

# THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE SHASTA-ACHOMAWI<sup>1</sup>

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The Shasta-Achomawi occupy an irregular strip running northwest and southeast across the northern end of California, about forty miles or so in average width, and extending from near the western edge of Siskiyou county to the Nevada line. Until recently they have been regarded as two distinct linguistic families, but in a recent note<sup>1</sup> I have tried to show that, from linguistic grounds, they may be regarded as probably related members of a single stock, though in many respects quite distinct. Although the linguistic relations which these two members bear to each other and to the surrounding stocks are of much interest, and will, I believe, eventually shed some light on the larger problems of Californian ethnology, the general cultural features of the stock are no less important in this regard.

As has been clearly pointed out by Dr Kroeber, in a recent publication of the University of California, we may distinguish broadly three contrasted culture areas in California—the northwestern, occupying the northern coast from about the southern portion of Humboldt county to beyond the Oregon line, and extending inland some forty or fifty miles; the southwestern, including the southern coast counties from Monterey southward; and the central, occupying all the remainder of the state excepting its southern border. These are the main broad divisions, but immediately one looks closer he finds each of these major divisions broken up into a number of minor subdivisions which may be more or less clearly distinguished one from the other. This is particularly true in the case of the large central area.

This brings us face to face with the fundamental characteristic of California ethnology—its diversity. In other parts of the North

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American continent uniform or closely similar cultures spread over large areas, as in the plains, the southwest, and the northwest coast; here the area covered by a culture type is much smaller, and each is split up, rather more clearly than elsewhere, into a number of diverse subtypes. The Shasta-Achomawi form one of these subtypes of the general central Californian culture area, and lie geographically between the Maidu and Wintun subtypes of this area, the northwestern area, and the as yet little-known type of southern Oregon.

In mythology, as in language, the two components of the stock are alike, yet different. As one might expect, the eastern, or Achomawi, branch resembles the Maidu in not a few particulars. We find in the first place much of the systematic, sequent quality which has been pointed out as characteristic of the Maidu, and also the considerable importance of a Creator and of the episode of creation. In outline, the Achomawi account of the creation runs somewhat as follows:

In the beginning all was water, everywhere was nothing but the sea, and the clear sky. In the clearness a cloud formed, and from it the Coyote appeared. A fog then arose from the surface of the water, and from it the Creator, the Silver-fox, appeared. The prior appearance of the Coyote is here to be noted. Wearying of suspension in mid-air, the Creator *thinks* a canoe, into which Coyote and Creator descend, and for a long time float about. At length the canoe becomes old, moss-grown, and rotten, and the Creator determines to obtain some better abiding place. While the Coyote sleeps, he combs out from his own body a mass of hair, forms it into a flat disk, sets it afloat on the water, and on it places what are to be trees and plants. The world is thus created, and the canoe floats gently ashore, when the Creator arouses the Coyote, who wakes to find himself overshadowed by drooping branches of fruit. The two step ashore, build for themselves houses, and live there together. After a time the Creator makes the various animal-people, and the deer, and for a while all live together. The use of obsidian for knives and arrowpoints is discovered, mankind is made, and the struggle begins between the Creator and Coyote for the mastery: the former desirous that life shall be easy for the man

he has made, the latter wishing conditions to be hard. As in the case of the Maidu, the Coyote wins, death is brought into the world, and his own child is the first to die. At length, the Creator having tried in vain to destroy the Coyote, the events described in the tale of the Loon-woman among the Maidu and Yana take place: all the animal beings try to escape the wrath and fire of the Loon by ascent to the sky; Coyote as usual is responsible for their fall, and with few exceptions all are burned to death. Their hearts however are restored to life, and then Silver-fox gives to each animal-person his or her peculiar markings and cries, and sends them off to different parts of the country. From here, as the Indians say, the "story branches," and the multitude of tales of the doings of the different animal-beings follow, in little or no order. In comparison with the Maidu, one notices here the animal name of the Creator; the Coyote's precedence; the rather more philosophical account of the origin of things; the rather slighter development logically of the dualism so strongly shown in the Maidu, and, on the whole, a less logical and orderly working out of the cycle.

If we turn to the Shasta, we find a notable difference. Here the development of the Creator and the episode of the creation is practically wholly lacking, and the dualism, still clear in the Achomawi, entirely disappears. Apparently there is no very clear idea of creation, and the most that has been found is a confused account of a flood brought on by a mysterious being;—after the subsidence of the water, the Eagle largely shapes the world, and then sends down a boy and a girl, brother and sister, who marry, and are the ancestors of the human race. Of the creation proper, or the making of the animals, there seems to be little trace. The Coyote assumes a very important role, however, for he names the animals and is responsible for the introduction of death into the world, but in a manner wholly different from that in the Achomawi or the Maidu. The systematic, orderly character, strong in the Achomawi, has entirely disappeared, it seems, and in its place there is a mass of meager incidents, with little correlation, and as in the northwestern California cultures the creation episode practically disappears.

So far, then, there is considerable difference between the Shasta

and the Achomawi, each apparently resembling its neighbor (the Hupa and the Maidu) rather than the two components resembling each other. If, now, we turn to the remainder of the mythology, we shall find a different state of affairs. In the Achomawi there is a large mass of tales, which may be divided into Coyote tales and miscellaneous tales. The former are numerous, and in part agree with the similar type of Maidu tales. The Coyote preserves his character as a mischievous trickster, continually led into trouble by his curiosity and amorous propensities, and we find here again the familiar incidents of the "Tar-baby" stump, the Bags of Wind, the Cannibal feast, etc., with also a large number of new ones, particularly those of an erotic character. The number of tales, however, that are similar to those of the Maidu is less than the new ones, so that while we clearly have relationship here, there is also, and no less clearly, evidence of a new type.

In the class of miscellaneous tales, the same holds true. As compared with the Maidu we find, to be sure, several old friends, such as the tale of the Loon-woman, the Fire-quest, the Two Girls sent in search of a Husband, etc.; but these tales are either quite a little changed, or, as in the case of the Loon-woman, play quite a different part in the general sequence of events. We find, moreover, a large number of tales quite different from any found as yet among the Maidu, such for example as the tale of the Lost Brother, or the tales of the prowess of Lizard in his conflicts with the Grizzly Bears. In the former, a notable incident is the ascent to the sky by the Mice to ask the Sun for information relative to the whereabouts of the lost brother.

Turning to the Shasta now, we find a considerably greater agreement with the Achomawi in the Coyote and miscellaneous tales than in the Creation series. The major part of the Coyote stories are alike or nearly so; practically all the characteristic Achomawi incidents appear, with of course numerous new ones also. On the other hand, the Maidu incidents found in the Achomawi disappear to a large extent. The Coyote, moreover, in the Shasta is not so purely a trickster as in the case of the Achomawi, and indeed in several tales he appears as a benefactor of mankind and a destroyer of monsters. The number of tales in which he figures as an important character is also greater.

In the miscellaneous tales from the Shasta we may note several points of interest. Many of the typical Achomawi stories appear, notably that of the Lost Brother, but here it assumes a different form, being apparently part of a series of tales relating to two brothers, culture heroes, one of whom seems to wander about the country killing monsters. The incident of the ascent to the sky is elaborated more than in the case of the Achomawi, and the brother's quest is much more elaborately described, and includes such incidents as the cutting of the bow-strings and the gnawing of holes in the bottoms of the canoes in order to hinder pursuit. These incidents recall the type of tales characteristic of the region of western Washington. A number of other incidents in other tales, as well as in this series, also suggest some relationship with the Puget Sound region. In addition to these, however, there are not a few which are strongly typical of the Basin area, and as such resembling those of the northeastern Maidu. Wintun resemblances may also be noted in some cases. In general there is but little which directly resembles the northwestern area, although the Shasta are in immediate contact with it.

From the foregoing it appears, then, that we have in the mythology of the Shasta-Achomawi more or less corroboration of the evidence obtained from linguistic comparisons, namely, that the two branches of the stock are unquestionably allied, and closely so, yet present features of essential difference, and that the stock as a whole is, so far as the mythology is concerned, a subtype of the general central Californian culture area. Presenting many points of agreement with the Maidu subtype, and with that of the Basin area, as we know it from the Salish of Thompson river, it also has much that reminds one of the type of tales characteristic of the Oregon-Washington section. On the other hand, although the Shasta-Achomawi are in close contact with tribes of the northwestern Californian culture, it presents, on the whole, few points of agreement with this. As this lack of agreement holds almost equally well in the remainder of the culture, and also in language, we may perhaps be justified in regarding this as evidence that the two cultures have been in contact but a comparatively short time. This lack of agreement is emphasized all the more by the great

number of instances in the rest of the state, where neighboring stocks very clearly show association one with another. Taken in connection with several other small indications, and with direct traditions of a former considerable extension of the stock, particularly the Shasta branch, in southern Oregon, and the comparative lack of several characteristic features of the central Californian culture, we may perhaps regard the Shasta, at least, as comparatively recent comers into the area south of the Siskiyou mountains. This southward advance must have been early enough, however, to have all recollection of it lost. Yet the matter is not at all simple, as there are one or two conflicting traditions, and references to the regions farther south, about Redding and even as far as Tehama. The recent finding, moreover, of three fragments of Shasta dialects along the western and southern periphery of the stock area is a further contradictory feature, suggesting possibly the earlier occupancy by these dialects of much or all of the present Californian territory covered by the Shasta branch of the stock, and their later being overwhelmed by the influx of a more northerly branch, from beyond the Siskiyoues. Unfortunately, corroboration of any such hypothesis, from the cultural side, is virtually impossible, owing to the almost complete extinction of these newly found fragments.

Speculation aside, I trust the foregoing brief discussion of the mythology of the Shasta-Achomawi has made clear the nature of some of the problems awaiting solution in the ethnology of the northern portion of California, and how well the data obtained from the study of the general culture agrees with that gathered from linguistic material.

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