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# THE YUMA

## HOMELAND, ARTS, AND CUSTOMS

YUMA mythology points to the vicinity opposite Fort Mohave, on the California side of the Colorado river, as having been the place of origin of the various Yuman tribes now found along the river from the Grand Cañon to the Gulf. The tribe bear ing the family name of Yuma at one time doubtless lived three hundred miles north of their present location, which is along both sides of the lower Colorado, near Yuma, Arizona. Mythology indicates that the Mohave are the parent stock, and that the Yuma offshoot migrated to the south. This migration took place long before the earliest Spanish explorers penetrated the desert wilds of the Southwest, for when first met the Yuma occupied the locality they now inhabit.

So far as United States history is concerned, these people first became known in the days of the California gold rush. Prior to 1849 the Yuma lived in their primitive way unmolested. Then came the emigrant trains with their mule teams and creeping ox-carts, which traversed the very heart of the Yuma country, ferrying the Colorado at the Indian ferry, and the ill-clad natives were not slow in avail ing themselves of the opportunity to replenish their larders in a way they had never known. The looting of emigrant wagons soon be came so exasperating that it was found necessary to establish a mili tary camp on the Colorado river, at the seat of Yuma activities. This was done in November, 1850, under Brevet Major Samuel P. Heint zelman, at the junction of the Gila with the Colorado, and the depre dations of the Indians were soon checked. A year later Camp Yuma, as the post was called, was abandoned, but renewed depredations on the part of the Indians called for its reoccupancy three months afterward. In February, 1852, Fort Yuma was established as a permanent garrison, and maintained until 1883, when it was abandoned by the War Department and transferred to the Department of the Interior. The Yuma reservation, lying wholly within the state of California and comprising 45,889 acres, was established by Executive order of January 9, 1884.

Prior to contact with the whites, which began materially to affect them about 1850, the Yuma did not have an elective chief, and they had never a very stable tribal organization. Chieftainship became elective in form mainly through the recent influence of Catholic missionaries. All tribal matters, as well as personal disputes, were adjusted by a council of leading men, whose decision was final. The man who could afford to give feasts to the people at large or was successful in war would maintain the leadership for a time, only to lose it when exceeded in his liberality or his prowess as a warrior by some other tribesman.

There was one man, however, who held the tribe completely under his control for forty years. This was Pascual. He was yet a young man, and had come into successful leadership through wars with the Cocopa, when Camp Yuma was established. Though never formidable fighters, the Yuma under Pascual did some very clever manoeuvring and made some valiant stands against the United States troops sent in 1851 to stop their raiding. For two years Pascual held out against discouraging odds, for the inhospitable desert into which he had been driven was practically destitute of everything necessary to horse or man; but in 1853 he came in and signed a treaty of peace and friendship, which was faithfully kept until his death in May, 1887.

Chief Miguel, his successor, who now holds only nominal control, was elected by the tribe through its council. A faction of the Yuma was radically opposed to the election of Miguel, and has since refused to recognize him as chief.

Warfare against neighboring tribes was carried on more for the purpose of establishing prestige and cultivating prowess than for direct gain, yet the Yuma never let pass an opportunity to capture children and hold them for ransom. The standard price was two ponies and a blanket. These operations were conducted mainly against the Cocopa, Mohave, and Maricopa, tribes of their own blood, and if captives were not ransomed they were adopted into the tribe. These warring tribes, often at bitter enmity, would forget their hostile attitude toward one another when a formidable band of Apache made a foray into their river camps, and join against the common enemy. They dreaded the Apache as they dread death, and the old Yuma warriors to-day, after years of peace and forgetfulness, assert that they would have been driven by the Apache from the Colorado river far into California had not the valiant Pima intervened.

When victorious, the Yuma scalped their slain foes, taking the

entire hair covered portion of the skin from their heads. These scalps were cared for by the women, who fastened them upon poles and kept them thoroughly cleaned and brushed for use in scalp dances, which were held to celebrate subsequent victories.

The Mexicans and the Yuma had but little trouble, although an extensive trade was carried on between the two peoples for a great many years. The Indians bartered corn, melons, pumpkins, and other products of their agriculture for beads and blankets. Horses were first obtained by them through the Mexicans. The Yuma are excellent horsemen, riding in early Indian fashion without saddle or bridle. With only a rope around its lower jaw the most vicious bronco is mounted and broken.

The primitive Yuma domicile, like that of the Mohave, was a low, dome-shaped structure, as much under ground as above. This form of house has now practically disappeared, and in its stead are built rectangular huts of upright posts, horizontal poles, and mud filling. These jacales, as they are called by the Mexicans, are scattered at intervals along the river, their settlements being of the nature of rancherias rather than villages.

Their environment being practically identical in character, the Yuma naturally made use of the same native foods as the Mohave. Prehistorically their foodstuff consisted principally of mesquite and mescrew pods, grass seeds, quantities of fish, and the small animals and birds native to the valleys. In the soft, mellow soil of the bottom lands they raised corn, squashes, pumpkins, and beans, and later added melons and small grains.

Though a river people, the Yuma, like the Mohave, never made canoes. Cottonwood logs were sometimes roughly hollowed out for ferrying camp equipage across the river. This rude contrivance was called *qulhó.* For a like purpose very large clay bowls, *katelhakám,* as much as three feet in diameter and equally deep, were made. Clothing, bedding, and children were placed in these curious craft and ferried across the Colorado by the adults who swam beside and pushed them along. The usual water conveyance when travelling up or down stream was a raft. Father Salpointe, in "Soldiers of the Cross," says:

"For a Yuma to ride a stick on the river, and to carry on it his little luggage, is of common occurrence, and it seems to the bystander the easiest thing to be done. In fact, what is required for a voyage of that kind is to pick up a convenient stick or pole from among the many

that generally lie on the shore, and to tie at one end of it the bundle of garments and some food, if necessary, for they consider it easier to return by land than by water, up the river. After the tying of the baggage, the man sitting on the other end sets out breast deep in the water, rowing with his hands, while the package, which, of course, must be lighter than the man, goes ahead of him, protruding above the surface of the river, high enough to be protected against moisture. In case it be necessary to carry heavy loads, then a raft is built by tying or coupling logs together with ropes or strips of rawhide, until the desired space for the cargo is obtained. In regard to the Yuma Indian women, who can cross the river swimming as well as the men, they use another kind of embarkation for their young children, when they want to pass them from one side to the other of the river. The process is very simple; the pappoose is placed in a rather flat earthen 'olla' (jug), which is put afloat, and then pushed ahead in the desired direction by the swimming mother."

The "dress" of the men in prehistoric times consisted of a pelican plume in the hair, a necklace of beads, and a loin-cloth woven of grass or bark fibre. Before the introduction of Mexican or American fabrics, the Yuma traded with the Mohave for black loincloths woven of cotton by the Hopi. The Havasupai traded for them first, passed them on to the Walapai, the Walapai to the Mohave, and these in turn to the Yuma. Havasupai deerskin garments were obtained in like manner, and a few Apache deerskin articles also reached them. Moccasins they never wore. Their first footwear was sandals made of leather purchased from the early California settlers and Spanish missions.

The first pretence of dress for the women was a small willow-bark apron as wide as the hips and dropping midway down the thighs. Later they wore a full short skirt of bark, superseded long since by cloth. It is only within the last twenty-five years that the upper part of the body has been covered. Now close-fitting waists and long skirts are worn.

If it be possible, the Yuma are more deficient in handiwork than the Mohave. In the past they made considerable pottery, but crude in form and without decoration. With the coming of the white man they were able to obtain tin cooking utensils, which sounded the doom of their ceramic art, so that now but few potters are found in the tribe.

Their knowledge of basketry is very limited, only a few ordinary specimens being made as a part of the paraphernalia for the mourning rite, and burned with the other ceremonial articles on the pyre. Yuma

mythology alludes to the use of baskets by mythic characters, suggesting knowledge of basket weaving in ancient times.

The burden-carrier of the women was the *hulepó,* a square willow-bark blanket, the corners of which were tied together around pumpkins, corn, or other objects to be transported, and the baggy weight suspended at the back by means of a forehead band, or carrying strap, of braided grass, bark, or yucca. Dip-nets for catching fish in the river were made of willow bark. Fish were caught also with hooks of cactus spines bent to the desired shape by heating over hot coals, and in weirs.

Fire was produced in two ways: by the common Indian custom of twirling a dry, hard spindle-stick in a small sanded socket in a flat piece of wood; and by striking a stone containing iron pyrites against a piece of flint, with a tuft of wild cotton held on the flint as tinder.

The metate, or milling stone, was used for grinding corn and grass seeds; and a mortar and pestle, *hamokí*, fashioned respectively from a cottonwood block and a mesquite branch, were employed to pound mesquite beans into pulp.

A social system giving rise to tribal laws prohibiting marriage within certain groups unquestionably existed among the Yuma at no very remote period, but it is decadent now. The generic term for such a group or gens is *simúl,* "different people," and a man was supposed to look to "different people" for his wife. The totemic name of the gens is borne by all the female children of a family, in which descent is through the father.

Although it has long since fallen into disuse, there once prevailed a custom that sealed the marriage contract by having the couple eat a bowl of gruel made of mesquite beans. Marriage is by consent of the woman, the custom of bartering daughters never having been in vogue among the Yuma. After marriage the girl lives with her husband's family until the couple have built a home of their own. Polygamy was common. Either the husband or the wife might declare divorce at will, but the woman usually took the initiative, retaining possession of the domestic property if she were the only wife or the only one living in a particular house; otherwise she simply departed.

Medicine-men are born, not made, among the Yuma, and power and knowledge are supposed to come from divine sources through revelations in dreams. The dreams which destine a man to become a healer in his tribe he is said to experience often before birth, but

generally in infancy. Many of such foreordained medicine-men are regarded as possessing superhuman strength before they can talk, and this reputation clings to them through life. They are called Pipaetsmúts, "he dreamed," and Mutisthó, "wizard."

Every medicine-man claims to learn the secret of potent cures through dreams, but the modes of treatment are very similar, the principal difference being in the story of the dream. An eagle or a beetle might have talked to one while he slept, telling him how to cure, and an ant or a buzzard to another. Yet the practice differs but little, consisting in the main of sucking, blowing upon, and spraying spittle over the body of the patient. Some do nothing more than to lay their hands upon the sick one's chest. Songs are sometimes sung, but medicines are tabooed. So ardent are the Yuma in the belief that their medicine-men are possessed of superhuman power that most of them expect relief in time of illness from the mere presence of one of these sacred healers. Their faith is unbounded in the belief that his godly breath, at his bidding, can dispel all mental and physical evil.

On the other hand, medicine-men are feared for their power also to inflict evil. Belief in witchcraft and its malevolent effects is deep-rooted in the tribe. Disease is invariably attributed to sorcery, and the medicine-men are usually accused of employing their power in this direction. A deformed person is certain to be marked as a witch or a wizard, and many normal individuals of previous good standing in the tribe have met death at the hands of their merciless tribesmen owing to a public accusation of sorcery; for a mere charge of having caused sudden or mysterious death is all-sufficient, under tribal custom, for the accused to forfeit his own life. The relatives of the one who dies from alleged witchcraft are the executioners always. Such killing was formerly very common, and is still practised. Seldom do medicine-men die a natural death. Since they are believed to possess superhuman powers, all are regarded with suspicion when abnormal conditions arise. Faith in their power never wanes, but faith in their will often does, and this leads to the death of many healers whenever the tribe is afflicted by an epidemic. If a medicine-man loses several patients, his own life pays the penalty, for he could have saved them if he would.

As has been seen, the Yuma exhibit slight tendency toward ingenuity or inventiveness. Their creations in handicraft, in mythological conceptions, and in religious observances or ceremonies, are few and of inferior order in comparison with those of other Indians of the

Southwest. Ceremony has been in its decadence for more than half a century.

## CEREMONIES

Two ceremonies, the one of mourning for the dead, known as Nimíts, "crying time," and the Harvest Dance — Tsimetoqázik, "melons ripen" — are yet observed, though not annually as of old. In the former a large ramada, or shed, is built of brush on the first of the four days devoted to the performance. It consists of little more than a roof, under which the mourners assemble on the last day about a large quantity of wood stacked up like a funeral pyre. All who have lost relatives by death during the year make effigies of them — long sticks dressed in the best quality of bright-colored cloth the mourner can afford to purchase.

The mourners with their effigies gather under the shelter and wail and chant throughout an entire day and night, with occasional intervals of rest. Seven men crowned with wreaths of pelican down stand inside the circle formed by the mourners and sing. All keep time with their feet, but cannot be said to dance. During one of the intervals in the singing and mourning a drama representing a successful raiding party is given. Several men take the part of Yuma, while others impersonate the enemy, each side having two almost naked horsemen with bows and arrows. Two women follow each party, scattering white cornmeal in their tracks. The sham fight creates much merriment, the Yuma, of course, always being victorious.

Just before dawn of the fifth day the effigies are placed upon the funeral pyre and burned. Food and gifts of all sorts, as well as all ceremonial paraphernalia — feather crowns, bows and arrows, drums, and baskets — are thrown into the flames, which consume the shelter and all, when the mourners disperse.

The mourning ceremony is always held in harvest time, when the Indians are well provided with food and clothing. Four days later the Harvest Dance is given. No ramada is built, but in a convenient place for dancing the members of the tribe deposit quanti ties of food in a common hoard. Singing and dancing continue for four days, during which time anyone may eat, and all he chooses. Their happiness testifies to their thankfulness for bounteous crops, and the songs contain invocations vaguely addressed to objects and elements for

future beneficence.

Many of the songs used in the ceremonies consist of words that convey no meaning whatsoever to the Yuma of to-day. Some declare them to be vocables created by medicine-men long since dead, and others that the songs and words are of foreign origin. Judging from the formation of the sounds, it would seem that the former belief is the correct one.

Arrival at the age of puberty in girls is celebrated among the Yuma, in accordance with the universal custom among Indians, by an appropriate ceremony. The girl's mother prepares a plaster of mesquite gum and clay, which the girl puts on the heads of any men who come to her home on the evening of the day that word is sent forth that the Mutarrék ceremony is being observed there. The men leave the mud in their hair overnight, washing it out the next morning. The girl remains indoors for four days, refraining from scratching her head except with a small stick. On the night of the fourth day the mother plasters the girl's hair with clay and gum, which is allowed to remain until morning, when she bathes and is free to move about again. These ablutions are said to symbolize a pledge that all persons taking part, particularly the girl, will remain pure and chaste.

The Yuma always cremate their dead in accordance with ancient custom. A hole or trench the length of the body and about three feet deep is dug, and covered with poles and fine, dry brush. Upon this the corpse is laid, face downward, with head toward the east, and dry wood is then piled high over the whole. To this pyre are added the personal effects of the deceased and any offerings the mourners may wish to make to his spirit. The actual burning takes place before daylight, the fire being started first on the southern side, then on the eastern, northern, and western sides in order. After the pile has burned down, all the ashes that have not fallen into the trench beneath are raked into it and covered with earth to obscure the grave.

The custom of speaking over the remains of the dead at the funeral pyre still prevails, but it is insignificant now. In earlier days shrewd old leaders made the most of such opportunities to win the good will of the tribe. The occasion being a solemn one, the assemblage always gave heed, so that the time was propitious for formulating tribal policies and for disseminating philosophic lore.

It is believed that the spirit of the dead remains near the place where the funeral pyre was erected, hiding in bushes and behind trees

and rocks, for four days after cremation of the body, when it ascends to the eternal home. Overhead, a little beyond reach, extend two roads, one to the north, the other to the south. One or the other of these the spirit must take. If he has murdered, stolen, aroused dissension among his people by falsehood or trickery, or bewitched his fellows, he will be sent northward. The good go south. Friends and relatives may or may not meet in the hereafter. The portals to the roads are guarded by two aged keepers, Umpótkôikek, Against Storm, and Inyíasarr, Road of Light. These know the career of all on earth, and when a spirit arrives to pass through, designate the way it is to go. The personal belongings of the deceased that are burned upon his funeral pyre are for use in his spirit home. If all his property were not sent with him, he might return in spirit form for what remained and take some one away with him. Food, in the form of grain, fruits, and game animals, is obtained by the spirits from the earth, being taken at will unseen; and, regardless of what is taken, its counterpart grows again instantly.

## CREATION MYTH

At the beginning the world was but a vast ocean of water supported by the earth, upon which no life existed.

The sky and the water met four times, when forth from the depths of the water emerged two beings, Kókomut and Qárra Akutár. Kókomut came first as a god to create all things upon the earth. The water through which the two passed in coming up from below was very salty. Kókomut closed his eyes and called to Qárra Akutár to do likewise; but the latter gave no heed, for he wished to gaze about him and know all that might happen. For this folly he later became blind.

The two stood upon the waters. Kókomut blew upon them with his breath, and they began to subside, soon revealing a spot which later proved to be a mountain top, Aviqamé,[1] whence sprang the Indian race. The waters continued to subside, leaving bare great expanses of sandy mud, with here and there a range of mountains past which flowed Havíl, the great Colorado river.

Descending from the mountain top to the river bank, Kókomut

[1] A mountain near the Colorado river, on the California side, opposite Fort Mohave, bears this name, and is reverenced by the Yuman Indians as the sacred place of their origin.

at once began to create people. First he made clay images, in perfect form, — a man and a woman of different mould for each tribe. When the various pairs of images were completed, Kókomut looked them over to decide upon names for the several tribes which should spring from them. The first made were the first to be named, and he called them Qichún, "The People." [2] These, when they were given the breath of life, became the progenitors of the Yuma; the others, of the Apache, the Mohave, the Pima, and the Papago. With his own hand Kókomut faced each pair toward the east and moved them forward four times, whereat they became endowed with life and walked on.

While Kókomut was thus engaged, Qárra Akutár also busied himself endeavoring to keep pace with the master in his creative work; but the forms he made were ugly to look upon. With his fast failing eyesight and inferior conception he had neglected to provide his beings with fingers and toes, and their limbs were misshapen and disproportionate. When Kókomut saw them, he was filled with anger, and swept them into the river; but they did not sink, for his touch gave them life, and they became ducks, geese, pelicans, beaver, muskrats, and other aquatic birds and beasts. Qárra Akutár resented this treatment, but being powerless to prevent it, departed beneath the surface of the earth whence he had come, where he yet lives in blindness.

Kókomut next made Hatelwí, Coyote, whom he placed in charge of all people as adviser and instructor in their life and work, to teach them how to hunt, fish, till the soil, and reap harvests.

As yet there was but little light; still, shadows could be discerned. Desiring a son to help him complete the universe, Kókomut looked upon his own shadow and bade it arise, and lo! there appeared a man, powerful in form and handsome to look upon. Thus was born Komustamhó, son of the god Kókomut, who took the master's place, as his name signifies, for it means "taking his place."

Komustamhó at once assumed control of all, and began the work of finishing and beautifying the world. There was neither bright light nor darkness; all was twilight, yet there were neither stars nor moon nor sun. Walking to the eastern horizon, Komustamhó dampened his

[2] This is the name by which the Yuma designate themselves as a tribe. The term *Yuma* is apparently derived from *Yahmáyo,* signifying "son of the captain," according to Hardy (Travels in Mexico, 372, 1829), and was seemingly the title of the son of the hereditary chief, contracted and applied to the tribe through misunderstanding by the early Spaniards.

first and middle fingers on his tongue and painted a lambent disc on the blue sky. This he made to traverse the sky and to pass beneath the earth, radiating light and warmth. In like manner he made the new moon, which was charged with the duty of lighting the night, but not brightly, except at intervals, permitting darkness also — for all eyes sometimes need rest from light. The stars, the moon's assistants, he made by snapping saliva from his thumb and finger to the sky.

Then Komustamhó turned his attention to grasses, trees, shrubs, and seeds, causing them to spring from the earth in myriad forms, and to thrive in the warmth and light of the sun. Countless kinds of animals he next brought forth to live upon the abundance of the earth and to supply food for the people.

Now Kókomut had been sitting in thought while his son was completing the creation, and it occurred to him that life everlasting would permit the different tribes of people and birds and animals to become so numerous that in time there would be no room for them upon the earth, so he decided to contrive death, which he would do by dying himself. He first gave his people advice as to how a cremation pyre should be built, and directed that his body be burned when he died. The people knew not the reason for these directions, but heeded them fearingly. Soon thereafter Kókomut went to sleep to wake no more. In accordance with his injunction a hole was dug and covered with timbers, seven pieces in all, upon which his body was placed and heaped with dry wood. The people and the animals all gathered in a close circle about the body of their father at the funeral pyre, and wailed mournfully, shedding copious tears. In their grief many of the animals cut off their tails, so that now the deer, antelope, bear, rabbit, and others have very short tails, and the people clip the ends of their hair when mourning for their dead, whom they also cremate because Kókomut established the custom.

From the beginning Coyote was deeply opposed to having Kókomut cremated. He wished to see him buried, that he might later dig down and get his heart, which, when he ate it, would transform him into a god with divine power. Though he knew not Coyote's secret purpose, Komustamhó was suspicious of him, so he sent him to the east to bring fire from the sun when it first appeared above the horizon. Coyote departed on his errand, but as soon as he had started fire was made with fire-sticks, and the pyre ignited. By the time he returned with his tail ablaze, Kókomut's body was almost consumed, and the circle

of mourners was closed against him. Springing over Badger's back, Coyote dashed into the fire and caught up the yet unburned heart of the father, ran away with it to a mountain, and ate it. For this evil deed Komustamhó made him an outcast, despised of men, which he has ever since been; and the black streaks in his tail bear testimony to the charring it received in bringing fire from the sun.[3]

Life having been created and death devised, Komustamhó announced his intention of leaving the earth and ascending to the sky. Calling his people about him, he said, "I wish to give you farewell directions for your guidance before departing; turn now, all of you, and face the east; march seven paces toward the sun." They followed his instructions, facing about at the command which came as they halted. To their surprise there stood before them, where but a moment before was nothing, a stoutly made, dome-shaped house. To all appearances it was made of poles, brush, and mud, but in truth it was Avá Qatinyám, House of Darkness.

"This," said Komustamhó, "is a model after which to pattern the homes you will build in the future, no matter whither you go." Standing before the doorway, which faced the east, Komustamhó then instructed many men — the truest and ablest — in medicine practices, religious rites, and social customs, advising all to live in peace. The members of the different tribes were then sent in various directions to seek homes. The several Yuman tribes he established on the Colorado river, but sent the Apache, Pima, and others farther back, and as they dispersed he called to Whirlwind, which bore him into the sky.

Among the many bands that wandered about in search of suitable homes were the Yaqilú.[4] Nothing pleased them. The earth was not bounteous enough, it was too dry and barren; their language, though much like the Yuma, was not satisfactory, and for all this they blamed Komustamhó and reviled him, whereupon he became angry and caused it to rain. For days and months the rain fell ceaselessly, until all the land was flooded. The people found safety on Aviqamé, the sacred mountain, drifting thither from all directions on cottonwood

[3] Compare the Jicarilla myth of the origin of fire, in which Coyote assumes a somewhat similar rôle, in Volume 1

[4] These are a few wandering Yuman Indians, numbering fewer than a score, in Lower California, northeast of the Cocopa. They are not in favor with their Yuman kindred, being, in fact, through long affiliation, more Mexican than Indian in blood and habits.

logs — all save the Yaqilú, the most of whom, for their wickedness, were drowned. That is why they are few in number now, as they have been since the flood, though before they were numerous and strong.

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