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The Journal of California Anthropology

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3k63c016>

Journal

The Journal of California Anthropology, 1(2)

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Publication Date

1974-12-01

Peer reviewed

The Buffalo in Chemehuevi Folklore

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In their far-flung peregrinations the Chemehuevi undoubtedly encountered the buffalo and came to know of tribes who lived by the buffalo.¹ They had a name for buffalo (*kutsu*), and Chemehuevi men who had broad, heavy shoulders and slim hips were said to be "built like the buffalo." Yet the buffalo plays a very minor role in Chemehuevi mythology. Of the thirty-odd Chemehuevi texts of myths dictated between May 1919 and May 1920 by my informant, George Laird (who later became my husband), only two make mention of this animal.

One of these is a story of the travels of Southern Fox (*Tantivaipatsi*).² George Laird entitled it "Southern Fox Went Across Fire Valley."³ He said frankly that he had constructed it out of four remembered fragments which he thought "belonged together." In the tale as he told it, Southern Fox travels in a semicircle from his home on Whipple Mountain south to Blythe Intake, northwest across the Mohave River, then north to and across Death Valley. The third episode only will be given here, for it is only in this section that a buffalo is mentioned.

Southern Fox came to the bank of a stream.⁴ There he found a number of girls sitting side by side on a log. He requested that one of them might ferry him across the river. "Who, I?" asked the girl sitting nearest

to him. "No, the one further over," he replied. This query and Southern Fox's answer were repeated all the way down the line. When the very last girl asked "Who, I?" Southern Fox answered "Yes." He chose her because she was the largest.

Southern Fox entered inside the girl. Then *Yalaaki*, Goose,⁵ went into the water. "How deep is it?" Southern Fox asked from within her. "To the calf of my leg," the Goose Girl replied. He continued to ask "How deep is it?" and she said "To my thigh," then "To my belly," then "To my mouth," and finally "I have gone out of sight under the water." Southern Fox continued his queries and the answers were repeated in reverse. At last the girl said "To my ankle," and then, "I have come out."

Whereupon Southern Fox, still being inside of her, killed her by snapping off her heart.⁶ The one that had been a goose, when dead became a buffalo, also dead, lying there in her place.

Southern Fox then went about singing:

*With what shall I butcher, with
what shall I butcher,
Lacking a stone knife?
With what shall I butcher, with
what shall I butcher,
Lacking a stone knife?*

Coyote (*Cinawavi*)⁷ was living not far away and he also was walking about in the vicinity. He heard the song. He thought: "I am becoming a shaman in my old age! I hear the song clearly! It will sound well when I am curing!" He then began to imitate the song in his own Coyote-ish way, adding to each phrase his own characteristic *-aik(y)a*.

Coyote, still singing, caught sight of Southern Fox and realized that he had been hearing his song. "What are you saying?" Coyote asked in great excitement.

"I am merely going about singing," Southern Fox replied.

"No, you are hunting for a stone knife in order to butcher a buffalo!" Coyote said.

"Yes," Southern Fox admitted, "the buffalo that I have killed lies right up this way."

Coyote went with him to look at the buffalo. "I have forgotten my knife," he cried. "I am going to fetch it!" With this he ran off to get his knife.

Southern Fox had his own knife all the while and had been singing for the sole purpose of attracting Coyote. He began at once to butcher the buffalo, and as he worked he sang:

*Quickly, quickly
Water-pine⁸ grow!
Quickly, quickly
Water-pine grow!*

While he sang, the water-pine grew under him, bearing him and the buffalo carcass aloft. He kept on butchering and singing, and the tree kept on growing.

Then Coyote arrived, bringing with him his wife and all his children.

"Throw us down a piece of meat!" Coyote begged.

"All of you lie down side by side," Southern Fox told them, "then I will throw this meat down on top of you."

Coyote and his family obeyed. Then Southern Fox threw the buffalo bones on top of them, killing all with the exception of one little girl. Her he caused to sit on a projecting branch of the tree, then shook it with his foot and made her fall to her death.⁹

The other story in which the buffalo somewhat obliquely appears is notable, George Laird said, in that "it may be mentioned in several different ways." The titles he gave are: "Coyote Killed His Mother-in-Law," "Coyote Killed the Hooked Arrow People," "Coyote Rolled off the Fire," "Coyote Made Buffalo Robes," and "Coyote Married His Own Daughters."

The narrative begins in a conventional way: Coyote was living in a certain place¹⁰ with his wife, their son and their three daughters. His mother-in-law was living with

them. The tale goes on to tell how Coyote caught sight of his mother-in-law's genitals as she sat weaving. Shortly thereafter he invited her to go on an overnight jackrabbit hunt with him. During the hunt, as she went to retrieve the jackrabbit which he had shot, he told her to protect herself from the thorny shrub by going along stooped over with her dress thrown up over her head. Coming up behind her he embraced her and had intercourse with her as they walked. This episode was repeated several times during the day. But when they lay down for the night Coyote raped the old woman with his sky-penis, and she died. Coyote asked his tail¹¹ how he should explain this to his family and was advised to say that they had been attacked by the Hooked Arrow People,¹² that his mother-in-law had been killed and that he himself had been severely wounded. To substantiate this, Coyote was to poke a hole in his belly and stuff in jackrabbit intestines, letting some of them hang out. The story continues:

When Coyote returned to his home, he explained the death of his mother-in-law and his own apparent condition just as his tail had advised. "The Hooked Arrow People killed the old woman," he said. "Me they allowed to escape after I had been shot in the belly. I don't think I am going to live. When I die, you will burn me."¹³ My daughters, you will marry the one who comes packing buffalo robes on his back; the one who comes packing red paint you will not marry!"

Then in the night Coyote died.¹⁴

In the morning his family stacked wood on a hillside, carried Coyote out and placed him on the pyre, then set fire to it. Then they returned home quickly, because Coyote had said, "When you set fire to me you must return to the house quickly without looking back!" Thus Coyote had instructed them.

But Coyote's son, Rat Tail (*Kaagwasi*) did look back just at the moment when Coyote rolled himself off the pile of burning brush.

"Coyote rolled!" Rat Tail said. The old woman, his mother,¹⁵ chided him because he had mentioned a dead relative.

Presently Coyote got up and went away from there. He took up residence in a place where there were many yucca stalks, and those same dry yucca stalks he was turning into buffalo robes.¹⁶

As the one who packed a load of red paint on his back was traveling around, he came upon Coyote's deserted house.¹⁷ Not finding any people there, the bearer of red paint went about looking for someone. When he came to the house where Coyote's family was living, he went inside and lay down.

"You will not marry this one," the old woman said to her daughters, "you will marry the one who comes backpacking buffalo robes."

Then when Coyote had made enough buffalo robes out of the yucca stalks, he bundled them up and went to the house where his family was now living.

"This is the one you will marry," the old woman told her daughters.

"I have come from far off," said Coyote, disguising his speech.¹⁸ "There I have been hunting buffalo." When it got dark he said, "Behind the house!"

Then the three girls spread their beds behind the house and there Coyote was lying with his own daughters!

The narrative goes on to tell how, on the following day, Coyote's wife/mother-in-law sent her new son-in-law out to hunt rats with her son, Rat Tail. The latter, catching sight of Coyote with his mouth open, recognized him by the peculiar way in which his teeth had been scored by a firestick. Delaying Coyote by a ruse, he hurried home to expose to his family the true identity of the bearer of the buffalo robes. Whereupon, in disgust the mother, son, and three daughters ascended into the sky. When Coyote discovered that Rat Tail had gone home, he himself hurried back to the house, and there he was looking all about and finding no one. The old woman willed him to look up. He did so and saw his

family in the sky. He said, "You will be *Soni(y)awi*,¹⁹ the Pleiades." His wife retorted, "And you will be one who picks up scraps around people's houses with your muzzle." Then Coyote (*Cinawavi*) became a coyote (*cina'avi*), going on all fours and foraging in garbage, while his family became the Pleiades.

This scanty material indicates that the Chemehuevi knew the buffalo, but not intimately. However, the two words for "buffalo robe" plus another for untanned buffalo hide argue a certain familiarity with the ways of tribes whose culture was based upon the buffalo. The absence of a personage named Buffalo seems to point to the classification of the buffalo of myth as "the kind who does not talk,"²⁰ a game animal of the immortals.

The verb which Coyote uses when he says that he has been hunting buffalo is a form of *yah(a)ig(y)ah*. Now in the literal translation of the texts, *yah(a)ig(y)ah* is always rendered as "hunting small game" while *tinaagah*, invariably applied to the hunting of deer or mountain sheep, is translated "hunting big game." When I commented that a buffalo is appreciably larger than a deer or a mountain sheep, George Laird said that *yah(a)ig(y)ah* was, he thought, employed "because buffalo live on the prairie, not in the mountains." He may have been attempting to indicate that the buffalo is not indigenous to Chemehuevi hunting ranges and does not stand in the same peculiarly intimate—one might almost say totemic—relationship to the Chemehuevi as the deer and the mountain sheep.

In the stories here given the buffalo is not encountered in an ordinary way. A buffalo in one tale and buffalo robes in the other are produced by magic. Southern Fox magicks a buffalo out of the carcass of a goose (to say nothing of a jack-and-the-beanstalk type pine tree out of nothing!) apparently for the sole purpose of tricking Coyote and his family to their doom. In the other story Coyote turns

yucca stalks into buffalo robes to further his incestuous designs upon his daughters.

In the episode involving Southern Fox it is almost possible to follow the mental processes of the myth-maker. A man sees a row of geese sitting on a log who remind him of girls—or perhaps it is a row of girls who remind him of geese. The last one in the row is very large, so big she makes him think of a buffalo. How easily from that starting point the fertile imagination of a teller of tales brings a buffalo to view beside a desert stream! And of course it is natural to weave Coyote into the story, because Coyote is the dominant (if not the most admirable) figure in the mythic period.

It is a little harder to see the connection between Coyote's buffalo robes and yucca stalks; yet it becomes believable that there may be a connection when one remembers that yucca fiber was woven into a fabric which formed the base for the legendary feather capes of the Chemehuevi.

NOTES

1. Remains of buffalo (*Bison bison*) are commonly found in archaeological sites in the northern Great Basin, but are quite rare in the southern part. Taylor (1954:60) reported buffalo bones from the Garrison site in Snake Valley, Utah, a Parowan Fremont site dating to about A.D. 1100. Fowler, Madsen, and Hattori (1973:Tables 1 and 15) reported finding two buffalo bones at O'Malley Shelter, about 20 miles ENE of Caliente, Nevada, in deposits dated between 6,500 and 7,100 radiocarbon years old. John Wesley Powell (Fowler and Fowler 1971) recorded words for buffalo in several Southern Paiute vocabularies he collected between 1868 and 1880. These include *Kūch* (Las Vegas Southern Paiute), and *Kūts* (Kaibab Southern Paiute). (These data were kindly provided by Don Fowler, Desert Research Institute, University of Nevada.)

2. Voiceless vowels in Chemehuevi words in this article are rendered in roman type. Sequences of two

identical vowels represent long vowels. Ng stands for the sound in *sing*. All other symbols have their standard phonetic value.

3. *Kunayīwaavi*, Fire Valley, is the Chemehuevi name for Death Valley.

4. Identified in notes made at the time as the Mohave River.

5. From the Mohave *yelaaka*, goose; it is implied that all the girls were geese. "l" occurs only in loanwords.

6. That is, by breaking her heart off from the aorta. Mice and woodrats were killed in this manner by pressure applied from the outside.

7. *Cinawavi*, Mythic Coyote, as distinct from *cinawavi*, coyote.

8. *Payuvimpi* (*pa-* water, plus *yuvimpi*, pine species). George Laird insisted that this must be "the redwood, because that is the biggest pine tree." His reasoning was based on the fact that *tihiva* means deer and *parih*, "water-deer," is elk (could he have meant moose?), "the largest of all deer." I objected that a redwood could not grow on the banks of the Mohave River. He said, "Of course not; Southern Fox caused it to grow by magic, just as he changed the goose into a buffalo."

9. John Wesley Powell (Fowler and Fowler 1971:86-87) recorded a parallel tale among the Kaibab Southern Paiute in 1871.

10. The Chemehuevi idiom is "in that same place."

11. Or penis; Coyote's alter-ego may be referred to in either way.

12. *Tsangkuhuuug(w)ami*, literally "Hooked Arrow Havers;" this is the plural form of the name of a species of long-legged black ants.

13. The Chemehuevi buried their dead, and there are many mentions of burial in the myths; but here Coyote specifically requests cremation.

14. That is, he assumed the appearance of being dead.

15. The mother-in-law being dead, Coyote's wife is referred to hereafter as "the old woman."

16. *Totsivi*, dead yucca stalk. Coyote magicked these into buffalo robes, called either *ʔuttsivi* or *kuttsivi*. But an untanned buffalo hide is *kutsuvi*.

17. The house had been abandoned so the family would not be troubled by Coyote's ghost.

18. By omitting *haik(y)a* from his speech and adding *-naavasuwī'ī* to every phrase.

19. George Laird translated this word as "nests" and said it was formed by adding an animate plural to the root of *soni(y)avi*, the soft, fur-lined "nest" or den made, for example, by a rabbit—but the nest of a bird is *kani*, house.

20. All creatures of the myth might be divided into "the kind that talks" and "the kind that does not talk." However, the line between these categories is not always firmly drawn. For example, the bear appears as a pet incapable of speech; yet in the great saga of Wolf's and Coyote's departure, Coyote's aunt is Bear, member of a tribe of Bears who conduct themselves like other mythological "people." Only the deer and the mountain sheep (and perhaps the buffalo) never appear as personages. Even when Coyote's grandson is turned into a mountain sheep he does not speak, though he acts as a judas goat to entice other mountain sheep within range of Coyote's arrows.

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Seasonal Exploitation of Chione Clams on the Southern California Coast

CHRISTOPHER E. DROVER

The remains of shellfish of various species comprise a significant fraction of many coastal southern California middens. Analysis of the growth rings of certain species permits determination of the season in which the shellfish were collected for food, and hence the season in which the middens were occupied. These data are thus useful for clarifying certain aspects of settlement patterns. The present paper adds two species of *Chione* clam to the list of molluscs used as indicators of archaeological seasonality, and discusses the implications of these findings for understanding prehistoric settlement adaptations on the southern California coast.

The data presented below are derived from investigation of a recent shell midden (4-Ora-119), located on a bluff overlooking a former eastern extent of upper Newport Bay, near the campus of the University of California, Irvine, on property owned by the Irvine Ranch Company. Excavations revealed that the deposit contained artifacts generally attributed to the Late Horizon, including such items as mortars and pestles, steatite containers, numerous small triangular projectile points, several types of shell beads, and Tizon Brown Ware sherds.

Shell represents a major constituent of the midden deposit. Recent studies (Weide 1969) indicate that it is possible to determine the season of collection of Pismo clams (*Tivela stultorum* [Mawe]) in coastal shell middens with some accuracy through a study of the growth rings of the shells. Since the Pismo clam was represented by only a single fragment in the shell collected from the site,

