

NOTES ON THE ACHOMAWI AND ATSUGEWI INDIANS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA¹

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The area occupied by the Achomawi and Atsugewi Indians, who form a portion of the Shastan stock, lies mainly in Shasta, Lassen, and Modoc counties in the northeastern part of California. The Achomawi territory was pretty closely restricted to the valley of Pit river and, as nearly as can be learned at present, may be described as follows: Beginning at a point above the mouth of Montgomery creek on Pit river, they occupied or claimed all the valley of that river up to its head, together with the valleys of Fall river and of Beaver and Ash creeks. Burney and Goose valleys were also claimed by them, but in the case of the former, the Atsugewi insist that they and not the Achomawi occupied it. Permanent settlements were made only in the immediate vicinity of the streams, although the Achomawi hunted as far west as the head of the McCloud and Mt Shasta, north to Medicine lake and south as far as Lassen Butte.

Unlike the Achomawi, the Atsugewi did not occupy a continuous area, but were divided into two separate groups. One of these, and the larger, was settled on Hat creek, from its head down to about one mile below the present town of Cassel, and in Burney valley; the other in Dixie valley some twelve or fifteen miles to the east. The Atsugewi seem to have had a clear idea of unity among themselves, and to have formed a distinct group apart from the Achomawi, with whom, however, they were usually on good terms.

The area outlined lies along the southern edge of the barren and forbidding Lava Beds which extend for so many miles along the

¹ The following notes were made in 1903 while the author was engaged in getting linguistic material from these two members of the Shastan stock, as part of the work of the Huntington Expedition. As no further opportunity has occurred to continue the work in this region, it seems undesirable to withhold any longer such information as was procured. These notes are therefore published by permission of the Trustees of the American Museum of Natural History.

Oregon-California boundary east of the Klamath lakes. The southern edge of these lava flows forms really the northern limit of the Achomawi territory, which may be described as a series of wide, semi-arid plains, lying at an elevation of about 4000 feet, separated from each other by rugged, mostly timbered ridges, rising some 2000 feet above the level of the surrounding country. Across these plains, and through these ridges, Pit river and its tributaries run, often cutting rather narrow, deep valleys. Below the mouth of Fall river, the Pit has cut a tremendous cañon across the confused mass of mountains lying south of Mt Shasta, and in this portion of its course offers few available sites for settlement. In some cases, as in Goose and Dixie valleys, there are large swampy areas. To the south, about the head of Hat creek, lies the desolate volcanic region of cinder cones and ash beds about Lassen Butte. The climate of this whole area is decidedly arid, with hot summers and rather cold winters. The flora is largely that of the dry, interior plateaus, and the fauna as a whole poorer than in the regions to the west and south.

Both Achomawi and Atsugewi were divided into a number of fairly well defined groups. Detailed investigations along this line were not made, but in a long series of geographical terms obtained, most of Powers' divisions can be recognized. To these may be added the following: Amit'dji (Ach.) = Apwarukē'i (Ats.) = Dixie Valley people; Ap'amadji (Ach.) = Wamarī'i (Ats.) = Burney Valley people; Idjuigilum'idji (Ach.) = Ak^howī'gi (Ats.) = Beaver Creek people. The Achomawi called the Hat Creek people Baqā'mali; and the latter called the Achomawi in general, Pomarī'i.

The dress of the men consisted of a belt under which was passed a strip of skin, tanned with the fur on, so that it doubled over the belt, and hung down as a small apron in front. The regular breech-clout was not worn. Poor people used coyote skins for this purpose, whereas the wealthy made use of mink, otter, or silver fox. Moccasins of deerskin were worn on the feet in summer, the poorer people often using a low, slipper-like shoe or sandal of tules. Wealthy men sometimes wore deerskin leggings, decorated with quillwork and fringed. On the upper part of the body men wore a deerskin garment, somewhat like a shirt. A hole was cut

for the head, and then the skin sewn up under the arms, making a sleeveless garment which was belted at the waist, and sometimes decorated with quills. Deer-hide robes, with the hair on, were used in cold weather also. In summer men wore a netted cap similar to those used by the Maidu; in winter a cap of fur was sometimes worn. The skin of a mud-hen was used for a glove, or mitten.

The women's dress was of two sorts: either a deerskin fringe or apron, reaching to the knee, the fringes being threaded through pine-nuts or small pieces of bone; or else a skirt of deerskin, made of several skins, wrapped about the waist and held up by a belt of fur. Moccasins were worn on the feet, and the upper part of the body was covered with a garment similar to that worn by men. On the head, women wore a basket cap.

Men wore their hair long, either rolling it under the cap or letting it stick up in two horns, one on each side. Women braided it in two braids, wrapped with mink-skin, and allowed them to hang in front of the shoulders. The ears were pierced by both sexes, and ear-ornaments of beads, dentalia, etc., worn. Men pierced the nose also, and wore a small string of beads or a single dentalium shell therein. Headbands were made by the Atsugewi of quills, strung side by side on threads in the same manner as the feather bands of yellowhammer feathers made by the Maidu and other Indians to the south. Tattooing was little used on the whole. Women made three lines on the chin, some also put lines on the cheek. Men occasionally had a line of small dots running from the eye across the temple.

Two sorts of houses were built by these Indians. The regular winter house was built as follows: An excavation a little more than a foot in depth was made over an area ten to twelve feet long and six to ten feet wide, one end being generally somewhat wider than the other. At the wider end two forked posts, six to eight feet high, were set up about two feet apart, and one similar post at the narrow end. A long pole was then laid from each of the two posts at the broad end to the post at the narrow end, forming a v-shaped ridge-pole, to which slabs of bark and poles were leaned from the edge of the excavation. The doorway was between the two posts at the wider

end, and usually faced south. The fire was in the center, and the smoke escaped through the space between the two ridge-poles. The second type of house was the so-called sweat-house. It was larger, and often built on a gentle side-hill slope or on top of a low mound. In this form of house the excavation was carried to a depth of about three feet over an area sometimes as large as twenty by thirty feet. One end here also was usually narrower than the other. A single post of large size was set up on the median line, about one-third of the distance from one end, and to it two stout rafters were laid, one from each side. At the farther end of the excavation then, an entrance passageway was dug, across the inner end of which a beam was laid, and from this two other rafters ran to the first two, leaving a narrow space between. On this as a framework, poles were laid and leaned from all sides, and then covered with brush and earth. The space between the second pair of rafters was left as a smoke-hole, and also served as an entrance by means of a ladder made of two poles with cross-bars tied on with withes. The Achomawi seemed to have used the dug-out entrance as the usual one, whereas the Atsugewi state that they used this merely as a draft-hole, and normally entered and left the house by means of the ladder. These larger structures were occupied by several families as a rule, and there were sometimes two or three of them in one village.

The houses were occupied only during the winter season. In the summer people lived outdoors without shelter, or with a simple windbreak or a rude roof of brush, open on all sides, or with a few mats hung up to keep out the wind.

The region occupied by these Indians was about on the eastern edge of the area in which the acorn forms the chief food. The more westerly portion of the people were able to get considerable supplies of this valuable food, but the easterly divisions were obliged to obtain what they could by trade. Acorns were prepared for eating in the usual manner, being dried, pounded to a fine meal, leached with warm water, and then cooked, either as a soup or in cakes as a bread. The mealing was done with a stone pestle, using a flat stone for a mortar, and a mortar-basket. Other vegetable foods used were various sorts of seeds and berries, together with roots.

The seeds were gathered by means of a seed-beater and a flattish basket tray, and were parched by shaking with coals, and then cooked as a mush. Manzanita berries were mixed with those of the skunk-brush, and were not used, it is claimed, to prepare the so-called "manzanita-cider." Various other berries were gathered, mashed, and dried in cakes and kept for winter food. Pine-nuts were much relished, and camass and other roots were to be had in some abundance.

Animal foods included nearly everything available. Deer were moderately abundant, and their meat was dried and preserved. Rabbits, squirrels, and other small game, together with ducks, geese, grouse, and birds' eggs formed the larger part of their animal food. Dogs were not eaten, but crickets, grasshoppers, and angle-worms were not disdained. Salmon were secured up as far as the Falls in abundance, and were dried and kept in large baskets, or sometimes crumbled into a coarse meal. Other sorts of fish, together with crayfish and mussels, were also eagerly sought.

Food was cooked either by boiling with hot stones in baskets or by baking in an oven of heated stones, or was roasted. No salt was used, it is said, by the Achomawi, as they thought its use caused sore eyes.

Various methods were employed in hunting deer. The use of pitfalls, which gave the name to Pit river, was common. These pits were six to ten feet deep, covered lightly with sticks and earth, and were excavated in deer trails. No one must look down into the pit after it is dug, as to do so would make the deer look down, and avoid the trap. All the earth removed was carried far away in baskets. Other methods used for getting deer included setting nooses; driving, either by beaters or by fire; stalking with a deer's head for a disguise and a whistle to imitate the cry of the fawn; and running down on snowshoes in winter. There were many regulations in regard to deer hunting. Children must keep quiet while the hunters are away; the latter must not use the common terms for the ordinary foods or the various places they passed, as to do so would bring bad weather; and the jaw-bones of all deer killed must be hung up on trees. The first day of a hunt there was a ceremony in the evening. The food for the evening meal was spread

out, but before eating, the leader of the party must take certain roots, chew them, and then throw a little toward every prominent mountain in the region, saying "Here, here is food we have brought for you! Eat it!"

Rabbits were either snared in nets by drives, and killed with a club, or shot with bow and arrow. Spring-traps were also sometimes used for rabbits, as well as for squirrels, wildcats, etc. Ducks and geese were caught in nooses hung from ropes stretched across a stream close to the water. The two ropes were placed close together, and each noose was tied to both ropes, so that the two were held closely in contact. The nooses were then slipped between the two ropes which held the nooses open. In salmon fishing, nets, spears, and traps were used. The first method was confined mainly to small seines, held across the mouths of tributary streams, while men went above and drove the fish down into the nets. Dip-nets were used for suckers and trout. Spearing was done with the usual salmon-gig. Traps and weirs were partly of posts and brush, and partly of stone. They were frequently put at the foot of a small fall, and were provided with long poles arranged along the top, slanting up from the top of the dam, and extending out four or five feet. The fish in trying to leap over, fell back into a net spread along these poles, or onto a rough open-work platform laid on them. Fish-hooks, of two pieces of bone, were used for trout and pike. In drying salmon, the fish was split, the backbone removed, and the fish dried in the sun. It was then slightly roasted, doubled up, and packed in large baskets which were set on bark and covered with large slabs of it, or else put up in the branches of juniper trees, from which the bark and lower branches had been removed.

The bow and arrow were the chief weapons of the Indians of this area. The former was of the broad sinew-backed type common to the northern portion of California, and seems to have differed little from that of the Klamath River stocks. If anything, it was more like the Maidu bow. Among the Atsugewi, at least, the bow was held horizontally in shooting, with the palm of the hand up. Each man marked his arrows in a different way. Quivers were of wild-cat, coyote, or otter skins. Elk-hide armor was used, consisting of a long gown-like garment, covering the whole body, the head also

being protected by a strip of hide. Grizzly-bear skins were sometimes used in place of elk-hide. Rod or stick armor was also made, the hard mountain mahogany and the service-berry being the woods used for the purpose.

There was comparatively little opportunity for the Indians of this region to make use of canoes. They made them, however, burning and digging them out of yellow-pine or cedar logs. They are said to have been rather square-ended, and ranged up to twenty-five feet in length. Both poles and paddles were used to propel them. Rafts of tule were also employed.

Baskets formed the main portion of the household goods. These were made exclusively of twined weaving. They were as a rule soft and pliable, except the conical pack baskets, which were strengthened and stiffened by the addition of four sticks. The baskets and their decorations have been elsewhere discussed.¹ Mush paddles were used in stirring acorn soup, but were mostly undecorated. Spoons were little used, although the breast-bone of the duck was employed for the purpose. A porcupine tail was used as a comb. Pipes were of wood or soft stone, tubular, and rarely more than six or seven inches in length. The musical instruments in use were a flute and a whistle. The former had four holes and was played only for pleasure, and never in summer on account of the snakes. The whistles were generally double, of bird-bone or elder, and these were used in dances by shamans. The split-stick rattle and deer-hoof rattle were both in use.

A number of games were played by the Achomawi and Atsugewi. The four-stick game, using ten counters, was a favorite; also the stick game in which thirty or forty slender sticks and twenty counters were used. A form of the hand game was known to the women, in which they used two pairs of sticks about two and a half inches long, one of each pair being marked by a band. The hands were concealed under a handkerchief about the neck, and the opponents guessed the relative positions of the sticks. Ten counters were used in this game. The same game, played in the normal California manner with grass, was employed by the men, and so far

¹Basketry Designs of the Indians of Northern California, *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, XVII, 14 et seq.

as information goes was practically identical with the form described among the Maidu. Dice games do not seem to have been played. The double-ball game, and a form of foot-ball in which three players take part on each side, are also in use. The double-ball game is played chiefly by women. The Atsugewi at least had a form of hockey, played by the men, and a game in which arrows were shot at rolling disks of bark; also one in which spears were thrown, he who could place his nearest to the first one thrown, being the winner.

For the greater part, the Achomawi and also the Atsugewi were at war with the Modoc. These latter frequently made incursions into Achomawi territory, but the Achomawi rarely attempted to retaliate in kind. In such little trade as there was between the two peoples, the Achomawi gave beads for furs and bows. Intermarriage sometimes took place. With the Wintun there was considerable trade, skins being offered for beads, and in general the relations were friendly. With the Maidu of Big Meadows, the Atsugewi traded, and were on pretty good terms, intermarriages being not uncommon.

Little investigation has as yet been made in regard to social organization and kindred topics. So far as information was obtained, there is no trace of a clan system, and these people therefore are similar in this respect to the majority of California Indians and those of the adjacent portions of the Great Basin. Governmentally, it may be said that the chiefs or village head-men had somewhat greater power than among the Maidu, resembling in this the chiefs among the Shasta. Each considerable village had its chief, whose brothers or whose children succeeded him, the eldest son usually taking the lead. The chiefs were not elective, and could not be deposed (?). There were four or five important chiefs among the Atsugewi, and rather more than this among the Achomawi. In war these men seem to have led the people, but there were apparently no general leaders or chiefs who controlled several villages, or the whole group.

Puberty ceremonials centered about the piercing of the ears. Boys have this done at the age of seventeen or thereabouts. The ear-lobe is pierced with a sharp wooden awl, and as soon as it is done,

the operator, who is generally the father, shouts loudly and whips the boy with a bow-string. The boy at once runs away to some distant lake or spring, where he bathes and swims all night, fasting. As he goes, the man who has pierced his ears, calls to the mountains and to the Deer-woman to watch over the boy. Early in the morning the boy runs back again, lighting a series of fires as he goes. While he is bathing during the night, he may find something in the water, or may dream of it later when he takes a little sleep. That object or animal is his protector for life, and comes to warn him of danger and to aid him. Should he fail to get such a guardian, he may not try a second time. After this first experience, he must spend several nights alone in the hills, fasting, building small fires, piling up heaps of stones, and sleeping but little. All the time he is absent he must drink through a reed, failure to comply with which regulation would lead to the loss of his front teeth. In returning home, he may not come directly back, but must stop at a distance. His mother brings him here a little food, after eating which he goes off again into the hills. By no means all who go off thus see visions or get protectors. Most of those who do become shamans.

In the case of a girl, the proceedings are as follows: The ears are pierced in the same manner as described, and as soon as it is finished, the operator seizes the girl, lifts her from the ground and lets her down again, and then strikes her with an old basket. At once the girl runs off, while the operator prays to the mountains to be good to her. The girl gathers wood and returns at dusk, and all night dances back and forth before the fire which she builds. She faces constantly toward the east. Other people dance near her, and also inside the house. She must sleep and eat but little, and can have no meat or fish, and must not smell them cooking. She wears a band of braided bark about her forehead, and a new pair of moccasins on her feet. Sometimes she puts strong-smelling herbs in her nostrils so that she may not smell meat cooking. The people who dance and sing near her have a deer-hoof rattle. The girl dances thus every night for five nights, and at sunrise she stops, is lifted and dropped as before, and immediately runs off to the eastward, seizing, as she goes, the rattle from one of the dancers or singers. On the last morning she returns quickly, is sprinkled by

her mother with pounded fir-needles, then bathes, and the ceremony is finished. The whole ceremony of the dances is repeated at the next two menstrual periods. Later in life the monthly seclusion lasts three or four days, and certain food restrictions are in force.

A man who desires to obtain a wife asks the parents of the girl directly, and if they approve, the affair is settled at once by the payment by the suitor of such property as has been agreed on, and he then takes up his residence with the girl's family. He stays there, hunting and working for his wife's family for a month or two, and then if he has parents, takes his wife to their house ; if not, he remains with his wife's family. Child betrothal was not infrequently the custom. If a man is dissatisfied with his wife, or if she be barren, he can send her back to her family. If a man's father tells him to send his wife back, he must obey. Polygamy was general, the number of wives depending on a man's wealth. The first wife was always regarded as the most important. "Berdashes," or men-women, were not uncommon.

In childbirth there were food restrictions for both man and wife which lasted until the umbilical cord dropped off. Both parents must live apart, in a small hut, the man gathering much wood. All water taken by the mother must have a little earth mixed with it. At the end of the period of seclusion, both man and wife must bathe. If a child is stillborn, the parents must keep up the food restrictions for several months. A child's first teeth, when they come out, are placed in its fæces.

The funeral customs of these Indians are simple. The body was buried as soon as possible after death, generally in a flexed position, and if the family could afford it, in a large basket. It was laid on its side in the grave, facing to the east. All the property of the deceased was put in the grave with the body, together with gifts made by relatives and friends. Sometimes, and particularly if death took place at a distance from home, cremation was employed, in which case the property was burned with the body, and the ashes afterward buried. Generally the house of the deceased was burned. There is said to have been no dance held at the time of the funeral ceremonies among the Achomawi, although the Atsugewi say that they themselves had a dance, in which men carried the weapons of

the deceased, and all relatives threw handfuls of dust into the air. In mourning, the hair was cut, and pitch put on the face and head by the widow, who wore it thus for two or three years. The Atsugewi state that men sometimes put pitch on also. The widow made a belt of the hair she cut off, and wore it. If a man's wife died among the Atsugewi, he cut his hair, and his nearest female cousin wore the belt made of it. Widows also wore a necklace of deerskin, with beads of pitch. The name of the dead was not spoken. No widow may remarry until her hair grows down to her upper arm again, and then she may marry only her husband's brother.

Notes on the shaman have been previously published,¹ but some additional particulars may be added here. The youth who is fasting and bathing at puberty dreams or has visions of the thing which is to be his guardian spirit. The thing seen may be a bird, an arrow, a reed, or a tree, or it may be a "disease person" or spirit in human form which sings to him, and appears before him. He must sing the song that the supernatural being sings to him, and very carefully follow his instructions, else he will fall ill. The shaman can hear the mysterious objects or beings singing ever afterward. According to the thing seen is the shaman's power to cure or cause disease—from one coming the power over one sickness, from another the power over a different one. In curing a patient, the shaman among the Atsugewi makes use of songs and also of the *qagu*.² One of these is tied to a pole set up near the house, or is held in the hand, or used to sprinkle the patient. The *qagu* tells the shaman where the pain is, and aids him to remove it. While dancing, the shaman frequently bleeds at the mouth.

The "pains" grow in size and strength by killing people. If the shaman does not catch the "pain" when it returns to him after killing the person it has been shot into, he loses all control over it, and it goes about killing people of its own initiative. This is the cause of epidemics. The only sure way to put an end to its depredations is to kill the shaman to whom such a "pain" belongs, for at the death of a shaman all his "pains" die also. Sometimes a

¹ Some Shamans of California, *Journal of American Folk-lore*, xvii, 24-25.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

"pain" is sent by an enemy to a village. It causes much sickness, so that a shaman has to be sent for. When he comes, he finds the spot where the "pain" lies concealed in the ground. Then, with the aid of another shaman, he tries to drive it out. After dancing all night, the two shamans and all the people of the village gather in a circle about the spot. One of the shamans approaches, holding out his hand in order to scare the "pain." Sometimes the latter tries to deceive the shaman by urinating upward, but the wise man is not deceived by such trickery. He waits till by the force of his power the "pain" is forced out of the ground, and then catches it on the end of the middle finger of his hand. The "pain" cannot escape sideways, because of the ring of people; it cannot go back into the ground, nor can it fly upward, as the shaman's guardian spirits hover above, and drive it back. Gradually the "pain" is forced to the palm of the shaman's hands, while he is staggering about as if intoxicated. Suddenly he shuts his hand, imprisoning the "pain," and at once falls senseless. The second shaman then brings a basket of water, plunges the fist of the first shaman into this, and then slowly the first shaman revives. The "pain" is softened and made innocuous by the water. When the shaman revives, he tells the people what the "pain" has told him in his trance, and who it was that sent it. The "pain" is then destroyed, either by swallowing, or burying it in the ground under the fire, or is sent back to its sender, with orders to kill him. If a shaman tries to kill a person, and is found out, the relatives endeavor to kill the shaman, and then mutilate his body.

In doctoring, the shaman wears a bunch of woodpecker feathers, like the mysterious *qaqu*, on his head. Sometimes also he wears a yellowhammer band like those of the Maidu, or a strip of mink or other skin. He wears the skin of the animal whose spirit appeared to him in his dream at puberty. If he saw the bear, he wears a bear-claw necklace. The shaman also acts like the animal so far as he can, pawing up the ground or digging as a bear will for roots, or howling like a coyote.

Ghosts are seen about burial places. They emerge from the ground and sink back into it again. Shamans see them more commonly. For a common man to see a ghost causes a peculiar sick-

ness. The man feels very sleepy, has a headache, and swelling over the eyes. Shamans can by dreaming determine the trouble in such cases, and by sucking the forehead, cure the patient. No "pain" however is removed.

After death the spirit was thought to go to the westward, to an underworld where all things were delightful. To reach this spot, the spirit travels along the Milky Way. Spirits may return to this world and appear in dreams. Some shamans can visit this other world, and tell of their experiences. People have died and come to life again and told of their journey. They came to a place where the sun goes down, and looked over the edge of the opening into the underworld. Just before death, the spirit leaves the body, and stands about looking on at people, and at such times the shaman can see the spirits, and tries to seize them and force them to reënter their bodies.

There seems to have been comparatively little in the way of ceremonials apart from those described. The Achomawi and Atsugewi thus accord fairly closely with the Shasta, in this feature of the paucity of ceremonial. The mythology of this area has already been discussed.¹

In conclusion, it may be said that from this brief sketch of the culture of the Achomawi and Atsugewi it seems clear that they were similar on the whole to the Shasta, although with several minor features reminding one of the Maidu and other central Californian peoples. The similarity to the Shasta is shown most strikingly in the religious beliefs and mythology, the material culture exhibiting more the influence of the changed environment.

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¹The Mythology of the Shasta-Achomawi, *Amer. Anthropologist*, n. s., VII, 607-612.