

UC Merced

The Journal of California Anthropology

Title

Almstedt: *Diegueño Curing Practices*

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5zr464tv>

Journal

The Journal of California Anthropology, 5(1)

Author

Elasser, A. B.

Publication Date

1978-07-01

Peer reviewed

acquired during her years with the Mohave, who bought her from her captors. Mary Ann lasted only two years, she being too immature for such traumatic acculturation.

The first and second editions (both San Francisco, 1857) are contained in this volume. The first edition sold out in about two weeks; the second is 44 pages longer than the first, the additional material mostly referring to Olive's life among the Mohave.

There is a large volume of newspaper and archival accounts referring to this captivity which will no doubt some day be brought together. But this is the essential story, written by the Rev. R.B. Stratton from information secured from Olive and Lorenzo. The writing style shows what a sanctimonious old hustler Stratton must have been. But it is a great yarn, wholly true, and it tells, in a way no ethnographer could, what life among the Mohave in the 1850's was like. Anyone interested in California Indians should read it.



Diegueño Curing Practices. Ruth Farrell Almstedt. San Diego: San Diego Museum Papers No. 10, 1977. 38 pp.

Reviewed by A.B. ELSASSER
Lowie Museum of Anthropology
University of California, Berkeley

This volume is a compact summary of an abstruse subject, which, in order to gain coherence, relies on scattered quotations from ethnologists or missionaries and testimony from Indians, some of whom remember only part of the medical lore which was part of the pre- and immediately post-Mission culture. The work is divided into sections including Concepts of Disease; Parts of the Body; Shamans; Witchcraft and Magic; and Botanical and Home Remedies. These all permit discussion of practically every aspect of the curing practices in parts of Southern Cali-

fornia and Baja California.

Naming and indicating specific use of some 39 medicinal plants used by the Diegueño in a whole range of diseases, including some introduced ailments, is probably the main contribution of the book — this section is most valuable when we consider how relatively few monographs are available on the subject. In any event, the most stimulating part of the work probably occurs in sections on Concepts of Disease and Shamans. Here is confirmed what has been observed elsewhere on many occasions, i.e., that in the Indians' opinions, despite their intimate knowledge of many plants, the mysterious (faith?) curing techniques of the shamans were more important than plants in the treatment of serious diseases.

Unexpectedly or not, quotations from Father Baegert (who worked, before 1772, in Baja California among Indians whose curing practices paralleled those of the Diegueño) and from another priest (recorded in [*Preguntas* and] *Respuestas* of 1812) evince a counter opinion regarding faith as a curing device. In the *Respuestas* this kind of native curing evidently was regarded as a charade, while Baegert implies or states that such healers were imposters or quacks.

Yet another opinion is set forth in a quotation (p. 4) from an Indian and agency physician in 1890, who believed that: "... the old time 'medicine man' was really better than the average white doctor in those days, for although the treatment was largely suggestive, his herbs were harmless, and he did allay some distress which the other aggravated, because he [the white doctor] used powerful drugs almost at random and did not attend his cases intelligently." This was written in 1916 by C.A. Eastman.

