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INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS

EDITED BY F. W. HODGE

VOL. VII



No. 3

A SERIES OF PUBLICA-
TIONS RELATING TO THE
AMERICAN ABORIGINES

EARLY CREMATION CERE-
MONIES OF THE LUISEÑO
AND DIEGUEÑO INDIANS
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BY

EDWARD H. DAVIS

NEW YORK

MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
HEYE FOUNDATION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

So many of the customs and practices of the Indians are being discarded or forgotten that it seemed advisable to gather such data as yet remained in regard to one of the primitive customs of the Indians of southern California. To do this it was necessary to interview the oldest men and women of the Luiseño and Diegueño tribes, and for the contents of this paper I am indebted to the following:

Mr Landis, Government farmer at Martinez, Riverside county; Santiago Segundo, of the Los Coyotes Indians, San Diego county; José Antonio Morales, Luiseño of San Pasqual, San Diego county; María Luisa Sunot, of Mesa Grande, San Diego county; Manuel Banegas, also of Mesa Grande, San Diego county; Celso Callac, of La Joya, San Diego county; William Guassac,

also of La Joya; José Osuna, of Manzanita, San Diego county.

To them I express my thanks for their valued aid in enabling me to perpetuate the knowledge of the cremation ceremonies of their people.

EDWARD H. DAVIS.

EARLY CREMATION CEREMONIES
OF THE LUISEÑO AND DIE-
GUEÑO INDIANS OF SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA

BY EDWARD H. DAVIS

HOW long the practice of crema-
tion existed among the Luis-
eño and Diegueño Indians of
extreme southern California
cannot now be known, but it has been
definitely determined that it was a
settled custom until the introduction of
Christianity among these tribes in the
eighteenth century.

Under the influence of the padres, the
ceremony fell into disuse, no doubt owing
to the fact that they informed the con-
verted Indians that unless the bodies of
their deceased relatives were buried in
the *campo santo*, or holy ground, the souls

would go to the land of evil spirits. For upward of a century the practice has fallen into disuse, and the writer of this paper, realizing that all knowledge or remembrance would soon be forgotten, determined to interview such of the Indians of advanced age as had any knowledge or recollection of the ceremonies. He was singularly fortunate in this attempt, for some of the old Indians related how they had witnessed the ceremonies when children, so that the following data may be considered as trustworthy.

In his search for information the writer visited the Luiseño Indians thirty miles north of Mesa Grande, and the Diegueños sixty miles south. The territory of these two tribes is separated by the San Luis Rey river in San Diego county. Only a few of the oldest Indians, perhaps a dozen, were interviewed, and with the exception of a few minor details the information given by them was practically identical.

THE CREMATION CEREMONY

On the death of an Indian, or when a death was imminent, a long, shallow pit was dug, about two feet deep and in the direction of north and south. The implements used in the digging were sticks of sycamore, sharpened at both ends and charred in fire to harden them. These, together with flat stones, were used to pick the earth loose, which was then scooped out with the hands and laid to one side. As soon as a person was dead, the ceremony was begun. The pit which had been prepared was filled with dried grass and brush, upon which dried logs were placed and built up about three feet. The body of the deceased was then carried out and laid upon the funeral pyre, head to the north and face upward. One man was appointed to superintend the burning of the body, while the members of the immediate family and other relatives sat near and wept and wailed. When the pyre was lighted and the flames reached the body, great

96	CALIFORNIA
	<p>muscular contraction resulted, so that the arms and legs drew up and the body writhed, even sometimes sitting up or turning over on hands and knees. The duty of the man appointed to superintend the burning was to keep the corpse in the hottest part of the fire until consumed. This he did standing to windward, using a long green pole with which he turned the body over and over, while the nearest relatives sat with backs to the fire and mourned. This often required twelve hours, the heart being the last part to be consumed. To hasten the burning of the heart it was punched full of holes. When the flesh had been consumed and only the calcined bones remained, the fire was allowed to die, then the bones were gathered by the relatives, the larger ones being broken, and (among the Diegueños only) placed in a small olla; the other ashes and charcoal were put in until the olla was filled, then a small, bowl-shaped vessel was placed over it as a cover, and the filled jar placed in the deepest part of the pit. The remaining</p>
VII	INDIAN NOTES

ashes and charcoal were scraped into the pit, and the whole leveled with the ground, so that all traces of the cremation were obliterated. Sometimes a broken metate was inverted over the spot where the olla had been deposited, as a marker. It should here be mentioned that the custom of depositing the incinerated remains in ollas is confined to the Diegueños—among the Luiseños they were merely placed in the pit and covered.

The next day the father and mother, or other near relatives of the deceased, repaired to the spot and, while sitting over the place where the olla was buried, the women had their hair cut off even with the ears. This hair was saved for the *Mono*, or Image, ceremony, and was used to supply the front and back hair of the image of the dead.¹

The man who superintended the gathering of the bones went to the *temescal*, or tribal sweat-house, and took a sweat, followed by a bath before the final rites, thus purifying himself. Cremation so soon after the person was thought to be

dead sometimes revealed the fact that life still remained. Several such instances were related by the older Indians. It is related by an old Indian of the desert that many years ago an Indian died, his body was placed on the funeral pyre, and the fire started. When the flames reached the body the man returned to consciousness. Those present became greatly frightened. They attacked the man with clubs and beat him to death, and then completed the cremation according to custom.

Mr Landis, the government farmer at Martinez, in 1917 repeated to the writer a story related to him by the Indians at Mojave. A supposed corpse had been prepared and laid on the pyre; when the flames reached the body the man recovered consciousness and climbed down from the burning mass. The relatives, in amazement, ran away, leaving the intended victim unharmed. The man lived for years after.

In cases where there was a village, there was one general location for crema-

tions, corresponding to a cemetery. One such place lay a little north of the old rancheria of Los Coyotes, a Cahuilla settlement, where the wind sometimes blows the sand from the shallow graves, exposing the burned bones.

Santiago Segundo, an old medicine-man of Los Coyotes, living at San Ygnacio, twenty-five miles northeast of Mesa Grande, San Diego county, related an occurrence which he experienced. When a young man he and a companion were hunting wood-rats on the lower Coyote, when he was struck by a rattlesnake on the calf of the leg. His companion killed the reptile and carried Santiago to the house; his leg swelled, his throat almost closed, and his eyes became swollen and shut, as nothing was done to counteract the effects of the poison. All night long he lay as dead, and the relatives prepared to cremate his body. He lay on the earth, face upward, his legs tied together, and his arms fastened to his sides ready for cremation. While in this condition he said he had

a dream, in which he seemed to go out of the house toward a doorway opening into a great rock. Inside he could hear the women wailing and crying, while he seemed to see his body lying on the ground. As he entered the doorway the women motioned to him to go away. As he turned to go back, he recovered consciousness and found three men beside him ready to carry his body to the funeral pyre, but his return to consciousness saved him from premature cremation.

CREMATION FEASTS

Among the Luiseños it appears to have been the custom, after six or eight deaths had occurred, for the relatives of the deceased to give a great fiesta, to which many friends were invited. The relatives furnished the necessary provender, consisting of deer, rabbit, mountain-sheep, seeds, acorns, and piñon-nuts. It sometimes required two years to gather sufficient materials for the fiesta. This ceremony lasted night and day for a week,

and was accompanied with dancing and singing. Crude images of the dead were made of arrow-weed woven together like a mat, with sticks inserted for the shoulders and the hips, but no effort was made to portray face or features. To indicate a man, a bow and a quiver of fox-skin or coyote-skin, with arrows, were placed with the image, and hawk-feathers were placed on the head. To indicate a woman, a basket-hat was sufficient. When the images were completed, they were supposed to be occupied by the souls of the dead.

Another version of the image-making was given by Antonio Morales, a Luiseño. According to his description the head and face were made of clay and covered with deerskin, in which a slit was cut for the mouth, and the deerskin was pinned through the inner clay with pieces of chamise, or greasewood (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), from which the bark had been removed. Inside the deerskin a piece of bent willow made the projection for the nose, and two holes were punched

through the skin for nostrils. The eyes were made of ocean shells, and the pupils were indicated with a black gum from the chamise. These were fastened by piercing the deerskin. The hair which had been cut off by the nearest relatives at the cremation ceremony and saved, was then pinned to the head of the image with spines from the tuna, or prickly-pear cactus. The faces of the male images were painted in black, horizontal stripes on the cheeks and chin, while those of the females were perpendicular. The male images were also adorned with feather headdresses and with girdles of eagle-feathers. A performer in the *Tatahuila* or "Whirling Dance" would have, in addition, plumes on the shoulders. The bodies of the males were dressed in skirts of bark, and the females in addition had capes of rabbit-skins. While the assembled feasters sang and danced, some of the calcined bones of the dead were pounded to a fine powder in mortars, mixed with water and then drunk from small ollas by the relatives.

This was believed to insure long life, without illness, and to endow those who drank with the virtues and qualities of the dead. At Pechango a survival of this custom is found. The clothing of the dead is placed in water, and meal of chia seed is mixed instead of bone, and drunk. At Rincon only the water is taken. At the close of the feast all the images were burned, and presents of baskets and food made to the other kinship group. The final part of the ceremony is the burning of the house or houses and effects of the dead.

The following is a description of a house-burning as witnessed by the author among the Cahuilla, in the Cochella desert, Riverside county, on October 27, 1917.

A woman, the wife of Chapule (Grasshopper), had died only two days before, and word was sent throughout the valley for the relatives and friends to gather that night to witness the burning of the house. At six o'clock in the evening I went to the place where the ceremony

was to take place, and sat near the camp-fire in the circle of Indians. Everything was decorous, with no levity or play. One woman was making tortillas, patting and rolling them until they were as thin as paper and as large around as a sombrero. She worked half the night baking the tortillas and supplying them to the Indians—to the men first, and then to the woman, for no woman sat down with the men. Afterward the men sat cross-legged in front of the fire, and the women behind. One old Indian, Capitán Jim, sang canto after canto all night long, while some of the men who knew the death-chant, and a few women, joined in the singing. The words and air varied with each canto. There was no grunting, and no rattle was used. At one or two periods of the night the men and women set up the death-wail. Toward four o'clock in the morning the chant died down and the men went to the house to prepare it for burning. The old man, Chapule, husband of the deceased, went into the house while I held the lantern. Poking around, he took

CREMATION

105

some things out of the house. In one corner were half a dozen baskets, a rosary, a few old clothes and things belonging to the dead, but otherwise the interior was bare. Most of the wife's effects were given away before she died. The house was made of palm-leaves and arrow-weed, and was thoroughly dry, so that it burned readily. Just before the burning, three old women walked around the house from west and south toward the east. The first threw handfuls of pink beans on the ground from a basket, the second threw corn, and the last dragged a bolt of blue calico, symbolizing, it is assumed, food and clothing for the spirit of the dead. After this the building was fired and soon consumed. Two men with a torch started toward two large granary baskets made of arrow-weed, which were situated near the house, but I did not think they were to be burned. When the torch was about to be applied, however, I made a bid for the baskets, and asked the men if they could not be bought. They said they would ask the

AND MONOGRAPHS

3

nearest relative, but she shook her head, and the baskets, valuable as ethnological specimens, were consumed. When the torch was applied to the house, the wailing ceased, and all watched the destruction of the building. By six o'clock in the morning most of the people had departed. From information gathered, mortuary ollas were not used in this section.

Part of the legend of Wiot, the good deity of the Luiseño Indians, is here given, as it was related by Celso Callac of La Joya, and interpreted by William Guassac: Wiot disliked the frog very much because he was so ugly. The dislike was mutual, for the frog, who was a *hechicero*, or medicine-man, finally killed Wiot. While Wiot lay sick, the Coyote, who was a bad man, came and smelled around, and wanted to eat him. All the people hated Coyote, and were caring for Wiot, and when he went to sleep the Bee-martin kept watch. This bird was Wiot's son, and he kept awake all the time. The Road-runner, also a *hechicero*,

came and looked every way, but could not help Wiot. The Horned Toad then came, and he also looked every way, but could do nothing. A very small bird from the brush, the Wren, came to see Wiot, and said, "You have been killed." Wiot said to the bird, "I am going to die, but I shall return again." They looked toward the east, and saw the moon (called *Wi'-ot* to this day) rise, and he said, "My father is up," telling all the people to look at it, and Wiot died. When the moon rose the people dug a long, shallow pit, and filled it with dry brush; then the animals brought logs and laid them crosswise. There was one log that no one could lift, so each asked Weasel if he could bring it. They took him to the log, and he said, "North, south, east, west, and center," and it began to roll. Weasel picked it up and carried it to the pyre of logs, and put it on the top. On this they laid the body of Wiot. They wished to burn the body on the funeral pyre, but they had no fire. Then all the people urged Coyote to go

and get the fire. He went north a short distance, then turned and came back, and said there was no fire up there. They told him to go east. He went but a short distance, when he returned, saying there was no fire there. They told him to go south, and he came back and said there was no fire in the south. Then he went west, but came back and said there was no fire in the west. All the people stood around watching the body, for they hated Coyote, and told him to go to the center, and he disappeared. Then the Hummingbird, with the red under his throat, stepped out from among the people, accompanied by the Glowworm, and they set the funeral pyre ablaze. The people were afraid Coyote would eat the Hummingbird, so they wanted to get rid of him before Hummingbird set the fire. Soon Coyote saw the smoke from a long distance, and returned as quickly as he could. By that time the body was burned to ashes, except the heart. The people were turning the heart over with sticks to get

it to burn. They formed a tight ring around the funeral pyre to prevent Coyote from getting in, but some were short and others were tall, and each had a stick. Finally Coyote found a short man, and leaped over him, seized the heart and jumped out and ran, but as he jumped each man hit him with a stick and made the dark mark down his back which he bears to this day. But he got away and ate the heart. Ever since then he has been condemned to eat dead things. Tahko, the son of Wiot, took the bones, pounded them in a mortar, added a little water, and drank the mixture. After this the people went to the grave and filled it level. The Coyote was afraid to come back, so he never comes near people for fear they will kill him. After the ceremony was over the Brush Rabbit began to sing, and the Grasshopper or Locust, sister of the Rabbit, stood behind and sang too. All the people wailed; then the Crow and the Crane began to jump and hop around, for they could not sing. This made the

110	CALIFORNIA
	<p data-bbox="311 244 971 406">people laugh. This custom was handed down. Now when the people dance, each canto of the song ends with a chuckle or a laugh.</p> <p data-bbox="594 444 689 472">NOTE</p> <p data-bbox="311 502 971 634">1. See the writer's "The Diegueño Ceremony of the Death-Images," <i>Contributions from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation</i>, vol. v, no. 2, 1919.</p>
VII	INDIAN NOTES

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