

# CERTAIN GAMBLING GAMES OF THE KLAMATH INDIANS

BY GEORGE A. DORSEY

During the month of June, 1900, it was my good fortune to spend a week among the Klamath Indians of Upper Klamath lake, Oregon, the object of my visit being to obtain ethnological collections for the Department of Anthropology of the Field Columbian Museum. In this I succeeded far beyond expectations, for, although the Klamath are reached only after a long and tiresome stage journey of 120 miles, and hence are rather free from the visits of collectors, they early in their association with the Indian Bureau willingly and even eagerly decided to adopt the manners and customs of the white man, consequently, to a very large extent and from many points of view, they have ceased to be a subject of general interest to the anthropologist. But so tenacious a hold has the primitive life upon the Indian that there still survives much that is of value and real importance to the student. Naturally I had access to Gatschet's scholarly work on the language of the Klamath,<sup>1</sup> and in many ways it proved of great assistance; but the importance of making a full and complete ethnologic collection in connection with a work of this nature was many times proved, for of the 250-odd specimens which I collected not more than three-fourths are mentioned in Gatschet's dictionary.

Among the categories of objects collected by me among the Klamath, none is more complete or interesting than that of games, of which not fewer than ten varieties were procured. With most of these satisfactory data were gathered; with one or

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Gatschet: "The Klamath Indians of Southwestern Oregon"; *Contributions to North American Ethnology*, vol. II, Washington, 1890.



**KLAMATH BALL AND PIN GAMES**

(Cat. Nos. 61673, 61712, Field Columbian Museum. Natural size)

two I had difficulty in obtaining such information as was desired, but this must be attributed to the nature and briefness of my visit. Not so much on account of the number of games collected as on account of the very peculiar geographical position of the Klamath have I thought a brief account of these games to be of sufficient importance to merit publication. The almost unique geographic position of the Klamath may best be comprehended by a glance at Powell's Map of the Linguistic Stocks of North America.<sup>1</sup> This map shows them to be near neighbors of not fewer than twelve different stocks, among which may be noted families of such importance as the Shoshonean, Shahaptian, and Athapascan. With such neighbors, so diversified in their origin and culture, it will be more than surprising if we do not find the Klamath games full of interest; and above all we may reasonably expect a wide variety of forms, for it seems probable that no phase of American aboriginal life was so subject to adoption by other tribes as gaming devices.

In considering the order in which the Klamath games should be treated, I have thought it better to follow a classification based on the character or nature of the games themselves than to treat first of the games played by the men, following with those of the women. It is now a well-known fact that, owing chiefly to the investigations of Mr Culin, the sixty or more varieties of games found in North America may be resolved into not more than five general divisions, the games in each being more or less intimately related and all perhaps having had a common origin.

I. As an example of the first category, the Arapaho wheel-and-arrow game may be cited. In this class of games a spear is hurled or an arrow is shot at something, generally a ring. Success in these games depends primarily on the ability to shoot or hurl a missile so that it may strike in some particular spot or that it will come to a full stop at some point in contact with a special portion of the ring.

<sup>1</sup> *Seventh Annual Report* of the Bureau of Ethnology.

II. Somewhat similar to games of the first division, those of the second also require the ability of the player to take good aim, but the object in this case is directly struck, as a ball by means of a stick. Strength and (to a greater extent) agility are also required, for the ball must be driven to a certain point in opposition to the efforts of an opponent, or certain positions of the ball must be maintained for a length of time greater than is possible with the adversary. Such are the game of shinny, so common among the Plains Indians, and the game of football or kicked stick among the Pueblo tribes.

III. In the third category of games success depends rather on skill acquired by long and patient practice, the object being to catch some such object as a cup-shaped bone, or a fish vertebra, or a ball, upon the point of a bodkin or needle. The so-called matrimonial game of the central and eastern Indians is the best-known example.

IV. In this category success is dependent solely on judgment, the object being to guess the location of an object, or of one object from two or more which have been concealed. Good examples are the moccasin game and the hand or grass game.

V. In the fifth class of games, objects are thrown on the ground or are permitted to fall in a basket or bowl, and the count is determined by the chance of the throw, one side or the other of the objects having a certain value, either singly or in combinations; such are the well-known stave and dice games.

The order in which these five categories of games has been given is based merely on the personal convenience of the writer. That this order suggests any line of development is not believed; on the contrary, it is extremely likely that the games of the second division represent the oldest of American games.

#### I.—RING AND JAVELIN GAMES

The games of this class, nine specimens of which were collected, represent five distinct variations.



KLAMATH FOUR-STICK GAME AND COUNTERS

(Cat. No. 61537, Field Columbian Museum. Three-fourths natural size)

WÓSHAKANK.—This is a ring-and-arrow game, the arrows employed not differing from those used by boys in hunting. The ring (61682)<sup>1</sup> measures 11 inches in diameter and is made of the inner fiber of the tule rush, wrapped with tule bark. The object of the game is to hit the ring with an arrow.

Another specimen of ring (61681) belonging to this game is 6 inches in diameter. Rings of this size are used chiefly by boys. In construction it does not differ from the ring just described, except that half of the outer wrapping is of tule.

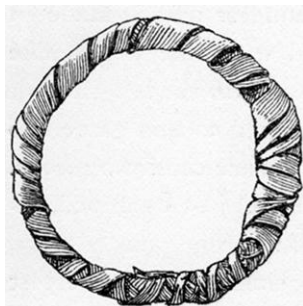
SHŪ'KSHUKS.—This game is generally similar to the one just described. It is usually played in a wikiup by either men or boys, and most commonly in winter, in the following manner: One of two boys, sitting from eight to ten feet apart, rolls a ring toward the other who shoots at it with an arrow (*nté'kish*). In case he hits the ring, the one who rolled it endeavors, by shooting, to dislodge the arrow therefrom. Should the latter succeed, there is no count; otherwise the one who first shot gains an arrow, the object of the game being to win arrows. In the set collected (61641), there are a small bow, 2 feet in length, and three small reed arrows with long sharp wooden points of sage. The rings belonging to the set measure 3 and 4 inches in diameter, respectively, and are made of a variety of flexible bast.

Another ring (61530) belonging to this game measures 4 inches in diameter; it is made of tule fiber loosely wrapped with straw-like rush.

SHŪ'KSHUKS.—Although this game bears the same name as the one last described, the manner of playing is somewhat different. The ring (*shū'kshuks*) measures half an inch in diameter (figure 1), is rather tightly woven, and is not so flexible as the rings above described. Instead of an arrow, a small awl-like object is used, consisting of a bone point mounted in a sharp wooden handle. This variety of the ring game is played by both sexes and by all ages, and generally in the wikiup. The players

<sup>1</sup> Numbers refer to specimens in the Field Columbian Museum.  
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sit facing each other, and as one rolls the ring in front of him his opponent attempts to pierce one or both sides of the ring with the point of his awl. To pierce one side counts one, both sides two. Two specimens (61716-17) of this game were collected.



SHÜ'KSHUKS.—This is an interesting variation of the ring game for which I could get no native name to distinguish it from the ones just described; nor do I know that an account of this



FIG. 1.—Ring and awl for game. (Cat. No. 61717, Field Columbian Museum. Natural size.)

game has ever been published. The ring (figure 2) measures 11 inches in diameter and is an inch thick. Across one side of it is fastened a cross-bar, measuring 17 inches in length, projecting three inches beyond the ring on each side. Both ring and cross-bar are made of the inner fiber of the tule rush, closely wrapped with tule bark, the inner surface being placed outside, giving the ring a whitish color. In playing the game two rings of equal size are used; these are placed in an upright position, one end of the cross-bar resting on a sharp wooden pin firmly fixed in the ground. The interval between the two goals varies according to agreement between the players. There are always two opposing sides, each

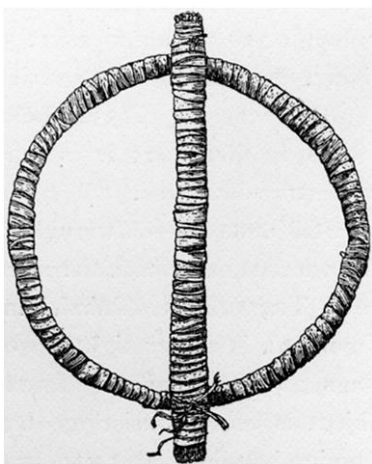


FIG. 2.—Tule fiber ring for game. (Cat. No. 61674, Field Columbian Museum.  $\frac{1}{2}$  natural size.)

consisting of one or more individuals. The ring is shot at with arrows from a bow, the object being to pierce both sides of the goal, which is always placed at right angles. Two specimens (61622, 61674) of this game were collected, the only difference being in the size of the diameter of the ring and the length of the cross-bar. This game, I was informed, has not been played for many years, and satisfactory information concerning the method of playing could not be obtained.

SHÍKNA.—This interesting variation of the ring game is played only by men. It consists of as many spears (*shíkna*) as there are individual players, and two goals (*tchedalk*), each of which is simply a forked stick thrust into the ground at such interval as may be mutually agreed on. The spears are of willow, measuring 6 feet in length and sharpened at one end. They are decorticated, except at the lower extremity. The spears are hurled from the hand, the object being to cause them to fall in such manner that the end of the spear will rest on the fork of the goal. Such a throw counts five, otherwise the one whose spear falls nearest the goal counts one; ten usually constitutes the game. The game is still practised to some extent by the Klamath, and in playing they exhibit great skill, one of the players whom I saw not failing to strike the goal oftener than once in six or eight throws. One set of this game (61710) consists of two spears and a pair of forked sticks.

#### II.—BALL GAMES

Of games of this variety two sets were collected, one of which is not without considerable interest:

TCHÍMMAASH.—This game (61538) is generally played by women. Two goals (*ánku*) are marked about a hundred yards apart. Each player is armed with a short willow pole (*skuekash*) with which she attempts to drive before her, in the direction of her opponent's goal, two wooden billets, 6 inches long and an inch in diameter, fastened to each other by means of a stout cord, 10 inches in length, which passes through the center of each



billet (figure 3). From two to ten generally play. The set of two poles (61538) collected by me are of willow; they are decorticated and marked throughout the greater part of their length with two burnt spiral bands which run in opposite directions. This game has been described by Gatschet<sup>1</sup> as follows:

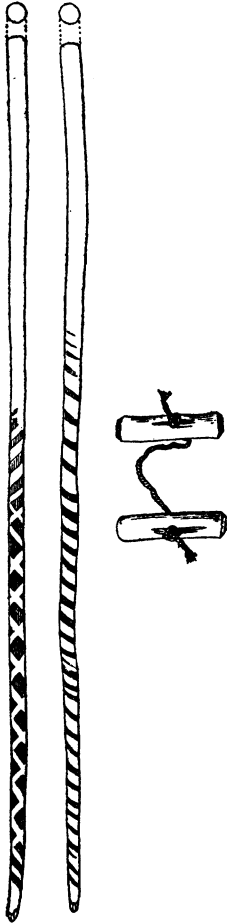


FIG. 3.—Poles and double ball for game. (Cat. No. 61538.  $\frac{3}{4}$  natural size.)

In playing *tchimmaash*, the Klamath women run back and forth, every one holding willow poles. In the middle of the starting places on either side they plant sticks for fixing bases, then with their poles they throw up the game string. Having caught it they throw it to the others, then they run over there; they throw the game string while chasing each other. One party throws back the poles to the girls on their side; and they then chase each other to the bases.

SHINNY.—For some reason, which I can not now explain, I failed to get the Indian name of this game. The set collected (61726) consists of a bat of white pine terminating in a flat extended portion, and a ball  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, of the same material. There is nothing in the Klamath method of playing this game which calls for special comment.

HESHTALXEASH.—The invariable answer to repeated inquiries among the old men was to the effect that the Klamath possessed tops before the advent of the whites. The first specimen (61729) has a disk,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, made of white-pine bark, through which is thrust a 4-inch stick sharpened at each end, thus giving the form of an ordinary spinning top.

<sup>1</sup> Gatschet, loc. cit., part I, p. 80. This and following quotations from Gatschet are literal translations of native texts.

The second specimen collected (61728) is similar to the first except that the disk is of cedar bark and instead of being beveled at the edges is cut off squarely.

### III.—BALL AND PIN GAMES (PLATE II)

A number of specimens of a single variety of a game of this category which were collected are unusually interesting and, so far as I know, have not previously been noted as existing in this region.

SOQUOQUAS.—This specimen (61531) consists of a long elliptical ball made of tule pith. The lower end of the ball, which remains loose, consists of a dozen or more strings of tule fiber which project beyond the ball. The upper portion or body of the ball is tightly wrapped with the outer bark of the tule rush. Projecting from the upper end of the ball is a small braided loop, a quarter of an inch in diameter, to which is fastened a 6-inch thread of native grass. At the end of this thread is attached a small bone pin a little more than an inch in length. The game is played as follows: Taking the pin by the end to which the cord is attached between the thumb and forefinger, and permitting the ball to hang loosely at the end of the string, a sudden downward thrust is given, the object being to strike the braided loop and catch it on the point of the pin. This is known as *shapashspatcha* ("to split or punch out the moon"). The game is always played in winter and generally only by adults. It is believed that by "punching out the moon" in this fashion the winter months are shortened and the advent of spring is hastened.

Another example (61673) is made similarly to the specimen just described; the ball, however, is 5 inches in length, while from it project several strands of the inner fiber of tule, also 5 inches in length; the knot, string, and pin are somewhat larger.

In another specimen (61532) no strands of fiber project from the ball, the two ends being similarly finished. Instead of the string being tied in a loop at the upper end, it is simply

fastened in one of the wrappings. This ball is not wound from side to side with a circular wrapping of tule bark, but it is wrapped about the center from eight to ten times with a tightly woven thread of that material.

The three other specimens (61712,-13,-15) are much smaller than the specimens described, the largest not being over  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length. They are all made of the bark of tule, which has been tightly wrapped from end to end, being considerably larger about the middle than at either end, thus giving the ball a sort of lozenge shape. In each of these three specimens the thread connecting the pin and the ball is unusually well made and is very soft and pliable, while the pin consists simply of a porcupine quill. In all those specimens in which no loop projects from the ball to which the string is attached, the object of the game is to strike the knot where the string is fastened to the ball.

#### IV.—GUESSING GAMES

As might be expected, we find the well-known hand game played among the Klamath, and in addition the four-stick game,

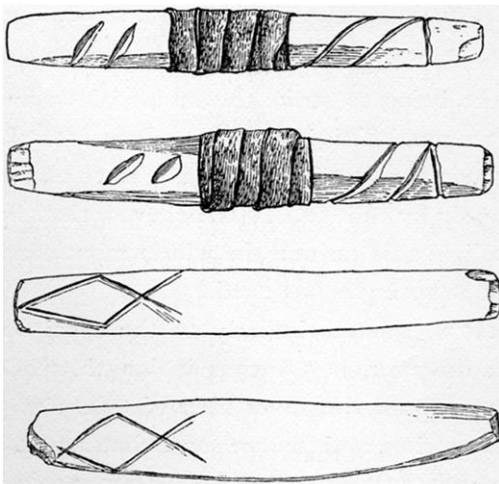


FIG. 4.—Bones for hand game. (Cat. No. 62626.  $\frac{2}{3}$  natural size.)

in its most interesting form, is found.

LÓIPAS. — The single set of hand game (61616) collected consists of four solid bones 3 inches in length and tapering toward each end. Two of the bones (figure 4) have wound about their center several wrappings of a buckskin thong; all of them are decorated,

the two plain ones having on one side of one end a double cross

( $\times \times$ ), while the marked bones have at one end an incision, running around the bone, from which spring two parallel incised spirals terminating under the wrappings. The two marked bones are known as *skú'tash* (tied around) or *hishuaksh* (male), while the unmarked bones are *solsas* (female). With this set are twelve sticks, 8 inches in length and sharpened at one end, which serve as counters (*kshesh*) for the hand game.

In connection with this hand game there should be mentioned a lozenge-shape stone (figure 5) measuring  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches long by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in breadth and an inch in thickness. This stone, with several others similar in shape, was found at Klamath falls, near the foot of Klamath lake, and was obtained by me from a merchant as I was leaving the reservation. The person from whom I procured the specimen said that a number of Klamath Indians had

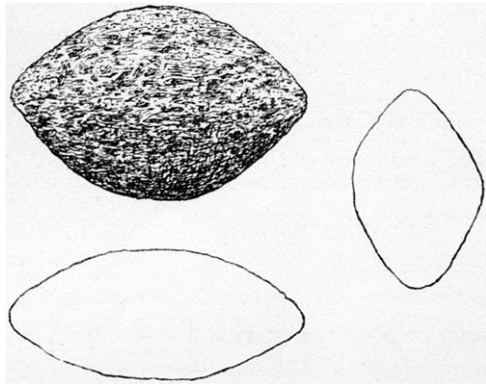


FIG. 5.—Stone used in hand game (?). (Cat. No. 61772.  $\frac{2}{3}$  natural size.)

seen the stone and had unanimously declared that it was formerly used in playing the hand game. It was not possible for me to verify this statement, but from the shape of the stone and from my inability to see to what other use it could have been put, I am inclined to the belief that it has been used in the hand game.

SHULSHÉSHLA, SPÉLSHNA, or SHÁKLA.—This game (61537) consists of four hardwood sticks (plate III) 12 inches in length. Two of the sticks (*skú'tash*) are less than half an inch in diameter and are closely covered with wrappings extending from end to end of a buckskin thong which has been painted black; the other two sticks (*mú'měni*, or *solses*) are half an inch in diameter at the ends

and an inch at the center, and the extremities have been blackened by being charred with a hot iron. Toward the center of these two sticks are two bands, two inches apart, which have been burnt in. Connecting the two bands are four parallel spirals also made by burning. There are also six small sticks, 8 inches in length, sharpened at one end and painted red; these are counters (*kshesh*) which, at the beginning of the game, are in possession of one or the other side and lie flat on the ground. As points are won by one or the other side, they are taken up and thrust into the ground in front of the winner according to the number of points gained. In playing this game the four long sticks are arranged in one of a number of possible combinations, the player hiding them under a blanket or large basket tray. *A* taking the counters on his side makes the first guess, *B* manipulating the sticks under a blanket or mat. Should *A* guess correctly the position of the sticks, he wins and thrusts in the ground one or two counters according to the value of his guess, and *B* again arranges the sticks under the blanket. Should *A* guess wrongly he forfeits one counter and guesses again, but in this case *B* conceals only two of the sticks, that is, one large and one small wrapped one. If *A* wins, or guesses correctly, the sticks are passed to him, when he manipulates them under the blanket and *B* guesses. But if *A* loses, he forfeits a counter and *B* again manipulates the single pair of sticks. In guessing, when they wish to designate the small wrapped sticks, the index and middle fingers are used; for the thick sticks, the index finger alone. In expressing the guess at positions numbered 1 (figure 6) and 2 (*vuish*) they



FIG. 6—Possible combinations of large and small sticks.

move the hand sideways one way or another as they desire to indicate the positions as expressed in numbers 1 or 2. To miss the guess when "*vuish* is laid" neither side loses nor wins, nor is there

any changing to the other opponent of the sticks; but when the position 3 or 4 is laid, with *A* guessing and winning, the sticks must be passed to him for manipulation and he wins no counters. When the sticks are laid in position 5 or 6 and *A* guesses, using two fingers, he obviously loses doubly and two counters are passed to *B*.

Another set (61724) of this game which was collected is exactly similar to the one just described, except that the buckskin-wrapped sticks are not painted black, while the two large sticks are not painted alike, one having two burnt bands about the center two inches apart, from each side of which a row of zigzag lines extends entirely about the stick. On both of the large sticks of this set there are four parallel bands, equidistant from the burnt ends of the stick, the two pairs being connected by parallel spirals.

A third set (61723) collected has two small sticks wrapped with rawhide which has been painted red; the large sticks are charred at each end for an extent of about an inch, while in the center are two parallel black bands. The intervening portions of these two sticks are painted red. This game has been described by Gatschet<sup>1</sup> as follows:

They play the stick game with four sticks; there are two thick, also two slender skin covered sticks. They guess at the slender sticks with index and middle finger, at the thick ones however with the index finger; they guess at the *vuish* moving the hand sideways; they also guess with the thumb making a side move. By the *vuish* they can only win one counting stick; with the index and middle finger they win two counting sticks, having put forward the index finger. When they have won all stakes from the losers then they stop.

#### V.—STAVE AND DICE GAMES

In this category of games two well-known varieties were collected, the stave game and the woodchuck-teeth dice.

**SKUSHASH.**—One set (61711) of this game which was collected

<sup>1</sup> Gatschet, loc. cit., p. 79.

consists of four pine staves (figure 7),  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches long, flat on one side, rather rounded on the other, and tapering toward the ends. Two of the staves are marked by a series of nine parallel lines at

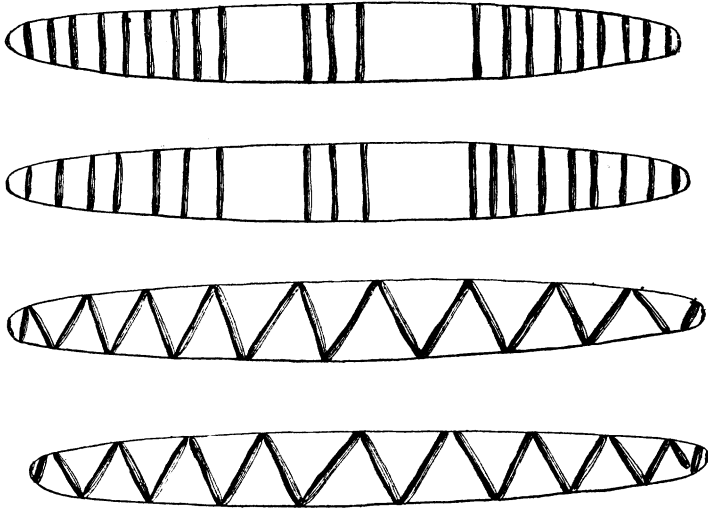


FIG. 7.—Set of staves for game. (Cat. No. 61711, Field Columbian Museum.  $\frac{1}{3}$  natural size.)

each end and three parallel lines in the center. These are known as *shnawedsh*, or women; the remaining two sticks are marked from end to end by zigzag lines crossing back and forth from side to side; these are called *xoxsha* or *htshuaksk* (male person). All of these lines have been burnt in by means of a sharp-pointed, heated iron tool. The counting is as follows: All marked sides up or down count two; both male sticks up with women down, or vice versa, count one. These are the only counts.

Set No. 61722 differs from the preceding only in the number of parallel lines in the two *shnawedsh* staves. At the ends of the two staves there are seven parallel lines, while in the center of one are five and of the other six parallel lines.

SKUSHASH.—Although this game is played with woodchuck teeth (figure 8) instead of staves, it bears the same name as the stave game. The two upper teeth (set 61536) are marked flatwise with zigzag lines extending throughout the length of the

tooth; these are *lakt* (male) dice. The lower teeth are marked by four incised dots and are *kulu* (female). In playing the game, which is generally done only by women, the teeth are dropped on a hard level object, such as an under grinding stone. The count is the same as in the stave game, namely, all marked dice up or down, two; both males up with females down, one.

In another set (61734) the markings are as in the preceding set, except that the lower teeth have five dots

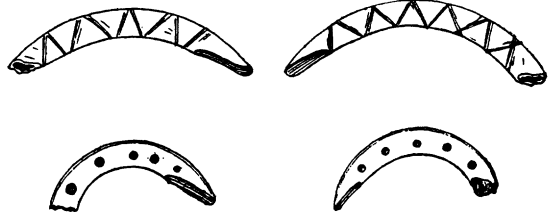


FIG. 8—Set of woodchuck-teeth dice. (Cat. No. 61734.  $\frac{2}{3}$  natural size.)

that the incised markings on all the four teeth have been filled with red paint instead of black as in the preceding set. This game has also been described by Gatschet,<sup>1</sup> as follows:

The Klamath Lake females play a game with beavers' teeth, letting them drop on a rubbing stone. All teeth having fallen up side, where they are marked, they win two checks. If both female teeth come down falling right side up, they win one check. If both male teeth come down falling right side up, on that account also they gain one check. Falling unequally, however, they win nothing; and having won all the stakes from each other they quit. Only women play this game.

<sup>1</sup> Gatschet, loc. cit., p. 80.