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Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5dn244n1>

Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 4(2)

ISSN

0191-3557

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Publication Date

1982-12-01

Peer reviewed

Kumeyaay Socio-Political Structure¹

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WHEN the Spanish entered Alta California, the Kumeyaay held the land for about 50 miles north and south of the present border between Mexico and California. They had developed a national identity within the region extending from the coast to the sand hills west of the Colorado River, including from time to time a small section of the river below the Quechan (Shipek 1982). Over time, these people have been variously called "Diegueño" (because many were within the region allotted by the Spanish to Mission San Diego), Ipai and Tipai (Luomala 1978; translates: human beings in contrast to animals and now used to indicate "Indian" as opposed to non-Indian), and Kamia (Gifford 1931; used for the unmissionized desert populations). Ethnographic data and Spanish mission and exploration records indicate that the people throughout this area called themselves "Kumeyaay" (various Spanish spellings rendered phonetically). Although they have been called hunter-gatherers, the Kumeyaay had actually developed intensive plant husbandry of native food resource plants (including emergency drought food sources) combined with broadcast of a native semi-domesticated grass seed (now extinct), fire swidden of chapparal for food resources, and planting of corn, beans, and squash in selected mountain and desert locations having appropriate summer moisture (Shipek 1972, 1977, n.d.a, n.d.b). Using this intensive resource management system had allowed them to develop a population of

approximately 10,000 occupying the territory from the coast to the crest of interior mountains (Shipek 1977, 1981). Within this region, population density varied between 5 and 7 persons per square mile from the southern to the northern boundaries of Kumeyaay territory.

Kumeyaay socio-political structure was so drastically disrupted by the Spanish, Mexican, and American political and economic policies, and by the depopulation resulting from repeated epidemic diseases and drought, that the reconstruction of the original socio-political economic system has required collating data from many sources. Beginning in 1955, repeated ethnographic interviews with numerous Kumeyaay elders were conducted. At that time, at least five were 95 years of age or older; one was at least 115; another ten were above 80, and about 15 were above 70. Approximately another 20 were in their sixties during the late 1950s and early 1960s. These people were from throughout Kumeyaay territory from Mataguay, Mesa Grande, and San Pasqual on the north to Neji, Ha'aa, and San Jose El Zorro on the south, and from coastal San Diego bands to mountain and New River bands in the east. Many of these elders had been part of the band leadership structure and others had participated in band activities prior to the reservation period. Two families were descendants of an ethnohistorically recorded general or *Kuuchult kwataay*.² According to these elders, even after the federal government began to impose reservation controls, the traditional leadership quietly continued its activities in opposition to

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Bureau of Indian Affairs controls until the late 1950s. Those elders who were over 80 by the early 1960s were primarily individuals who had avoided most non-Indians and who had opposed Bureau controls. These people also had more information concerning details of traditional organizational structure than did those under 80, except for a few of the latter who had been raised by traditional leaders, grandparents, or great-grandparents. Several interviews were conducted with these people to clarify the material presented here.

While interviewing these elders in relation to Docket 80 before the Indian Claims Commission (Mission Indian Claims Case), genealogical research in the Mission Registers was being conducted at the request of several bands. Portions of the results of this research have been used in testimonies presented in Dockets 80 and 80-A-1 before the Indian Claims Commission, the Federal Power Commission, the Federal District Court, the San Diego Superior Court, and before the Bureau of Indian Affairs for various band membership and federal recognition purposes.

BAND ORGANIZATION

Politically, the Kumeyaay were organized into territorial bands³ which generally controlled from 10 to 30 miles along a drainage and up to the drainage divides (Kroeber 1962; Shipek 1983). Each band had a central primary village and a number of outlier homesteads located at small water sources, springs, or at the mouths of secondary creeks (Shipek 1983). This territorial organization was crosscut by the sib (kinship) structure composed of between 50 and 75 named sibs spread throughout the territorial bands. Each band might have lineage segments of between 5 to 15 sibs. In other words, each sib or *shiiimull* had lineage segments scattered in many bands throughout the various ecological zones within Kumeyaay territory. This facilitated movement of individuals or families

from one area to another in times of necessity (Luomala 1963; Shipek 1977). This tribal structure with the sib organization cross-cutting the territorial band organization contrasts with the paralleling patrilineage-territorial organization of both the Cahuilla (Bean 1972) and the San Luiseño (White 1963; Shipek 1977).

CAPTAIN—KWAAYPAAY

The San Diego Mission registers identified the "Capitan" or Kwaaypaay of a band as resident in the central village of the band. Until July 1777, a majority of adults were identified by an Indian (Kumeyaay) name, and the *shiiimull* of both father and mother. Analysis of the band membership revealed that the Kwaaypaay did not belong to any of the larger *shiiimull* in the village (Shipek 1983). In fact, except for an occasional brother or sons, the Kwaaypaay was normally the only adult male of his sib in the band. Later ethnohistoric records, such as those of early American explorers and others passing through Fort Yuma and the New River area, noted that the "Captain" was generally some form of outsider to the village (Heintzelman 1853). Also, in commenting upon Captain Antonio Garra of Cupa (Warner's Hot Springs), Judge Benjamin Hayes (who entered the region in 1850 and became a judge in San Diego and Los Angeles counties) noted that it was not uncommon for a "Captain" to be an outsider, i.e., not a born member of his village (Wolcott 1929).

Under careful questioning, the elders reiterated that the Kwaaypaay was a band leader, not a *shiiimull* leader (Drucker 1937). They pointed out that each *shiiimull* had many sections that were scattered over Kumeyaay territory and that most individuals only knew portions of their own *shiiimull*. The elders also pointed out that some *shiiimull* had no members within the official hierarchy and thus would have no Kwaaypaay of their own.

They all claimed that most of the Kwaaypaay had been members of only a few *shiiimull*.

The Kumeyaay elders related that at the death of a Kwaaypaay, all Kwaaypaay from throughout Kumeyaay territory—Mataguay and 'Elly Kwanan (Santa Ysabel) on the north to Ha'aa and San Jose El Zorro on the south—met for participating in the cremation (later burial) ceremonies and afterward they selected a successor. The new Kwaaypaay was generally from the ranks of their sons or nephews, and had been trained for the position. The selectee also had to be approved by the band in question. The reason given for selecting such an outsider, not a band member, was that a primary duty of a Kwaaypaay was to mediate and judge disputes between band members. A Kwaaypaay having no other sib members within a band would be more fair and just in solving disputes; after all, one could not decide against a member of one's own sib. This contrasts with both the Cahuilla (Bean 1972) and the San Luiseño (White 1963; Boscana 1933; Shipek 1977) in which the *Noot* (Captain) was the head of the largest patrilineage and did not settle disputes within the band. Among the San Luiseño, it was recorded that such disputes were handled directly by the families involved. Further, the Kwaaypaay was the final arbiter for cases of accused witchcraft and thus wielded power over all.

The other duties of the Kwaaypaay included organizing and directing all ceremonies for individuals (naming, marriage, death, and memorials), weather control, yearly cycle, harvest, and interband relations. By coordinating all information from the shaman who specialized in varieties of ecological knowledge, the Kwaaypaay decided when to go to the mountains for pine nuts, to the band's own mountain territory for acorns, or to their allotted section of the coast for seafood. In council with the shaman, he organized defensive strategies and made decisions for war,

peace, or alliances with other bands. Training for the position included learning to speak the various Kumeyaay dialects and other languages used in surrounding areas. The Kwaaypaay also had to learn the proper sequence of rituals for both seasonal rounds and individual life crises.

The Kumeyaay elders all indicated that the Kwaaypaay did not give orders, but that he was followed because of his greater knowledge and managerial abilities. He announced when he and his family were leaving the primary village for their mountain or coastal lands. While most band members followed him because he knew more about food resource availability, some members did not, but remained always in the main village, or in one or another portions of the band territories. Others came and went according to their own desires. Similarly, while all men participated in defense if the band were attacked, when the Kwaaypaay decided for a raid on another band, each man decided individually whether to participate. This individual decision making was in direct contrast to the San Luiseño where, according to Boscana (1933), the *Noot* or Capitan was obeyed and followed by all band members after a decision had been made.

OTHER OFFICIALS

The only other band official regularly identified in the Mission registers was the assistant to the Kwaaypaay or the "Second Captain." According to the Kumeyaay elders, this individual was the "talker" or "speaker" for the Kwaaypaay. He relayed information and instructions from the Kwaaypaay to the band members. Other band officials not identified in the Spanish records included religious shamans who managed or participated in the particular ceremonies relating to their specialty (life crisis or ecological), singers, dancers, a "runner," and a "carrier." This roster of officials paralleled those of the Cahuilla (Bean

1972) and the San Luiseño (Boscana 1933; White 1963; Shipek 1977).

While specific shamanistic positions were not delineated in the Mission Registers, three of the first 300 men named in the registers were listed as if their names were "Guisiyay (Cusiyay)," i.e., Kuseyaay (Shaman). One was named "Miguisiyay," another "Huagusiyay," and the third was identified with his *shimull*, "Llaycorcusiyaay." In contrast, six of the first 150 women baptized were identified as shamans. Two were simply called "Woman Shaman," or "Sincusiyaay," i.e., Siny Kuseyaay; three by some variant spelling of the term for shaman, "Cusialaq," "Guesamay," or "Guese-ney;" and the last as "Micusayap." Ethnographically, women have been identified as herb specialists, healers, or midwives. A much wider variety of activities has been described for men. Specialties extended from healer, rattlesnake shaman, and plant and animal specialists to sun watchers and other higher priestly duties, such as the *kuseyaay* responsible for ceremonies on *Kuchamaa*, the sacred mountain (Shipek n.d.c.).

Each Kwaaypaay had a "carrier" whose duty was to carry special ceremonial or religious presentation items to the Kwaaypaay of other bands. The runner was part of an interconnecting network of couriers for carrying messages not only from one Kwaaypaay to another, but also for sending messages from one side of Kumeyaay territory to the other. Each Kwaaypaay maintained a lookout system on high locations for defensive warning purposes and to alert his runner for the courier duty. This position of "runner" was definitely an achieved position depending upon both speed and endurance. It was a position for which many boys trained and competed.

EVIDENCE OF STATUS

Several comments by the missionaries, both the Franciscan Fr. Fuster and the Do-

minican Fr. Sales, indicate that a class of "poor" individuals existed. On January 1, 1777, Father Fuster wrote that the marriages about to be recorded were those "of the most poor," individuals who remained near the mission when the others of Rancheria Cosoy (adjacent to the San Diego Presidio) went to the mountains. This reinforces Father Sales' (Rudkin 1956) description of subservient, landless individuals, without voice in rancheria affairs and allowed to eat only the leavings of other band members who were active participants and able to speak in band conclaves.

Secondly, the military records of Captain Rivera y Moncada (Burrus 1967) indicate that the Kwaaypaay or "Capitans" apparently wore distinctive clothing or some mark of rank visible from a distance. In the spring of 1776, while searching through northern Kumeyaay territory (Escondido-San Pascual region) for the leaders of the revolt against the mission, Rivera y Moncada and his troops approached a village visible at a distance in the valley below them. Even though he did not catch anyone, he noted that four "Capitans" were among those who fled upon his approach.

Ethnographic data received from the elders indicated that prior to the reservations and to EuroAmerican disruption, each family had different quantities of land and different types of food resource lands. They also described land tenures and land inheritance rights in detail (Shipek n.d.d), and indicated that food could be traded for other varieties of food and tools, or shells, shell beads, or other valuable items. They all indicated that the Kwaaypaay, religious officials, and shaman had more power in decision making than did other band members. They stated that such officials had more land resources and personal valuables, such as shell money, shell beads, feather-decorated basket hats, and other items of wealth at their disposal than

did the rest of the band members. They indicated that although an occasional, exceptional individual could rise in status within a band, normally each leader and shaman selected his trainee for succession from among his sons and and his brothers' sons.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Little direct evidence for a national level of organization exists in the Mission Registers; rather it is found in the military records and ethnographic sources. First is the fact that the 1775 attack on San Diego Mission was a carefully organized attack by an alliance of a large number of both coastal and inland bands. An attack was also planned on the Presidio but that group was not quite in position by the time the Mission was burning. They felt that they had lost the element of surprise, increasing the possibility of failure if the Spanish had been alerted. The Kumeyaay withdrew. Thereafter, according to the elders, the inland bands maintained lookouts on the mountain peaks overlooking the passes leading inland from the coastal Spanish strongholds. Maintenance of these lookouts was organized jointly by all the Kwaaypaay to warn the inland bands of any Spanish approach. Secondly, the Spanish called one Captain, "El Capitan Grande," indicating that he was more important than others and was of higher rank than some of the other "Captains" or that other Captains followed him.

Additional evidence for the national level of organization can be found in other ethnohistoric records and ethnographic research. For example, later ethnohistoric records identified certain individuals as "General." One, "General Tomas," signed the Southern California treaties of 1851 and his signature was followed by those of the "Captains" of the various bands. "General Tomas" was resident at *'Elly Kwanan* and a "Captain" also presided in that band. Another leader, noted by Manuel Rojo (Gericke 1972) and Benjamin

Hayes (Wolcott 1929) was Jatinil, who resided in the Neji region of Baja California. He was also recognized and consulted by the bands in the San Diego area and inland to Campo. All the elders through the southern half of Kumeyaay territory remembered "Hutneel," Jatinil (i.e., hattnyilly 'Black Dog'), as a military leader who managed the lookout system against raids from the Colorado River tribes and who also represented the Kumeyaay to non-Indians.

This level of leadership, above the Kwaaypaay, was apparently acquired by a Kwaaypaay due to superior ability as a diplomat and war leader. Historical records indicate that ca. 1850-1870 several such leaders co-existed in different sections of Kumeyaay territory, each directing competing alliances of bands. Bands in the mountains and northeastern sections were under leaders allied with the Quechan while "Hutneel" led a group which opposed the Quechan (Heintzelman 1853).

As interaction with non-Indians became as important as intertribal military alliances and ritual and trade networks, the "generals" became important for managing these, speaking for several bands, and advising the band Kwaaypaay. Later, after reservations were set aside by executive order in 1875, the United States Agent for the Mission Indians decided that it would be easier to deal only with band "Captains" than with the "General" at the larger level of organization. Beginning in 1883, the Agents ignored the "generals" (Shipek 1977), and only dealt through "Captains," whom the Agent insisted should be "elected" each year. The Indian Agent also regularly informed these "elected" captains that they served at his pleasure and must obey him. Thereafter, the Captain recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs was seldom the traditional Kwaaypaay. However, these traditional Kwaaypaay continued to function in opposition to the Bureau. The "Generals" and their descendants continued to be sought for

advice and leadership in dealing with the non-Indian world by a majority of the Kwaaypaay and the people. "Paayon" (Pion, Davis 1919) of the Hillymeyap *shiiimull* and Jose Largo of the Kwash *shiiimull* were the last two Generals or *Kuuchult kwataay* according to the Kumeyaay elders.

The elders also stated that the *Kuuchult kwataay* was responsible for managing all interaction with other tribes, by contacting the "Big Leader" of the Quechan, Cocopa, or Mohave. He was charged with managing the lookout system and integration of the "runner" system. He was also responsible to organize and manage the life crisis ceremonies, including cremations and memorials, for individuals of other tribes married to Kumeyaay and living in Kumeyaay villages. The *Kuuchult kwataay* managed the memorial ceremonies necessary for the reburial of unknown human remains inadvertently exposed by erosion. Because the *shiiimull* and tribal membership was not known, all potential descendants must be invited.

Along with the Kwaaypaay, the *Kuuchult kwataay* was responsible for maintaining knowledge of tribal and band boundaries in order to solve any disputes which might arise. In the case of disputes between members of different bands or between bands directly, the *Kuuchult kwataay* was responsible for judging the dispute. He generally selected two non-involved Kwaaypaay to assist him.

Ethnographic and genealogical data indicate that the families of the *Kuuchult kwataay* were widely intermarried throughout the neighboring tribes. For example, "Paayon's" family members were married with Cocopa, Quechan, Luiseño, and Cahuilla leadership families. The family of "Tomas" was intermarried with Luiseño and Cahuilla leadership.

The runner and lookout system was integrated on a tribal basis. It was organized on a relay basis for expediting the transmission of information from one end of Kumeyaay

territory to the other. For example, the Spanish noted that on the day it occurred, the Kumeyaay at San Diego Presidio and Mission knew about the Quechan revolt and destruction of the Yuman mission (Englehardt 1920). A number of the lookout mountains for spotting runners at a distance and relay stations, such as Jacumba, have been identified. The lookout peak above a relay station enabled the runner to be in place and ready to move as the other runner approached.

Although the bands have been identified as the primary land-owning units, certain lands were considered tribal and open to the use of any Kumeyaay but not to non-Kumeyaay, e.g., Quechan, Luiseño, and others. For example, the pine-nut gathering areas of the Sierra Juarez were tribal and open to all families and bands on a first-come basis for choice of gathering spot. Certain sections of the Laguna and Cuyamaca Mountains were tribal gathering areas for acorns and various "wild" products. Other parts of these two mountain ranges belonged to specific bands. Major portions of the desert and desert foothills were tribal gathering areas to which any Kumeyaay from any part of Kumeyaay territory might come for "wild" foods (Shippek 1972, 1977, 1982).

The lands along the New River in Imperial Valley belonged to the individuals and/or families which had cleared and leveled them and had participated in dam and levee building, and canal maintenance. However, any Kumeyaay from any band—coastal, foothill, mountain, and north to south—could acquire land in the river floodplain by coming and clearing additional land, participating in dam building, and extending the levee and canal system to the newly cleared land (Shippek 1982).

Some of the coastal areas also fell into this category of tribal lands. Among these were the Silver Strand, the sand bar in front of San Diego Bay, and the Mission Beach sand

bar. Well-marked and well-used trails crisscrossed the territory from the Colorado River to the coast and from north to south through the mountains, along the coast, and along the desert edge of the mountains. Again, these trails were tribal rather than band lands, and were for the use of all (Shipek 1972, n.d.d).

As mentioned earlier, movement between bands was facilitated by the sib system which crosscut the structural organization of the band. However, except for the floodplain lands of the New and Alamo rivers, in order for an individual or a family to move from one band to another, the sib mates in the new band had to be willing to accept them as more than just "visiting relatives" and to assign them a section of the band lands which belonged to the sib. The band also had to be willing to have new members share the joint-use band lands, or land at the band level of ownership (Shipek 1972, n.d.d).

SUMMARY

The correlation of ethnographic with ethnohistoric and Mission Register data has clarified the analysis of Kumeyaay political structure by confirming the fact that the Kwaaypaay was not a "born" member of his band. He was not the head of the largest *shimull* in a band, but was normally the only adult male of that sib in the band. This structure contrasts with that of the Cahuilla and the San Luiseño where the "Captains" were the heads of the largest lineages. The crosscutting of the *shimull* organization by the territorial band organization increased the tribal or national level of Kumeyaay integration. Ethnohistoric data noting rapid communication of information between the Colorado River and the coast supports the ethnographic description of a nationally organized relay runner or courier system. This national organization of the *shimull*/bands, with alliance leaders or *Kuuchult kwataay*, facilitated the shifting of population under erratic climatic

conditions that were almost constantly affecting local resource availability. Furthermore, this complex structure integrated movement between ecological zones which required a variety of food-resource acquisition techniques. This included movement from the coast to the desert by way of foothills and mountains, and subsistence-related pursuits ranging from fishing to hunting, to desert riverine plant husbandry including irrigation farming (Shipek 1977, 1981, 1982, n.d.b).

NOTES

1. Portions of this research were included in a paper presented for the Mission Register Research Symposium at the 1982 meeting of the Southwestern Anthropological Association. For publication purposes, the sections containing marriage (Shipek 1983) and political data were separated in order to more completely incorporate clarifying material from ethnographic and other ethnohistoric sources.
2. It was through the descendants of these *Kuuchult kwataay* that I was able to interview most of these elders who normally avoided all contact with non-Indians.
3. The cause of the apparent sib localization recorded by Spier (1923) has been discussed elsewhere (Shipek 1983).

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