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The California Collection of I. G. Voznesensky and the Problems of Ancient Cultural Connections Between Asia and America*

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IT is hard to form an idea of the spiritual culture of the most ancient Californians without going deep into California prehistory, and without broad parallels with phenomena of similar character for other peoples of the world. In our view, the genesis of native California religious thought, particularly for the inhabitants of the northern and central part of the state, developed in the same way as the religious views of other peoples of the world, e.g., the peoples of Siberia, North Asia, and also the islands of the South Seas. From a scientific point of view,

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*1981, *Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography Collection 37: Material Culture and Mythology*, pp. 54-66. Leningrad: N. N. Miklucho-Maklay Ethnographical Institute, Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. Editor B. N. Putilov wrote: "This book examines mythological connections of different objects of culture and analyzes their semantics and ritual-mythological functions. The analysis involves different exponents from cult and art objects in the collection of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology. Such an analysis allows deeper understanding of the hidden context of mythological systems and rituals, and reveals the mechanism of the complicated interactions of the spiritual and material culture of peoples at stages of early history. The publication is designed for ethnographers, folklorists, historians of religion, art historians, and museum curators."

perhaps the most trustworthy and valuable facts which can allow one to reconstruct religious views and mythology for these early Californians are those presented in the sciences of archaeology and ethnography.

For such a reconstruction, priceless help can be found in the ethnographic collections from California made by the famous Russian explorer and traveler, I. G. Voznesensky, during his expedition to Russian America in 1840 and 1841. The feather regalia and cult objects acquired by him in the Sacramento River Basin and now curated in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography (Leningrad) (Collection 570) are of special importance.¹

Particularly of scientific interest in the California Voznesensky collection are the regalia and ritual costumes made from raven feathers. Anyone who has dealt with the materials collected by this explorer, or with the history of his scientific activity in Russian America, agrees with this fact (Gilzen 1916: 1-14; Stepanova 1944: 297; Lipshits 1950: 415-420; Lyapunova 1967: 36-39; Alekseyev 1977).²

It has been constantly pointed out that I. G. Voznesensky was fortunate to become

not only one of the last interested witnesses of California Indian life on the eve of the Gold Rush, but also the last collector of unique objects of their material and artistic culture. Almost one-third of the entire collection which he gathered in California is comprised of cult objects. Among them are ritually woven baskets,³ ceremonial head-dresses, bone earrings, striking pearl [shell?] ornaments, with mother-of-pearl [abalone shell?] bases,⁴ ritual whistles, large hairpins, ritual ribbons [belts or bandoliers?] from woodpecker feathers,⁵ and above all, the magnificent ceremonial cloaks made from raven and condor feathers (Figs. 1 and 2).⁶ These cultural objects, especially the feather regalia, serve at the present time as priceless factual material which confirms our assumptions about the extent of the once quite widespread and rich spiritual culture of California Indians.

As we study the ritual clothing made from the feathers of predatory birds, of special interest are problems of a religious and cultural order, problems closely connected with the mythology and religious practices of California Indian secret societies. The feather

regalia from north-central California is a phenomenon which comes very close to the most ancient level of bird-worshipping performances. The animistic world view of these Indians (from where Voznesensky brought his ethnological collections)—and which also predominate during the early stages in development of their religious beliefs—could be reduced basically to animism, either among living or nonliving nature. An animistic world view is directly connected with the totemistic, bird-worshipping viewpoint of these Californians. Totemism in California has very deep and ancient roots (Merriam 1908: 558-562).

In ancient times, the inhabitants of the places visited by Voznesensky—the vicinity of Bodega and San Francisco bays and the Sacramento River basin—had patrilineal totems. Among the Miwok, there was widespread belief that some antediluvian birds existed as “human tribes.” Such birds which appear in native Californian mythology in anthropomorphic shape were the owl, eagle, hawk, duck, bluejay, and woodpecker. The Maidu considered the goose, heron, swan, dove, and woodpecker as totemic birds.⁷

For each of the above bird personages in

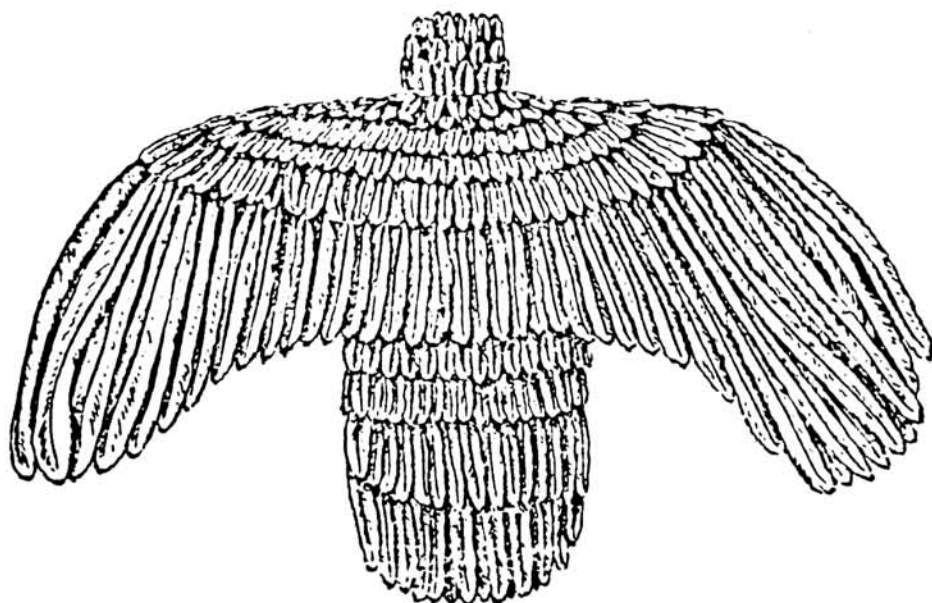


Fig. 1. Ritual cloak from skin of California condor (Collection 570).

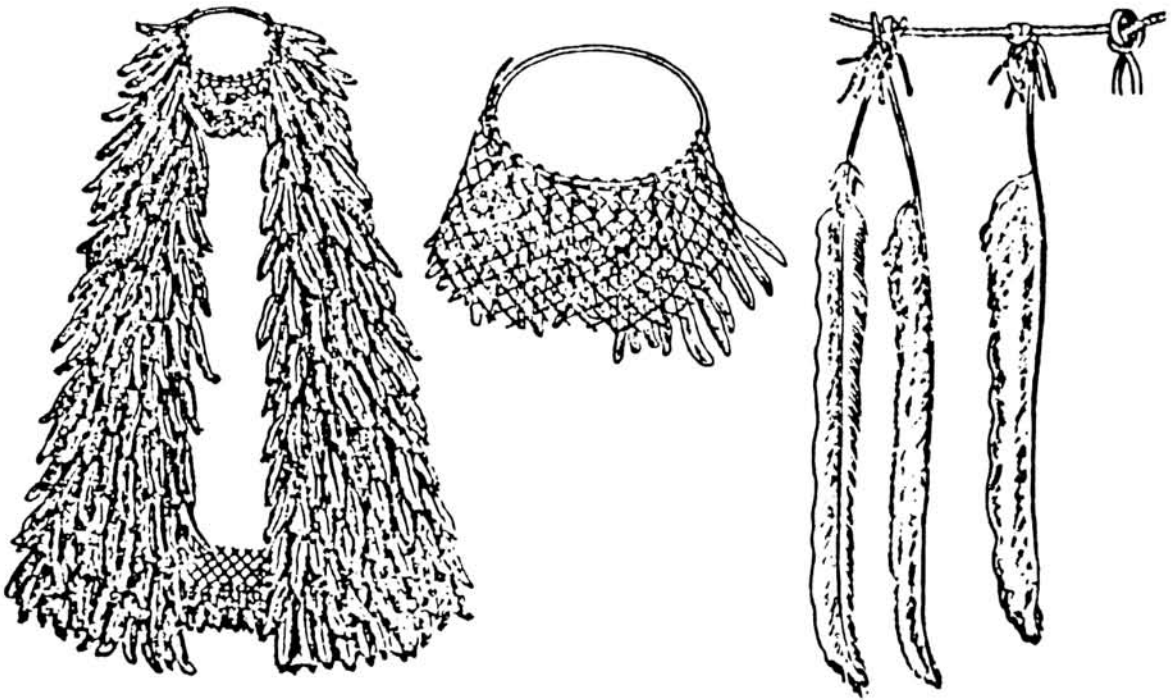


Fig. 2. Ceremonial costume made from raven feathers (Collection 570).

mythology, there was an oral tradition which connected them with very precise legends, the beings themselves often playing rôles in anthropomorphic form. Tales about antediluvian birds as human tribes belong to a cycle of legends that concern the creation of the world. In this particular cycle, the most important spot in the hierarchy was reserved for just two: the Raven—Kuksu, and the Condor—Moloko.⁸

The functions of creation and good deeds are clearly separated in Californian mythology among two different personified, supernatural beings. Oral tradition establishes the personage of one of these as the creator of earth and people—the Great Raven Kuksu. He appears as an ornithomorphic. And on the other hand, there is Hipostas, the organizer of world order, doer of good, and teacher of humanity—eagle or condor (Loeb 1926).

Because his image was widely used over the whole of California, the condor had a multitude of names. Most frequently he appeared as the image of Thunder Man, whose name sounded by different tribes as Moki,

Moloko, and Marumda. In many tales, Marumda appeared in the rôle of Kuksu's father (Loeb 1932:3).

In north-central California, the Indians pictured Kuksu with great expressiveness, always underlining his ornithomorphic image. In Maidu, Pomo, Wintu, and Miwok mythological representations, Kuksu has human features and carries the name of the "Big Head" because he appears during the most important ceremonies. This personification includes not only wearing a cloak of raven feathers but also a very extravagant feather headdress.⁹ As the ancient legend relates, in those faraway days when on the newly created, early ravaged, salty ocean waves, the Great Raven Kuksu rose from the sea depths possessed with an overpowering desire for creation. Rocking on the foaming waves, Kuksu began to speak, and by the power of his magic words created earth. Accompanied by Coyote, he stepped on the shore of the newly created earth, and so became the first human upon it. Out of the roots of an evergreen tree he made the first man accord-

ing to his own image and likeness, not less thriftily than 17th century California women wove their beautiful basketry, decorating them with pearls [shells?], feathers, and mother-of-pearl [abalone?] pendants.

In another version of the creation myth as told by the Miwok, the Great Raven Kuksu again appears in the role of creator. These people relate that during the first days of creation, Kuksu pulled gum from his wingpits, which he then changed into earth.

To make a tribal member (who would represent Kuksu during sacred ceremonies with personifications of divinity) unrecognizable to the audience, secret society members were painted. Their faces were painted with black, and their bodies were painted with stripes of black, red, and white. Such decorations symbolized the dualism common to California Indian beliefs about the world (day-night, life-death, etc.).¹⁰ The dancer who played the Kuksu role wore a tall headdress made of turkey vulture feathers. His upper face was covered by a fringe of feathers which acted as a mask. The rest of his body was wrapped completely in a raven-feather cloak which reached his ankles.¹¹

Judging by the artistry shown in the raven-feather regalia preserved in the collections of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, the existence of the cult of the ornithomorphic deity—"Great Raven Kuksu" and the splendid ceremony connected with it—bears witness to the existence in the ideology of north-central California of one of the most ancient traditions of Pacific world culture—namely, the tradition of the raven cult. The spiritual culture of these Californians connects not only with the world of ideas of their neighbors to the north (the Indians of British Columbia and the northwest shores of the North American continent), but also with the peoples of Siberia and the Far East who lived on the opposite side of the Bering Straits.

This connection can be traced first of all in mythology. The raven myth was the origin of the entire cycle of legends about the creation of the world of Kamchadals, Paleoasiatics, Northwest Coast Indians, and the Californians. Analogies can be traced not only in the phonetic transcriptions of the culture hero's name (i.e., Kamchatkas = *Kutch*; North America = *Elch*; California = *Kuksu*), but also in the context of legends in which the creation of the earth is described. According to a version of an ancient Paleoasiatic legend, Raven decided to fly across the Bering Straits to settle in Alaska. Tired from the long, unaccustomed flight, he tumbled into the sea and would have perished if there had not been by chance a pile of leaves and branches at that particular spot. Using this as a raft, Raven dived into the water and got from the sea floor stones and sand from which he then created earth—Alaska (Dzeniskevich 1976: 73-84). Upon his newly created earth, Raven encountered people, and he became their teacher and benefactor. He taught them trades, art, and other things. He brought them fire, which he had stolen from the sun, and also fresh water.

Drawings of Raven the Creator have been preserved in the rock art of the northwest shores of North America (Cape Mugl, Baranov, Wrangell, and Etoline islands), as well as in the stone carvings of the Lower Amur (Sakach-Alyan) (Okladnikov 1971: Table 42, Drawing 2). Precisely, these drawings show him holding in his beak the heavenly fire and the drop of water, depicted in the form of a circle.

According to a legend from north-central California, Raven, rocking on the newly created waves of the world ocean, used the power of his magic words to create the earth. The dancer who took the role of Raven Kuksu, the Creator, was dressed among the gathered crowd in a raven-feather cloak which covered him from head to ankles. According

to ritual, he held in his mouth a piece of mother-of-pearl [abalone?] shell which was wrapped in leaves. The Indians explained the necessity of that type of accessory by the fact that it made the dancer "very much like a divine bird" (Loeb 1926: 304). The piece of shell probably symbolized the heavenly fire, the drop of fresh water, or a piece of earth from the sea bottom (e.g., it was essential and defined the nature of Raven by the moment of the Raven myth).^{1 2}

Totemistic and bird-worshipping performances, investigated in depth from examples of native peoples of Siberia, North America, and the Far East, are not strange to California Indians. Moreover, bird-worshipping performances were extremely widespread in their midst in connection with the specific place set aside in their mythology for predator birds. As a consequence of the dominance of beliefs about certain mythological, antediluvian "birdmen," and about ornithomorphic ancestors, there appeared in the beliefs of California Indians the possibility of reincarnation into one animal or another, especially a bird, helped all the more by a ritual costume made from the feathers of the bird which had been deified. As is known, the idea of ornithomorphic spirit ancestors, or spirit-protector of shamans, was one of the most widespread religious practices of the peoples of Siberia.

It is enough to recall that there are numerous rock-carved pictures of winged human figures, or ornithomorphic figures, in the Perm animal style. If the shaman costume of the Siberian people preserved only symbolical, ornithomorphic trends, then the ritual clothing made from feathers by California Indians could be considered the most ancient form of this traditional, disguising costume. It is possible that the bird-worshipping performances came to the American continent by way of one of the multiple waves of migration out of northern Asia. Having reached California,

they received in the new land an unexpected, magnificent development, expressed in a complicated ritual of the cult of impersonation of deities. Additionally, it should be underlined that California Indians made costumes from the entire skin of the deified bird (condor, for example) or made a long cloak by attaching handfuls of feathers to a mesh, and not a costume with symbolic elements partially indicating the kind of deified animal or bird.^{1 3} Such symbolic elements were usually different parts of the bird's body: handfuls of feathers, talons, beaks, which were then attached to the base of a deerskin or cloth. The classic example is the shaman costume of the Siberian natives.

The second figure which was highly honored and impersonated during California Indian ceremonies was Moloko, the Thunder Man, who according to local tradition had ornithomorphic features no less clearly defined than Kuku's.^{1 4} His single, unchangeable ornithomorphic apotheosis was the eagle or condor.

In the lower reaches and tributary system of the Sacramento River, American scientists were able to observe the clearest display of the cult of Thunder Man, although this particular cult was more widely spread over all of present California, and was not strange either to northern or southern neighbors of the Californians.

The Moloko-Condor cult was extremely ancient in Miwok territory. Thus, in the lower reaches of the Sacramento River, at the mouth of the San Joaquin River, on Elk Hill in Kern County, in Yolo County (20 miles from the city of Sacramento), and at other points all the way to the northwest borders of Miwok territory, many relics of eagle skulls have been found, some with abalone shell inserts in the eyes, as well as bird skeletons in unanatomical order. These prove that preparation of regalia for dancers from feathers had clear precedents in antiquity. There also

existed a special, honorable relationship toward remains of birds killed so that their skins could be used to make ritual costumes. This also proves the existence of a bird cult. Adoration of eagles and condors is attested by ethnic materials of Indians of the northern portion of southern California, particularly the Miwok, as well as by their mythology (Kroeber 1925).

It is true that some American scientists disagree with Kroeber's opinion. They assume that there were no cults at all, including bird cults, in ancient California, believing instead that there existed only an unconscious attachment to animals, similar to what present-day San Francisco inhabitants feel for their beloved cats and dogs when they bury their pets in special cemeteries in suburbia (Heizer and Hewes 1940: 604).

When comparing the Thunder Man or Eagle-Condor cult of California Indians with the eagle cult of Siberian peoples, especially Turkic-speaking peoples living in the northern part of Asia (Yakuts), a system of coincidences can be clearly traced. These similarities are not only by chance or by unique coincidences, but as coincidences which can be organized into a strict analogical system. These similarities cannot be explained simply by convergence. L. Sternberg (1936), who examined the Eagle cult of Siberian peoples,

pointed out the possibility of genetic relationship, which must be one of the logical conclusions based on the system of these analogies (Ivanov 1973; Menovshchikov 1976).

The frames of the systems of these analogies can be broadened to such an extent that they encompass without difficulty the majority of North American Indian tribes which worship Thunder, and whose image is inseparably connected with the eagle. But in our concrete case, let us limit ourselves to a discussion of only the material which we were able to observe in examples of California Indian cult objects, as well as the connections between their spiritual cult and the world of ideas of Siberian peoples as shown in Table 1.

Then one may ask: What is actually known about the Kuksu cult, or about its place in the religious practices of California Indians?

Far from systematic, the first explorations of California Indian religion were carried out by missionaries of the 16th to 19th centuries, who studied the habits, languages, and religious beliefs of Indians with the goal of propagandizing Christianity. It was not until 1879, the year when the Bureau of American Ethnology was founded at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., that ethnological study of Indians was taken into

Table 1

**COMPARISON OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF IDEOLOGY AND
COSMOLOGY BETWEEN CALIFORNIA AND SIBERIA**

California Indians	Turkic-speaking Siberians (Yakuts)
1. Association of eagle with sun	1. Eagle the ruler of the sun
2. Eagle/condor benefactor and teacher of humanity	2. Eagle creator of the earth, divine bird, emissary of the heavenly father, progenitor of shamans
3. Connection with fiery element	3. Possessor of fire
4. Revitalizer of nature (Weda ceremony) of the mountainous Maidu tribes; rituals of impersonation of Thunder God on arrival of spring.	4. The Yakuts dionis, participation of the eagle in celebration of Isiaha.

competent hands.

During the 1870s, with the growth of interest in Indian culture and languages which was stimulated by major reforms in the Indian situation directed toward the annihilation of their independence, American scientists paid closer attention to Indian religious practices.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the first serious summary works in the field of ethnography, culture, and religious beliefs of California Indians appeared. These were by Powers (1877), Taylor (1860, 1863), Goddard (1905), Kroeber (1925), Merriam (1905), Harrington (1934), and others. American anthropology came close to the study of the problems of California Indian religion.

Basic contributions to the study of Indian beliefs among north-central Californians were made by Kroeber (1907), Gifford (1917, 1926), and Loeb (1926, 1932). Thanks to their many years of systematic explorations in the topic of religious beliefs among the Pomo, Miwok, Wintu, and Maidu, as well as among tribes in the north and south, a tremendous collection of field data was acquired. Based on analysis of this material, there appeared the possibility of selecting the most important cult systems of central California peoples: the renewal of life cult, and the cults of Kuksu and Tolache (Bean and Vane 1978).

In the world of ideas of north-central California peoples, there remains untouched, nevertheless, a large stratum of the most ancient performances. These performances connect with shamanic tradition, which is the beginnings of all primitive religions. These were rituals for initiation of women,¹⁵ war dances, requiems for the dead, bird cults, etc. Study of these is definitely interesting, because American explorers turned their attention to these aspects of California Indian religion too late, when former participants in the ancient traditions were either converted to Christianity or were dead, and the traditions themselves had fallen into decay or

degradation. Soviet ethnographic literature, too, has paid too little attention to this problem until now.

The basic cult systems, such as Kuksu, united large multitudes of people, such as members of large as well as small cult societies, as for example the so-called secret male "unions." These male "unions" were an institution fully formulated at least a thousand years before white men arrived.

Each of the three California religious systems mentioned above—life renewal, Kuksu, and Toloache—had deep roots in shamanism. Shamans often headed secret societies, because they were actually cult specialists who could bring about contact between supernatural beings and the people. Shamanic activity was based on traditional knowledge. Shamans played the priest-role in large cult systems (i.e., cults of Kuksu, "life renewal," and 'Antap).

In groups where kinship and clan structure were not too widespread (Atsugewi, Achumawi, Tubatulabal) secret societies like male sacred "unions" or sacred "unions" of medicine-man-bear are hard to find. It is a completely different matter with the Miwok, Yokuts, Serrano, Maidu, Tipai, and Cahuilla, among whom the expanded system of complicated social conjunctures like secret societies not only served religious purposes, but also supported the socio-economic balance in habitats which, from the viewpoint of ecology, were unfavorable. Such developed religious societies also promoted political expansion, spreading the influence of the secret societies beyond bordering territories.

The Kuksu religious system was no exception in the above sense. Like the other two major religious systems in California, it united different small, local religious groups. A complicated phenomenon, the Kuksu religion absorbed into itself many beliefs and rituals conducted by local populations up to the moment of the cult's diffusion. In addition,

the Kuksu religion is doubtless very ancient, counting millennia. American scientists have been able to establish that the Kuksu religion was called by the name of the deity who was most often impersonated during the sacred ceremonies—Kuksu (the name given by the eastern Pomo to that mythological personage) who appeared in the raven image.¹⁶

Kuksu cult territory covered the vicinity of San Francisco Bay, the lower reaches and basin of the Sacramento River, the northern part of the San Joaquin Valley, and the adjacent mountain regions. It was celebrated by the following tribes who lived within this region: Pomo, Miwok (coast, valley, and lake), Patwin, the Valley Nisenan, Kato, Maidu, Yokuts, and Huchnom.

Although predominant within specific borders, the Kuksu cult influenced practically all neighboring tribes because their representatives, who were invited to take part in celebrations, became participants.¹⁷ This was beneficial to the instigators because it promoted peace and trade expansion. The most developed variants of the cult were discovered in the densely populated territory of the river valleys. The sacred dances of Coyote, Condor, and Hawk were splendidly performed with the necessary impersonations of the main characters.

In the repertoire of sacred Kuksu ceremonies, the predominant role was given to the divine creator of world and people—the Raven Kuksu. The impersonator of Kuksu, a member of the Kuksu secret society, appeared before the audience gathered in a ceremonial house, not only dressed in raven feathers, but also dressed with corresponding attributes impressively bearing witness to his ornithomorphic nature. In later variants of the world creation myth, widespread among the Wappo and southern Miwok, it is Coyote, and not the raven, which appears as the divine creature. It can be guessed from this that Coyote took his mythological function from an ancient, orni-

thomorphic being. This is quite possible because of the “culture mixture”—a phenomenon characteristic of the lives of native Californians, among whom exchange was widely spread not only in economic goods, but also in spiritual values and religious opinions.

Coyote usually appears as one of the two twin persons—more exactly, the eagle—younger brother of the creator of the world or people, etc. He has intelligence, shrewdness, and the desire to create. Condor and Hawk, with other predatory birds, were accepted power systems which, in the southern part of the central valley and in southern California, were honored as powerful deities. Bean (1975) wrote that these creatures belonged to representatives of the cosmological pantheon of native California.

Marvelous feather costumes and headdresses made from the feathers of Kanuk, the eagle, were used during impersonation of the deities. In the later cult of Bole-Marú and “Big Head,” headdresses were made from long feathers with fluff on the ends. Pomo people painted the body of the dancer (who later turned into Kuksu) black, while Indians of the central valley about Sacramento and the central part of the San Joaquin, covered the body with feather cloaks. In the western region, Indians attributed an anthropomorphic form to Kuksu and associated his image with the moon. In the eastern region, Kuksu’s image was more ornithomorphic. On the periphery (Sacramento River valley and foothills) the Kuksu cult coexisted with the Hesi and Aki cults.¹⁸

Membership in a secret society was considered a privilege which could be inherited or earned by accomplishment. Members of such secret societies as Kuksu, Hesi, Aki, and so on, stood at a much higher social and political level than other tribal members. Especially in north-central California, regional cult societies were a kind of general educational institution.

They handed down religious postulates and behavioral norms from generation to generation. As a rule, a person who entered such a secret society was occupied with administrative and political activities as well as with religious functions. These encompassed the religious, political, and administrative guardianship of neighboring tribes comprising the same language family.

Secret society membership depended on social stratum, prosperity level, knowledge of some form of craftsmanship, and intellect. Religious societies in California were also involved in the community's economic life, such as the 'Antap cult of the Chumash. Secret society members controlled production and distribution in each group, and their spheres of influence would sometimes enclose neighboring tribes as well. Thus, the Chumash 'Antap cult watched over the level of professional mastery of craftsmen, participating in a "commission" which decided admission to the cult, and so on.

The social role of such societies was to initiate the adolescent generation into full-fledged tribal membership. This was done during solemn cult ceremonies, accompanied by magnificent impersonations of deities and spirits. During initiations the principle of elitism was naturally strictly observed. The procedure itself was a very impressive, very dramatic performance, one deeply relished by the neophytes and their teachers because it not only involved knowledge of formal and trade customs, but also "contact" with supernatural powers of the world beyond. These contacts were made under the direct leadership of shamans.

Initiation into Kuksu-ism by northwestern and southeastern California tribes was performed on boys.¹⁹ In some cults in the same region, for instance the Hesi cult, girls were also initiated as Kuksu-ites. During such initiation ceremonies, those present were divided into the audience, the neophytes (who were

later to become full-fledged Kuksu-ites), and the directors of the ceremony. The latter occupied high positions in the society and headed the secret "unions."

Only those who had reached priestmanship and had thoroughly learned all ceremonies prescribed by the rituals were accepted in the secret societies which flourished in these areas. This helped to preserve their position of leadership in society.

The actual goal of the long, complicated ceremonies led by these people was contained in the rituals for healing, initiation, asking for favors from spirits, or increase in fertility of animals and plants. During the ceremonies, secret society members appeared before the community in the "sacred dance house" dressed in splendid ritual masks and costumes made from feathers of birds personifying divine creatures, ghosts, animals, and birds, among them raven, condor, hawk, and so on. During the rituals, which lasted four days, very impressive dramas were staged, in which the Kuksu-ites, as if reconstructing the age of creation, related the great deeds of the First Ancestor and Creator of People, the Great Raven Kuksu.

Among many Californians, the Kuksu and the cult of ancestral spirits were united into one large entity. In other regions of the state, only specific Kuksu traditions penetrated the local cults. For instance, an impersonation of bears during splendid cult ceremonies arose in northwestern California and became widely disseminated among certain tribes—Pomo, Coast Miwok, Patwin—where secret bear shaman societies conducted the initiations each year.²⁰ In places where several secret societies coexisted, each had its own status and rank. For example, among the Patwin, functions of the secret society of bear shamans and the allegorically close functions of the "Northern Spirits" secret society, belonged to the third rank. The analogical picture of existence of ranks among secret societies was noted by

explorers also among the Northwest Coast tribes, such as the Kwakiutl. Membership in the "cannibal" segment of the secret male society ranked highest.

In north-central California there also existed parallel with the Kuksu other cults which were probably even more ancient. During ritual ceremonies of these secret societies, their members represented not such deities as creator of earth and people, but as the spirits of the dead.²¹ In the view of ancient Californians, spirits of the dead stayed on the same spot where they used to live, the only difference being that their habitat became a forest. Spirits of the dead differed from those of the living also in what they did: everything was opposite; for example, they slept during the day and were awake at night, and so on. Many scientists have noted analogic pictures of the images of life after death (e.g., Frazer 1928), among them investigators of Siberian peoples, although the same Nganasan believed the habitat of the dead was to be found beneath the ground (Grachev 1976: 63).

Ancient Californians believed that the land of the dead, like the land of the living, was located on earth and was inhabited by dangerous, evil spirits. Meeting them bode ill to an Indian, especially to young people. Particularly for this reason, secret society members represented visitors from the land of the dead during ceremonies, and most often these were spirits of sickness. Their bodies were covered with black, red, and white stripes and they carried long, black poles. These "ancestral spirits" appeared as middlemen between the worlds of the living and the dead. They also represented a kind of organizing beginning, because during ritual dances the unmanageable supernatural forces "came in contact" with the partly manageable forces of the adolescent male population.

Worship of spirits, especially ancestral spirits, was widespread over much of Califor-

nia. This worship was most clearly expressed in the annual mourning ceremonies. In the Sacramento and Patwin²² river basins, there were associations of so-called "running spirits" whose functions had much in common with activities of secret societies in which the spirits of the dead were worshipped.

In the Sacramento River Valley there was an ancient secret society called Hesi. Anyone who wished could become a member. No special esoteric knowledge was required, it being necessary only to pay. Progress along this society's social ladder, which had ten to twelve ranks, was achieved by payment or according to personal activity.

Dancers who performed specific roles during ceremonies were also paid in money. During the ceremony, the dance group leader represented the ornithomorphic creature called Moki by the Patwin. Kuksu was impersonated too, along with other representatives of the animal kingdom. Many magnificent ritual costumes, corresponding in character to the dances performed, were used during the ceremonies.

Hesi secret society rituals were conducted on holidays—harvest, new year, and so on. Contemporary knowledge of the character and contents of Hesi ceremonial dances is unfortunately incomplete, because by the time scientific interest in ancient social life and religion began in California, the rituals themselves had aged or completely ceased. It is known that similar functions were performed by members of the Aki societies among the Mountain Maidu.²³ The Valley and Mountain Nisenan, and some Maidu groups, had no secret societies of "spirit ancestors" at all, but they did conduct annual mourning rituals.²⁴

The Kuksu cult encompassed the entire northern portion of central California. In studying striking phenomena of religious life of these Californians, American scientists worked out two different but supplementary

viewpoints on the problem of its origin. Loeb (1932) expounded one view, correctly pointing out that Kuksu cult performances were always connected with secret male society activities. The initial rituals (conducted during splendid cult ceremonies, with participation of the deities impersonated by the members themselves) actually had an ordaining character. Kuksu-ites accustomed their neophytes to esoteric knowledge and shamanic practice. The institution of impersonation of deities itself was inseparably connected with sorcery practiced by shamans. Thus, Gifford's (1927) assumption came into being: he is the exponent of another point of view regarding the nature of the Kuksu cult, namely its shamanic basis. He underlined his conclusion by personal field explorations. "Shamans," he wrote:

poisoned the feather regalia by pouring pounded roots and grass over them. This was done to make the regalia holy and sacred. After this was done, the poisoned regalia became untouchable for ordinary Indians. Besides, the shaman himself was the only person who helped the actor of the main role, Kuksu, and the other participants in the sacred dances, to don their costumes. Before the dances began, the shaman performed actions called healing the dancers. Shamans were also responsible for preservation of regalia during the time between mysteries. Sometimes the practice of impersonation of deities itself coincided with "invocation of spirits" [Gifford 1927; from the Russian translation].

Gifford expressed the opinion that the shaman spirit-preserver, and the personified deity (Raven or Condor) were one and the same mythological, supernatural being. The final objectives of the shamanic mysteries, as well as dances with impersonation of deities, were relief from sickness, increase in fertility of animals, increase in land productivity, and initiation into shamanism. Finally, Gifford came to a conclusion about the probable existence of a single basis for California

shamanistic activity, as well as for the activity of the esoteric societies in the north-central part of the state.

Thus, any in-depth study of ethnographic materials is impossible without broad comparison with the phenomenon of the analogical circle. Analysis of the Voznesensky collection, on the other hand, especially the feather regalia, cannot lead to any scientific result when separated from similar ethnographic data. But with the help of comparative analysis it could be established that the ancient cult of predator birds not only has a very long history, but is also the origin of the Kuksu cult ceremonies, which are basically shamanistic.

The California costumes which Voznesensky brought, and which were sewed from whole birdskins,²⁵ appear to be the most ancient forms of ritual masquerade costumes, remnants of which have also been preserved by native populations of northern Asia and Siberia. The entire complex of mythological assumptions about predator birds—in other words the cult of predator birds, such as the eagle, condor, hawk, falcon, and also the raven—spread to the North American continent from the Old World, the world of the peoples of Siberia, northern Asia, Transbaikal, and Altai. The spiritual culture of native Californians is yet another fact which can serve as a proof of the probability of the genetic relationship and ancient cultural entity of peoples of the Old and New worlds.²⁶

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NOTES

CRAIG D. BATES

1. Specific information regarding where Voznesensky collected individual objects is difficult to ascertain. While it seems that a large number of items were procured in the Sacramento Valley on the Feather and American rivers with the assistance of Captain Sutter (Lyapunova 1967: 12-14), the bulk of the 152 objects in the Voznesensky Californian collection lack specific data. His travels took him to Bodega Bay, Fort Ross, the Russian River Valley, San Pablo, San Francisco, Cape Mendocino, San Rafael, Rancho San Antonio, San Leandro, Pinole, Napa, Petaluma, Cape Drake, Sausalito, Angel and Alcatraz islands, as well as the Sutter's Fort-Sacramento Valley area (Alekseyev 1977: 33-47; Lyapunova 1967: 12-14). Lyapunova (1967: 14) relates

... some items are attributed to the Suisun Indian tribe, others to "distant" Indians living in the rocky (sic) Mountains and a few objects to the Northern Indians, inhabiting the mountains north of Ft. Ross. The majority however, are attributed to tribes located along the banks of the Sacramento.

A study of what are apparently village names that Voznesensky collected indicate that he visited the Suisun (Patwin), the Valley Nisenan village of *Sekumne*, the Plains Miwok villages of *Lelame*, *Seuamne*, *Locolmne* and *Tihuechemne* along with the *Khukiyuze* (Coast Miwok?) who lived from Bodega Bay to Mission San Rafael and Petaluma and the *Tsuellisk* (Nisenan?) living around Sutter's Fort (Lyapunova 1967: 13; Bennyhoff 1977: 164).

2. The raven feather regalia referred to in the collection is the long, enveloping cloak such as is worn by the Patwin and Valley Maidu *Moki* and the Miwok and Valley Nisenan *Kuksuyu*. This item, along with a condor skin dance outfit called *Mollok* are referred to in his diary:

When I brought the *mollok* and *kukshui* costumes to the Sacramento River, the Indians who saw them were terrified and were astonished that I could keep such a thing in my room as a *kukshui*, in which Satan himself lived, whereupon they considered me a shaman [Lyapunova 1967: 26].

It would be hoped that these native terms would lead to some identification of the place of collection. *Kukshui* is found in a number of central Californian languages: Coast Miwok *kuksui* (Loeb 1932: 118; Kelly n.d.: 474 in Slaymaker 1977: 60), Nisenan *kuksu'i* (Beals 1933: 381), Central Sierra Miwok *kuksuyu* (Gifford 1955: 267) and Northern Sierra Miwok *kuksuyu* (Gifford 1917). The *Kuksuyu* dance is said to have been introduced to the Southern Maidu from the Pleasanton people (Bay Miwok or Costanoan) about 1872 (Gifford 1927: 220), which should eliminate the Southern Maidu as a possible locale for the Voznesensky cloak. A description of a Central Miwok *kuksuyu* cloak (Gifford 1955: 267-272) matches closely the Voznesensky cloak, although the auxiliary ornamentation is lacking in the latter example. A second extant cloak, collected also in 1841 but by the Wilkes expedition, is presently in the Smithsonian Institution (Cat. No. 3326) and is nearly identical to the Voznesensky piece. Unfortunately, the Wilkes specimen lacks collection data of any sort.

While the Coast Miwok term may be the most similar to that collected by Voznesensky, a study of the literature reveals that few groups made and used such long feather cloaks for the impersonation of the *kuksuyu* spirit. The Coast Miwok apparently lack the all-enveloping cloak (Kelly n.d.: 101 in Slaymaker 1977: 73-74; Loeb 1932: 118). The Patwin are reported to have had a *kuksu* dancer who wore a topknot of crow wing feathers (Kroeber 1932: 337), yet the impersonator who wears the all-enveloping cloak is the *moki*, just as among the Chico Maidu and Salt Pomo.

The term *mollok* for condor is closely approximated by the Coast Miwok word *moluk* (Kelly n.d.: 474 in Slaymaker 1977: 60), although a condor dance is not recorded for these people. The condor skin cloak closely approximates the descrip-

tion of a Central Sierra Miwok *moloku* costume (Gifford 1955: 287-288). Apparently a similar dance was owned by the Colusa Patwin who called it *molok-yapi* (Loeb 1933: 213). The Valley Nisenan at the village of *Pujune* (near present day Sacramento and not far from the village of *Sekumne* which Voznesensky visited) claimed ownership of a condor dance which they called *Mo'lo-k*, the right to which they sold to the Nisenan village of *ol-ac*. It, too, used an entire condor skin as a part of the ritual regalia (Kroeber 1929: 269).

3. The baskets collected by Voznesensky are the subject of a 1967 publication by P. M. Kojean in *Culture and Life of the Natives of America*, Academy of Sciences U.S.S.R., N.M. Miklojo-Maklai Institute of Ethnography, Collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography XXIV, Naooka Publishing House, Leningrad. This piece was recently translated by Wilma Follette and is available as a reprint in MAPOM papers No. 4, Miwok Archaeological Preserve of Marin, San Rafael. Although Kojean obviously made an in-depth search of available literature, the work suffers from errors in the sources cited.

4. Here reference is probably given to the abalone shell necklaces which Voznesensky collected.

5. It is not clear here if reference is made to the woven feather belts, of which Voznesensky collected five (E. A. Okladnikova, personal communication 1981) or flicker quill headbands, or both.

6. These are the *molok* and *kukshui* outfits previously discussed, as well as at least one cape made primarily of condor feathers on a net foundation.

7. The reference to Maidu "totems" is perplexing. Henry Azbill (c. 1896 - 1973) (personal communication 1969) claimed that at least his people, the Northwestern Maidu, and his Nisenan cousins, were without totem animals. Current overviews of Maidu culture likewise fail to mention the existence of totem animals (Riddell 1978; Wilson and Towne 1978).

8. While there is no dispute that *moloko* is condor, the connection of the raven to *kuksu* is an interesting claim, unsupported by data at hand (Loeb 1926: 300).

9. Okladnikova has confused the "bighead" dancer of the Hesi ceremony with the *kuksuyu* and *moki* characters. The dancer representing *kuksu* in Pomo rites dressed in a form of "bighead" headpiece (Loeb 1926: 356). Among the Sierra Miwok, the

kuksuyu appears only in the dance of the same name, and in no others (Gifford 1955: 267-272). The characterisation of the *kuksu* in Maidu, Pomo, and Wintu rites is unlike views held by other researchers (Azbill 1972; Loeb 1932; Dixon 1905; Gifford 1955). Among the Northwestern Maidu, at least, the term "kuksu" refers only to the instructor or teacher of the dance society (Henry Azbill, personal communication 1970).

10. The statement that the paint on bodies of dancers symbolizing the "... dualism common to California Indian beliefs" is not supported by ethnographic accounts which refer to painting for dances (Dixon 1905: 293, 298, 299, 301, 302; Gifford 1955; Azbill 1972), or by contemporary consultants among the Maidu, Miwok, Patwin, Pomo, and Nomlaki.

11. The capes collected both by Voznesensky and Wilkes have the headdress section of crow wing feathers, while a description of a Miwok cloak has the headpiece of hawk wing feathers (Gifford 1955: 267). While many such decisions of what feathers are to be used in these items is up to personal choice, Okladnikova's remark about turkey vulture feathers is difficult to pinpoint a source for. Both the 1841 cloaks have unpeeled shoots (willow?) thrust through the topknot of crow feathers, to which are lashed vulture feathers. Perhaps this is what Okladnikova refers to.

12. There is no mention of a cape or abalone shell in this citation of Loeb.

13. Regalia made from entire bird skins is unusual, and, excepting that for the condor dance, there are few references to such regalia: the Hill Patwin eagle dance used an entire eagle skin (Kroeber 1932: 347) and the Coast Miwok made pelican skin cloaks (Kelly n.d.: 115, 162 in Slaymaker 1977: 97, 98). "Attaching handfuls of feathers to a mesh" is a simplistic description of the construction of a feather cape. Usually single feathers are cut on the quill butt at an angle, bent over the cordage of the net, and secured by being thrust back into the quill or by lashing the bent quill section to the quill (Barrett and Gifford 1933: 273-274). Another technique is to soften the quill ends by chewing and then bend them over the mesh and lash the quill onto itself (Kroeber 1932: 330).

14. Loeb (1926: 301) speaks of buzzard wings as an accoutrement occasionally donned by Thunder Man among the Central Coast Pomo. The identification of the condor as Thunder Man is a view unsupported by data at hand.

15. Here the reference is probably for the girls' puberty ceremony.

16. Other researchers have been unable to find the term *kuksu* used by native people to denote the religious systems, but rather have used the term themselves. Conversations with Maidu and Miwok people who are fluent speakers of their respective languages reveal that they have no term for religion. When asked about the "kuksu religion" they indicate that the name is something non-Indians have created. *Kuksu* as a creator-spirit does not exist among many of the Californian peoples, including many of the Miwok and Maidu people.

17. This is not clear, as members of the sacred society were the participants in the dances. A hawk dance has not been recorded for Central Californian groups. The closest would be the Pota dance among the Central Sierra Miwok in which the prairie falcon takes part, but which is a commemorative dance celebrating the killing of murderers (Gifford 1955: 285-299).

18. The *Hesi* and *Aki* make use of regalia and ritual that qualify them as dances within the *Kuksu* cult, and not as separate cult systems.

19. Apparently the reference to Northwestern and Southeastern California is in error.

20. Apparently not considered here are the bear dances of the Northeastern and Northwestern Maidu (Azbill 1972; Dixon 1905: 295) and the Sierra Miwok (Gifford 1955: 275). As well, the ceremonial bear dancers among the Pomo were different and distinct from the bear doctors (Barrett 1917: 443-465; Cody 1940: 132).

21. It seems that the introduction of dances in which the participants appear as spirits of the dead was primarily the result of the 1870 Ghost Dance in California (DuBois 1939: 1). Although the Ghost religion of the Pomo was an ancient part of their culture (Loeb 1926: 338), it was not shared by other Californian groups such as the Miwok and Maidu (Gifford 1955; Dixon 1905; Kroeber 1932: 375-390).

22. The reference to a "Patwin river basin" is confusing, as such a river cannot be located.

23. The *Aki* is not recorded for the Mountain Maidu, but rather only for the Northwestern Maidu and the Nisenan, not the Maidu proper (Azbill 1972: 6, 9, 12; Dixon 1905: 364; Riddell 1978: 384).

24. Shamans who practice sorcery often were not dancers. Power needed for "sorcery" does not

generally come through dancing (Gifford n.d.; Bean 1975: 25-30).

25. Bird skins were not "sewn" to create costumes. As previously described, the bird feathers were used singly or the entire skin was used intact.

26. Other researchers have come to very different views based upon their work. Okladnikova has made several assumptions, among them the association of the *kuksu* deity with the raven. While it is true that the eagle, condor, and falcon were highly revered by groups such as the Sierra Miwok, the association of the raven with *kuksu* is unsupported by available data.

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