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THE YOKUTS

THE Yokuts occupied a more extensive territory than any other California group, with the single exception of the Shoshonean tribes, which spread over considerably more than a third of the state's area. Their southern boundary was the Tehachapi mountains, which are the connecting link between the Coast range and the southern extremity of the Sierra Nevada and separate the fertile San Joaquin valley from the Mohave desert and its Shoshonean bands. In the north the Yokuts probably came very close to the delta of the Sacramento. It is known that there were Yokuts in the vicinity of Stockton, but because of the sudden and complete occupancy of this region by early settlers the line cannot be drawn accurately. On the west they met the Costanoan family where the foothills of the Coast range rise from the valley. The northern half of their territory extended eastward only to the edge of the plain, where the Miwok began; but from Fresno river southward they reached well up into the foothills. The higher altitudes, however, belonged to Shoshoneans. Yokuts territory was about two hundred and sixty miles in length, from northwest to southeast, and of an average width of about sixty miles and a maximum of ninety. The area was approximately fifteen thousand square miles.

Topographically it is the entire vast plain of the San Joaquin, excepting a small Miwok intrusion at the northern end, and a fringe of mountainous country on the eastern border of its southern half. This hill region is well wooded and extremely well watered by such rivers as Kern, Tule, Kings, San Joaquin, and Fresno, and a multitude of lesser streams. At the southern end of the great valley are two small lakes, Buena Vista and Kern, fed by Kern river and connected by a slough with Tulare lake fifty miles to the north. Tulare covers some two hundred square miles and drains through several sloughs into Kings river and thence into the San Joaquin at the point where the latter swings from its course across the plain to continue northwestward to its junction with the Sacramento. The lakes and sloughs and long reaches of the rivers lie in the midst of extensive tule swamps, from which the Spanish, in the early days of their California colonization, called the San Joaquin Rio de los Tulares, and the inhabitants Tulareños. These tules were of prime importance to the valley tribes.

The name Yokuts was originated by Stephen Powers. In many of

the numerous dialects it is the ordinary word for people, but it was not used as a name by the natives, who indeed had no name applicable to the family. The Yokuts tribes were long known as the Mariposan linguistic stock, from a county in which they were erroneously supposed to reside; but this appellation, in every respect inappropriate, has been superseded by Yokuts as the family name. Moreover, Kroeber, the preëminent authority on the anthropology of California and the sole authority on the Yokuts, has shown the linguistic affinity of this group to the Miwok, Maidu, Wintun, and Costanoan branches of the new Penutian family.

The comparative study of Yokuts languages by Kroeber[1] results in his distinguishing seven dialectic groups, composing two divisions. With two exceptions, his Valley division is coëxtensive with the plain of the San Joaquin, and his Hill division with the border of foothill country from Fresno river to the Tehachapi. The exceptions are that the Northern Hill group at the headwaters of Fresno river, represented principally by the Chukchansi, are linguistically valley people; while the Buena Vista group at Buena Vista and Kern lakes are linguistically hill people.

The dialectic groups of the Valley division, then, are three: the Northern Valley, from the westward flowing reaches of San Joaquin river northward; the Southern Valley, from lower Kings river southward, except the area about Buena Vista and Kern lakes; and the Northern Hill, about the upper waters of Fresno river in Madera county. The dialectic groups of the Hill division are four: on Kings river in Fresno county; on Tule and Kaweah rivers in Tulare county; on Poso creek (some maps have Posey creek) in Kern county; and around Buena Vista and Kern lakes.

In all there were about forty Yokuts local groups, which closely approximated tribal organization. Each tribe had its own speech, but except for the seven groups named above the differences were subdialectic; in fact, divergences throughout were so comparatively slight that in Kroeber's opinion "it is probable that Indians from Kern river and from Fresno river could have conversed, and that they could have learned to understand each other perfectly in a short time." Yokuts

1 Univ. Calif. Publ. Amer. Arch. and Ethn., Vol. 2, No. 5, 1907.

dialectic variation is far less phonetic than lexical. That is, differences are not so frequently due to mutation of consonants and vowels, resulting in varying pronunciation of the same root, as to the adoption of a new and totally unrelated root to express a given concept. "Of about two hundred and twenty-five common words ... fully two-thirds show two or more distinct radicals in the totality of dialects.... Barely a fifth go back to the same radical in all the six dialectic groups."

Phonetic, and not radical, variation is of course the usual process of dialectic growth; and as one cause, but in his opinion not the principal one, of this Yokuts peculiarity, the author here quoted calls attention to the fact that a taboo on uttering the names of the dead must result in the adoption of new words, or at least giving new meaning to old roots.

The rôle of the Yokuts in history is not an important one. A few were settled at the Franciscan mission San Antonio, founded in 1771 among the Salinan Indians of what is now Monterey county, and at San Juan Bautista, established in 1797 among the Costanoan tribes in what is now Santa Clara county; but no single tribe of Yokuts ever became missionized. Although they suffered from the rapid occupancy of the country by Americans, and collisions were inevitable, there was never any organized outbreak by the Indians and general slaughter by the Americans. In 1851 they agreed to relinquish their lands in exchange for reservations and payments in goods, but the treaty was never ratified by the Senate. In 1853 Tejon reservation was established at the base of Tehachapi range, and Fresno reservation on a leased ranch near Madera. Comparatively large sums were annually appropriated to equip and maintain them, but nothing whatever was accomplished, and they were abandoned in 1864 and 1859 respectively. Very few of the Yokuts had been concentrated on them. Tejon was immediately succeeded by a reservation on Tule river, which in 1873 was changed to the present Tule River reservation, a short distance south of Sequoia Park. The final change of residence however was not effected until 1876. In 1905 the reservation population was only 154, mostly members of the Southern Valley tribes (principally Yauelmani and Tachi) and a few natives of the Tule and Kaweah River hills. A settlement of Tachi is near Lemoore, north of Tulare lake, and scattered families of the southern Yokuts are to be found here and there in their native localities. On San Joaquin river a few Gashowu (Kaghówo) are found

in the neighborhood of Pollasky, and a little farther north are some Chukchansi (Chuhchánchi) at Coarse Gold and Fresno Flat. The total Yokuts population as reported by the Census of 1910 was 533.

In the present investigation individuals of the Chukchansi, Gashowu, Tachi, and Koyeti tribes were interviewed. The first of these represents the Northern Hill group at the head of Fresno river; the second, the Kings River group; and the last two, the Southern Valley group, Tachi territory lying north of Tulare lake and Koyeti south of Tule river. The Koyeti have been regarded as utterly extinct, and it may be that the single individual found at Tule River reservation is the sole survivor of the tribe.

The implements of the Yokuts were comparatively few and generally crude. Of stone material were their obsidian arrow-points and cutting edges, and their mortars and pestles for pulverizing nuts and seeds. Mortars were either mere holes worn by usage in bowlders or bedrock, or portable bases with basketry hoppers attached with pitch. In some localities where stone material was rare, wooden mortars were common. The pestles were not artificially shaped. A Chukchansi (Northern Hill) informant is authority for the statement that cooking-pots of soapstone were made in a former generation, but it is probable that the objects of this kind which he saw were importations from the Santa Barbara coast in Chumash territory, where steatite vessels were made in abundance. The southern Yokuts tribes made a limited amount of very crude pottery by the process of beating and pressing the plastic material into shape. The art was no doubt learned from the neighboring Shoshoneans.

As for bone, the awl seems to have been the only implement of that material. There were no fishhooks. Shell was little used, for the spoon was a non-essential to the Yokuts, mush being hurriedly conveyed to the mouth by the tips of the fingers. The most southerly tribes, including the Tachi, made pendent ornaments of abalone-shells obtained by journeying to the ocean at San Luis Obispo bay in Chumash territory. There also they secured clamshells, from the thicker portions of which they produced cylindrical pendants perforated from end to end.

The bow was the principal example of woodwork. It was made of a piece split from a laurel or oak sapling, and was strengthened by a backing of deer-sinew. Bowstrings were either sinew or milkweed

cord. The arrow-shaft was a piece of the reed *háyu,* and the foreshaft of *háwit* (spiræa?). Arrows were carried in quivers made of the entire uncut skin of a fox, dog, wildcat, or other small mammal. Tobacco pipes were made of manzanita wood in the form of a short, truncated cone. The hole also tapered toward the mouth-end, but as there was no curve or angle in it the pipe was necessarily directed upward and the head thrown back, in order to prevent the tobacco from falling out. Could it have been merely the shape of the earliest tobacco pipes that resulted among various Indian tribes in making the act of smoking a form of supplication to the spirits above?

Fire was produced by a drill operated between the palms. An instrument for combing the hair and for brushing meal out of mortars consisted of fibres from the roots of soap-plant, the ends of which were cemented together by a coat of the glutinous substance boiled out of the roots, which on hardening becomes tough as rawhide. Musical devices were the elder-stalk flute, the split-elder baton for ceremonial singing, and the cocoon rattle of shamans. Drums and sounding-boards were not used.

Twisted cord of Asclepias fibre was used principally for dip-nets of the bow-and-arrow type.

Basketry was formerly the principal, as it remains the only, manufacturing industry, and here the Yokuts exhibit more skill and artistry than in any other field. Both the coiled and the twined processes are followed.

The materials for coiled basketry are the stems of a grass which the Chukchansi call *chínis* (Xerophyllum?) for the multiple foundation, and shreds of the root-stock of a sedge, *solósul*, for the wrap. Black designs are effected by an overlay wrapping of root fibres of *sapásip* (dwarf fir?) dyed by burial in mud; and reddish designs by the use of the bark of redbud, *mónohil.* A recent innovation is to add bits of a brighter ornamentation by employing the orange-colored quills of the yellowhammer.

Among the examples of coiled work are cooking baskets, which have flat bottoms, slightly flaring sides, and maximum diameter at the upper edge, where they are from eighteen to twenty-four inches wide; globose baskets, large and small, with restricted openings, for containing trinkets and other small objects; approximately hemispherical food baskets, sixteen to twenty inches broad, into which cooked mush is

poured and from which the entire family eats, each one dipping in the tips of his bunched fingers and rapidly conveying to his mouth that which adheres; and finally, shallow, tray-like parching baskets.

Materials for twined work include *Rhus trilobata* and redbud rods for both warp and weft, fir-root for weft, and redbud-bark and dyed fir-roots for overlaid weft to produce designs of red and black respectively. These materials are used in various combinations. The cradle-basket, which consists of a base and a separate shade lashed to it, the conical burden-basket, and the utility basket with opening slightly smaller than the base and used for storage of basketry materials and other objects, are made of *Rhus trilobata* warp and weft, with overlay of redbud-bark and blackened fir-root. *Rhus trilobata* warp, fir-root weft, and redbud-bark ornamentation appear in the shovel-shape, or somewhat triangular, sifters and the shallow bowls called "tortilla containers." A scoop-shape, open-mesh utensil with the warp-rods all converging into a handle, is made of redbud rods for warp and weft, some with the bark removed, others with the reddish bark intact. The seed-beater, of the same general shape and construction, has *Rhus trilobata* warp and redbud weft.

In the southern part of Yokuts territory, especially in the lake district, willow is much used in basketry; but in former times when the country was covered with tules, and willow and other basketry materials were not at hand, baskets of various types, including water containers, were made of tules. It is said that the water vessels were not gummed, and the swelling of the strands when wet made them fairly water-tight. Tule balsas were the work of a few men who specialized in this industry, but in all the valley country tule mats were made in quantity, to serve as house-walls, mattresses, and cushions. It is possible that the adoption of the potter's art among the southern Yokuts was due largely to the scarcity of suitable materials for basketry.

Men, and a great many women, wore nothing but a breechcloth of skin, which passed around the loins and between the legs. Some of the women had kilts, or more correctly double aprons, for the garment was open at the sides. These were commonly made of shredded willow-bark, tules, or sedge, more rarely of skin. In cold weather both sexes used robes made of strips of the skins of rabbits, coyotes, or waterfowl, the edges being decorated with the feet of the animals. Moccasins were rare. Men and women drew the hair together at the back of

the head and tied it in a bunch or a sheaf with a milkweed cord. Some used a head-band, which passed from the base of the cranium up over the top, to hold the hair back in place. Chukchansi women tattooed the chin, and men sometimes the fore-arms and chest; and both sexes had the lobes of the ears and the septum of the nose pierced in childhood with a piece of elder-root hardened in the fire. In the orifices they wore occasionally bits of bird-bone, or more rarely clam-shell cylinders purchased in the south. The Tachi on the other hand did not tattoo, and their ornaments were long, slender pendants of clamshell worn about the neck, in the lobes of the ears, and in the nasal septum.

Among the Chukchansi, and probably throughout the hill country, houses were of the Miwok type, a conical, grass-thatched structure over an excavation. In the northern plains similar houses were thatched with tules, but about Tulare lake and southward they were of a very different sort, much like the "long houses" of the Nez Percés and other Shahaptians. The frame was made by erecting two rows of strong poles, of which the forked tips of each pair met in the line of the ridge. This was lashed in place, other rafters were set up, and the whole covered with tule mats. The interior was partitioned off with mats into many rooms, each with its individual entrance and fire, and each occupied by one or more families. In hot weather they were converted into cool shelters by raising the mat walls. Generally one of the long structures housed the entire population of the village. Sweat-houses were of the semi-subterranean, earth-roofed type, and dances took place under the open sky in an enclosure made of branches, in the hill country, and of tules, in the valley.

The hill tribes had the same abundance of vegetal foods found in the Miwok country: nuts, including the great staple, acorns, buckeyes, hazelnuts, and pine-nuts; grain for pinole, including chia (Salvia), tarweed, and wild oats; fruits, such as plums, grapes, laurel-berries, and a large number of shrub berries; and the usual roots and green stalks, among which latter were angelica and clover. Some of the valley dwellers, like the Tachi, were far from the oaks and other food-bearing trees of the hills, and depended mainly on tule-roots, pinole, and fish. The dried roots of tules were roasted, pulverized, and formed into balls, which were baked in hot ashes, or the flour might be cooked into mush.

In the lake country fish were driven into nets by men on balsas,

and were dried in the sun for winter storage.

The great San Joaquin plain in winter swarmed with deer, antelope, and elk, but the Yokuts were not very adept in hunting them. The usual method was to drive them past an ambush, and sometimes the grass was fired for this purpose. The use of the deer-head disguise was known even to the southernmost part of Yokuts territory. But rabbits, ground-squirrels, and small birds were of more importance than the ruminants.

The Yokuts knew very little about warfare. The Chukchansi were intermittently engaged with all the surrounding tribes, whether Yokuts or alien; but the purpose of their petty raids was merely to steal women and other booty, and little fighting occurred. Scalps were not taken. In later days the Tachi sometimes made forays into the San Joaquin country to steal horses from the Yokuts tribes of that region, but apparently no fighting was contemplated or desired. In order to avenge themselves, the northern tribes on one occasion invited many of the Tachi to visit them, and during the progress of the dance they set upon their guests, stripped them of their beads and breech-cloths, and shot a few. The rest leaped into the river to escape, and some were shot in the water. Like the northern bands, the Tachi, when questioned on the subject of warfare, declare that their fighting consisted in killing their own medicine-men. They never had any difficulty with the Mono.

Chukchansi games differed little or not at all from those of the Miwok. The principal one of course was the hand game, *wéh'lawas,* in which successful guessing of the position of the unmarked bone won the "deal," while failure cost a point. Men and women participated, and the tally-sticks numbered ten.

There were two dice games: *tanéwas,* requiring six half acorns, which were dropped on a basket; and *tálkiwas,* with six half sections of elder, the *tálak,* which were cast end-foremost on a deerskin. The method of count was the same in both, one point if the dice lay evenly divided, two points if all faced one way. The possession of the entire ten tally-sticks won the wager. Both sexes played.

In *hálô* the contestants stood on one side of a high brush fence, and one of them tossed over it a stick containing a large knot. Then all launched their long shafts toward it, the one who placed his javelin nearest it winning a point for his side.

Íwas was a kicking race, in which each side had a ball of deerskin

stuffed with hair; *kónwas,* a shinny play with a small wooden ball; *lúlkus,* or *lúlkuwas,* a contest in which the players tossed a hoop toward opposite goals by means of throwing-sticks.

The Yokuts family comprised a large number of tribes, which were more clearly defined than were the bands found elsewhere in central California. This condition is evidenced by the existence of collective names applicable to the inhabitants of several villages, and entirely distinct from the names of the villages; whereas among all other Indians of this region there were simply local groups described as the people of such-and-such a village or locality. Although a Yokuts tribe included as a rule several settlements, each village had its head-man, whose duties were to act as the director of public undertakings, such as intercommunity ceremonies and feasts, and to deliver at sunset a daily exhortation enjoining right conduct. The office of chief was loosely hereditary in the male line.

Among the northern Yokuts there is the same social division into two exogamous patrilineal moieties as has been described for the Miwok. The Chukchansi call them *Nútuwish* and *Tohélyuwish.* The former corresponds to the water moiety of the Miwok and is nicknamed Coyotes, the latter to the land moiety and is nicknamed Crows. Gifford[2] cites the Tachi, residing north of Tulare lake, as exhibiting this feature, but the present writer's Tachi informant, a very old woman, was quite evidently ignorant of the system. All of his information agrees that it did not exist south of Tule river.

Marriage was arranged without exchange of gifts and without payment for the bride. The respective parents having agreed on the match, and the young man being willing, he was conducted to the girl's house, where a deerskin or rabbit-skin blanket was spread for the couple. The mother of a Tachi bridegroom placed a string of beads around the bride's neck. Sometimes the girl refused to cohabit with the young man, and then of course the marriage could not be consummated. In some cases the newly married couple lived for a time with the girl's family, but sooner or later they took their place among the husband's people.

The Chukchansi performed no rites to celebrate the puberty of

2 *Univ. Calif. Publ. Amer. Arch. and Ethn.*, Vol. II, No. 5, 1916.

girls. A Tachi virgin, however, at her first menstruation was required to abstain from meat and fish, although she was not confined. At the end of her period her family gave a feast and a dance, in which, at the request of various men in succession, she danced at one side of the enclosed ground while they in turn performed at the opposite side. From each one she received an object of value, usually beads. This is a feature of a dance still performed by these people, a man paying any woman twenty-five cents to dance at one side while he himself dances at the other.

There were no puberty ordeals for youths. Boys and girls, especially the former, were instructed in mythology and customs by their grandparents. The Yokuts are sometimes said to have observed an initiation ceremony for youths, in which the drinking of a preparation of toloache (Jamestown-weed root) for the purpose of inducing hallucinations was the principal feature. The basis for this statement seems to be the former use of toloache in achieving the status of shaman, and by men of any age for the purpose of seeing visions.

The Chukchansi dead were usually buried in shallow holes scooped out by means of digging-sticks and tray baskets. Cremation was rare, but when a person died far from home the corpse was burned and the charred bones were brought home in a basket, to be interred with beads and other valued possessions. The Tachi practised both burial and cremation, according to preference; but the single Koyeti informant was unaware that burning was ever a custom of his tribe. Personal possessions were either buried or burned with the corpse, and mourners, especially women, singed the hair short by means of an ember of bark, blackened the face with the charred, greasy seeds of a plant known in the Chukchansi country as wild hop (*apésua*), and abstained from meat for about a month. The shorn hair was buried. Destruction of the house by fire sometimes, but not invariably, followed the death of an inmate, and the name of a deceased individual was taboo for a few years. The spirits of the dead were believed to go southward to an unnamed place.

Candidates for the profession of shaman repeatedly fasted in solitude, and drank a narcotic mixture for the purpose of causing "dreams," in which state the desired power would be given by the spirits seen in the "dream." The Koyeti used tobacco leaves; the Tachi, leaves of the plant *syâhâ,* the description of which suggests a nettle; and the Chuk-

chansi, *hópul*, the roots of *tánai,* Jamestown weed, *Datura meteloides,* which is widely known in southern California under its Mexican name toloache. The narcotic was crushed in a stone bowl and transferred to a basket containing water, from which the novice drank. When the drug began to take effect, he wandered at will about the village or into the plains or forest. His hallucinations were regarded as actual visitation by the spirits seen therein.

The medicine-man treated his patients in the presence of a crowd of people. He sang, while his assistant kept time with a baton of elder and waved a bunch of eagle-feathers over the sick person, and finally he sucked out the "poison." A part of his fee was paid before he left his house, the remainder after the work was completed; and nothing was restored even though the patient died. Medicine-men were killed when it was thought that they were guilty of "poisoning" people.

Like the Miwok the Chukchansi Yokuts believed in the ability of certain shamans to become grizzly-bears and roam the country, destroying and plundering their enemies.

The ceremony most generally observed by all the Yokuts was the annual memorial for those who had died during the past year. It took the usual form of lamentation for several nights, the burning of property on the last night, and a final feast in which festivity reigned.

The use of toloache, which is to be classed as a religious practice, varied greatly among the Yokuts tribes. The Chukchansi reserved it for young men seeking shamanistic power. The Koyeti permitted individuals of either sex and any age to use it in order to have "good-luck dreams" ; and they made medicinal use of it to relieve persons in acute suffering, as from a broken bone. The Tachi held an actual ceremony in which the men, young and old, drank the mixture, sat or reclined in the assembly house awaiting the vision, and when partially recovered chanted their experience in the unconscious state.

An annual ceremony about which few details can be learned was performed by Yokuts rattlesnake shamans. Its purpose was to placate rattlesnakes, and the shamans are said to have handled the reptiles with impunity, even suffering themselves to be bitten. It was of course a phase of the snake cult once prevalent throughout the Pueblo area and still extant among the Hopi.

Most of the Yokuts ceremonies were shamanistic exhibitions in which medicine-men of different villages contended against one an-

other, performing their magic for the benefit of the spectators. Their feats of course were more or less convincing sleight-of-hand tricks.

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