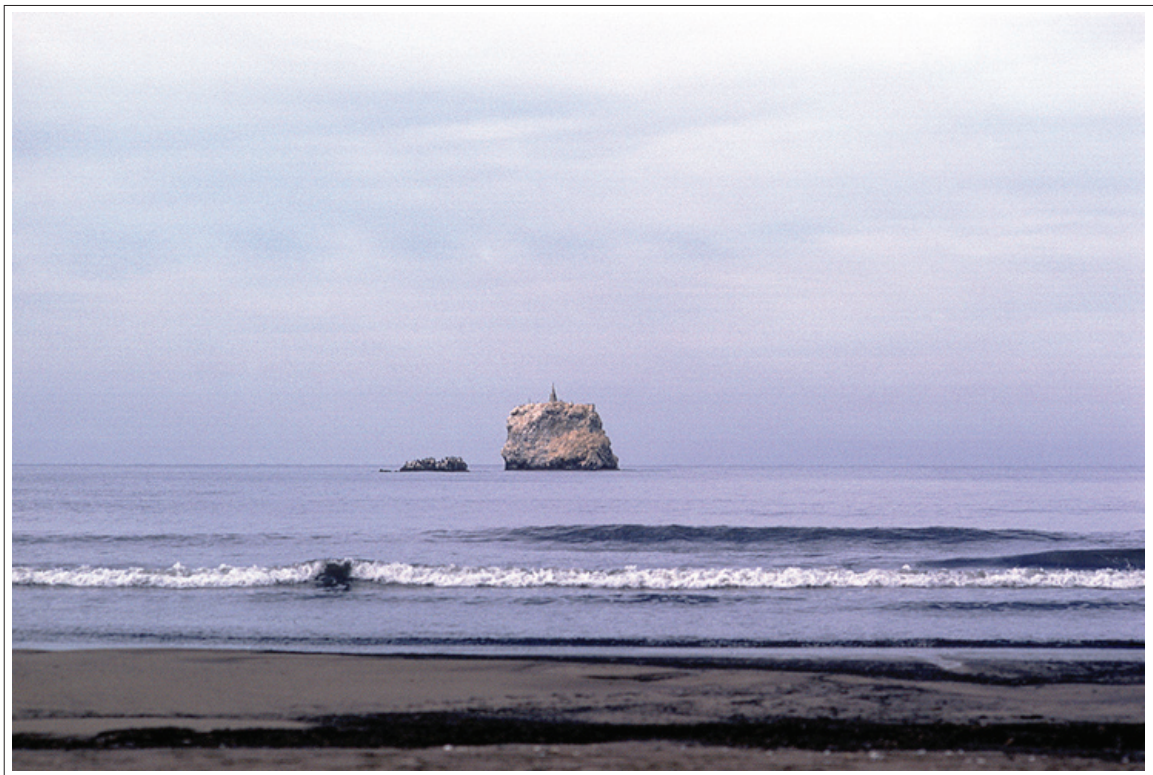


Foto: Juan Negrín Fetter

The pilgrimage of the Huichol natives of Northwestern Mexico, known as *Wixaritari* in their language, to the Ocean is a vital phenomenon. Although they mostly live a good 100 kilometers from the coast of the state of Nayarit: That is where the sparks of Our Great-Grandfather the Setting-Sun, *Tatutsi Sakaimuka*, disappear as he enters one of his subterranean aquatic canals, and one waits for Our Father, *Tayau*, or Our Creator, *Taweviekame*, to reappear on the other side, in the sacred desert of the east, *Wirikuta*.

In conjunction with the first radiance of dawn, appear the drops of Our Mother Dew Soul, *Tatéi Haütsi Küpuri*, coming out of the ocean. Thus, Our Mother Sea, *Tatéi Haramara*, is the primordial fountain of all water; some waves rise from there to be carried by Our Elder Brother Wind Neighbor, *Tamatsi Eakatéiwari*, changing them into clouds over the four cardinal spots and the center. The symbol of the rain and the clouds is the serpent, or the path of Our Mothers of Rain, *Tateteima* (those who are like our mothers), reaching different parts of the sacred cosmography.

For the *Wixárika* (Huichol, singular), if it were not for the sea, the clouds would not travel over the earth between the four cardinal points and there would be no rain. It is in the sea that the winged serpents originate which change into Our Mothers of Rain.

On the other hand, when it rains too much, the water carries part of the soil to the edge of the sea, where all the rivers join their waters to spill them out in the sea that represents the west, or the return to fetal obscurity and the journey to the world of the dead, where some spirits get lost, while others leave the underworld, being liberated to a celestial world in the form of quartz crystals, *teiwárite*, serving as an example to their descendants. Considering these factors, many *Wixaritari* undertake pilgrimages to the sea in gratitude for fertility and even to seek soil on its edge with the qualities of revitalizing the highland fields. Here is the incarnation of Our Mothers, *Tateteima*, who include Our Mother Young Eagle, *Tatéi Werika Wimari*, who symbolizes the bicephalous realm of the heavens which oversees the descent of the sun in the west with one head and the ascent of the sun in the east with her other head. In this bicephalous form, Our Mother Sky watches over Earth and Ocean below.

They travel to certain places on the coast of Nayarit from which they can see a peak in the sea called Our Mother who escapes like White Vapor, *Tatéi Waxiewe*, which symbolizes the place where Our Mother Fertile Earth, *Tatéi Yurienaka*, remains at the edge of the current land. Initially *Tatéi Yurienaka* reappeared after the flood in a peak that is in the south, where Our Mother of the Wild Fig Trees is found, *Tatéi Xapawiyemetá*.

The Huichol artist Tiburcio Carrillo Sandoval (*Tutukila*), from the community of Santa Catarina, *Tuapurie*, sketched out the theme of “The return of Our Mother Fertile and Sprouting Earth, *Tatéi Yurienaka*, to Our Mother Sea, *Tatéi Haramara*” (1974) in a series of ten yarn paintings¹.

According to the mythology gathered by *Tutukila*, *Tatéi Yurienaka* returns to the west, leaving Our Great-Grandmother, *Takutsi* (see below) and Our Grandfather (Fire), *Tatewarí*, in what are today their shrines on the platform of a cave near a deep river that divides the highlands. The purpose of the journey of *Yurienaka* to the west was to establish the flow of the clouds between the sea and the earth, since that flow is a manifestation of the nature of *Yurienaka*.

The first pause on the journey to the west is in the Highlands of Nayar (Mesa del Nayar), in the peak of Our Mother of the West, *Tatéi Kiewimuka*², who appeared first as a serpent and manifests itself as water in a cave that always drips. *Tatéi Yurienaka* conceded *Kiewimuka* the grace of representing her to the pilgrims who could not travel to the coast, and she left there her symbolic objects, like a votive bowl with grains of maize (*xukuri*), a votive arrow (*ürü*) and a hole or a mirror (*nierika*) that reflects his face. Near *Kiewimuka*, *Tatéi Yurienaka* found a peak which she changed into the figure of *Sakaimuka*, the one who guards the gourds, *yakwaite*, where the sacred tobacco, *ya*, is kept. It is classified botanically as *nicotiana rústica* and known popularly as ‘macuchi’.

The *Wixaritari* take offerings to the caves of *Sakaimutá* to give thanks for the use of this tobacco that serves for ceremonial occasions and is appreciated as an intermediary with Our Grandfather (Fire) to dispel certain negative beings along the sacred journey. The native tobacco is shared during rituals as a complement and balance to the effect of peyote that represents the illumination of dawn that glows in the east.

Along her journey, the rivers grow because of the rains and Our Mother Sea appears when Our Mother Fertile Earth reenters her original sanctuary in the west: the Gates of the World, *Watetüapa*, or the sacred underworld that is also the antediluvian, amorphous world (without the sun’s light).

Below we analyze in detail *Tutukila*’s yarn painting about “The Return of Our Mother Fertile Earth, *Tatéi Yurienaka*, to Our Mother Sea, *Tatéi Haramara*”:

1 This series of ten paintings form actually part of the permanent collection of “The Kolla-Landwehr Foundation Collection of Huichol Art”, donated to the Radford University of Virginia, U.S. Each measures 60cm. x 60cm.

2 *Tatéi Kiewimuka*, is in Jesús María, Nayarit.



The sea is sighted from the edge of the mountain range.

Tutukila, 60 × 60 cm

Foto: Lloyd Patrick Baker

The figure of Our Mother *Yurienaka*, at the top center, is accompanied by the First Cultivator, *Watakame*, to the left, and a black bitch, at the upper right. They stand on the last long range that separates the highlands from the coast. Here, in *Xeutariweküa*, they contemplate a vision of the sea for the first time (in the lower region). When she left the sea to create part of the actual world with Our Ancestors, she entrusted it to a Serpent, *Kuyuarwi*, also called *Waxiewe* (who appears here as the vapor that emanates from the snake, see essay above).

Kuyuarwi waits for *Yurienaka* in the lower part of the painting, surrounded by her two allied spirits, Blue Serpent, *Kuyuarwime*, the essence of the San Pedro River, and White Water, *Hatuxame*, the essence of the Santiago River, which assume human characteristics. Our Mother *Yurienaka* entrusts *Watakame* with the task of preparing a votive arrow to mark the center of the range where they stand. They spent the night there and heard a tree of wind (a very psychotropic solanaceous plant), called *kieri* in Huichol, relating to them. The tree of wind was directing them towards its sacred site, where it lives with Our Elder Brother, *Tamatsi Xeutariweküa*, the ancestor in charge of that range.

In the direction from which they had come, dominated by the high ranges, *Yurienaka* encounters nothing. She then directs her sight to the bottom of a deep river that is between the cliffs *Watákame* straddles; this is the path of the dead to Our Mother Sea. Those who are too burdened by 'sins' die all over again when they reach this narrow passage. *Yurienaka* had the spot marked with a votive arrow. Further ahead, she found the sacred spot of the *kieri* of *Tamatsi Xeutariweküa*, where they had to deposit the main votive arrow before penetrating the Sea again. *Yurienaka* concedes the *kieri* the power to cleanse those who take the path of the living pilgrims to visit the sea.



A Huichol shaman (*mara'akame*) with his family prepares offerings they will offer to the Sea. A type of yarn painting with a mirror in the center and two deer sketched off its side stand out: it is a *nierika* made for Our Mother Ocean to care for the pilgrim in his distant lands and to enable him to contact her. In the center of the *nierika* is a votive arrow (*ürüi*). Foto: Juan Negrín Fetter

The area depicted in maroon or a dark red background represents *Watetiüapa*, where the world originated in obscurity. This place evokes the world of the female in Huichol metaphysics, and particularly the power of Our Great Grandmother, *Takutsi Nakawé*. Because of her ability to germinate and to develop, she can be destructive if she is not satisfied, but she is known as *Takutsi Kiekari Ma'akame*, because of her ability to reorganize *Heriepa*, the actual earth after the flood. *Takutsi* as the wisest of the Ancestors knew beforehand that a flood was threatening the previous world, which according to Tutukila was dry, except for a lagoon in *Xeutariweküa*, and she organized the rescue of her principal companions (among them, Our Grandfather Fire).

According to information from the Norwegian naturalist Carl Lumholtz³, *Takutsi Nakawé* means Our Great Grandmother Growth, a very fundamental expression of female energy, however its semantic meaning derives from *naká*, ear, and *we*, large: that she is capable of hearing everything at the beginning of time and in darkness.

The caterpillar, *kawí*, came out of the sea from the edge of *Tatéi Haramara* to begin the journey to the east and know the pilgrimage to *Wirikuta* (the spot where our ancestors draw their sacred symbols on the faces of the pilgrims). The caterpillar changes into a butterfly when it reaches *Wirikuta* (in the desert of San Luis Potosí), then Our Father Sun rose and they both ascended to the seventh dimension, the heavens, *Tabeimá*, which appeared at that point.



The shaman, carrying a basket in one hand, and plumed arrows in another to direct the chant, accompanied by other members of his family, as they enter Our Mother Sea, *Tatéi Haramara*. Foto: Juan Negrín Fetter

Today the prototype of the wise *Wixárika* is the *kawiteru* who, like the caterpillar, knows the sacred spots that he visits one at a time, with respect and fasts, on his annual pilgrimage, until fulfilling the example of the ancestors. It is a long path of vows and devotions, followed by public responsibilities that the community entrusts to those who fulfill this tradition. Those who prove capable of carrying out their religious and political responsibilities reach the high cargo of *kawiteru*.

3 Carl Lumholtz was the first naturalist to explore the Huichol region at the end of the 19th century. His fundamental book on that is *Unknown Mexico*, London, Macmillan and Co, Ltd., 1903

This whole pilgrimage gives them the knowledge of the *kawitu*, which is the chant corresponding to the presence of Our Ancestors along the sacred path, from the south to the north, to the orient and to the west.

The majority of the *Wixaritari* who still live in the three most traditional communities of the Western Sierra Madre, *Tateikié*, *Tuapurie* and *Wautüa* in the state of Jalisco feel it is still not convenient to go to the coast without a spiritual purpose in mind. Indeed living among the outsiders, or ‘neighbors’, *téiwarixi*, many get disoriented, breaking their ties with their communities and their families, because of the influence of alcohol, prostitution and the poor advice given to them by some opportunistic neighbors.

However, it is the young *Wixaritari*, frequently orphans or from families where harvests were meager, who sometimes see themselves pushed to labor on the coast, as their main option to finding survival in the mountains.

Already in 1530, the Spanish conqueror Nuño de Guzmán dislodged violently many ancestors of the *Wixaritari* who lived on the current coastal state of Nayarit to the highlands of the Sierra Madre and still live in the western Sierra of Jalisco. Their exposure to illness and enslavement led to a mass rebellion of major proportions for this region of Mexico.

The *Wixaritari* have continued using any opportunity to return to the sea, from the most traditional customs of trading salt, or ‘sotol’ maguey wine, or peyote, as healers using its healing values or those of other medicinal plants.

Previously the *Wixaritari* worked in the sugar plantations on the coast and this is where they developed the tradition of using cotton muslin cloth in which the cane was transported to manufacture first class embroidered clothing.

In any case, the *Wixaritari* on the coast are far from the center of their land. They make the traditional pilgrimage to Our Mother Sea, *Tatéi Haramara*, in what was previously also their territory, and will look for work there in order to subsidize their later return to the mountains.

Since the 1940’s, they have been primarily hired as laborers on tobacco plantations. Since then we often find the *Wixaritari* in the periphery of their current territory, performing tasks that are enslaving, as migrant workers on the coastal plains of Nayarit, particularly in the agro-industrial plantations of TOBACCO.

The Origin Of Tobacco
 José Benítez Sánchez
 1.22 m x 80 cm
 Foto: Lloyd Patrick Baker



Today they are diversifying their work into other agricultural fields of Zacatecas, Aguascalientes and even outside the country. The sale of their crafts has taken them to the cities of Guadalajara and Mexico, as well as other tourist centers, like Puerto Vallarta and foreign cities.

Huichol Girl Carrying Tobacco In The Agro-industrial Plantations Of Nayarit
 José Hernández-Claire
 1994



For the author it was important to establish baptismal ties with *Wixaritari* shamans, *mara'akate*, at the edge of the Pacific. On these pilgrimages I became the co-father of several Huichol who gave native names to two of my daughters. To them and to Tiburcio Carrillo Sandoval, who died after acquiring the position of supervising the bilingual teachers for the National Indigenous Institute of Nayarit, in 1997, I dedicate this essay.

Juan Negrín Fetter
 Oakland, California, May 18, 2006

THE ORIGIN OF TOBACCO

Explanation by the artist and interpreted with Juan Negrín Fetter in early 1975.

This is where Our Elder Brother, *Tamatsi Kauyumari*, created tobacco in a seed bed (black area). *Kauyumari* (lower right), in front of a prayer bowl containing his thoughts, made his hand become tobacco and his vertebrae become the veins of the leaf. The black field contains a tobacco flower and a dry leaf and is covered with seeds. *Kauyumari* sprinkled the seed so he could achieve his ambition to create something to smoke.

The first results were not to his satisfaction because the smoke from its leaves was too mild. Samples of these first tobacco leaves are displayed from the top corners of the seed bed. In between these samples, *Tatewari*, Our Grandfather Fire (center left), and (center right) *Taweviékame*, Our Creator Sun, are trying cigars, *yanate*, made with a wild tobacco species that *Kauyumari* had finally created (wrapped in corn husks). This is the sacred tobacco called *ya* by the huichol and 'macuchi' by their mixed blood neighbors. A female plant is represented above *Tatewari*'s head and a male plant over *Taweviékame*'s head, with an added horn is found to be stronger. This is the tobacco the huichol use when they use peyote and that the shaman uses when he chants all night.

Just then Young Fox Person, *Kauxay Tewiyari*, was passing by. He asked to smoke a cigar which *Tatewari* allowed him to try. But Fox Person immediately regurgitated and fell to the ground howling (bottom left). The stone machete and axe that he was using to work the fields lie above him. Thus he lost his life (represented by a coiled cord, top left) and was born into his present identity as a fox (also top left). His fur is yellow on his chest and on his feet because it was stained by his vomit. Since this happened to Young Fox Person, even though he smoked part of the milder female plant, young people are not allowed to smoke wild tobacco.

Kauyumari sent word (in the form of a white insect, top right) to the hummingbird to spread the seed around (white spots). The hummingbird was asked to carry an arrow containing the seeds and life of tobacco (symbolized as flowers).

Set in the midst of flames is a container with dried tobacco (center). The multi-colored triangles framing the painting are the writings of *Kauyumari*, which take the form of rocks in every conceivable color.



Artist: José Benítez Sánchez

Materials: Thick wood board, 32' x 48',
thick Australian wool and thin Mexican wool.

Foto: Lloyd Patrick Baker