Myth and Reality: The Antiquity of the Kumeyaay

Florence C. Shipek

University of Wisconsin-Parkside

Abstract

Several Kumeyaay myths and Kumeyaay band territories are related to geological events which indicate the antiquity of the Kumeyaay occupation of their territory which extended from the coast to the Colorado River for about fifty miles both north and south of the Southern California - Northern Baja California border.

A major debate concerning the Kumeyaay (also known as Diegueño-Kemía or Ipai/Tipai) centers on the date of their occupation of the coastal region of Southern California and Northern Baja California. Some archaeologists, looking at material culture remains, have placed their "entrance" into the region as between about 2000 to 1000 years ago based upon the identification of particular complexes (1) of stone tools, mortars, and/or pottery (Warren 1964; Rogers 1945). Others see no break in the archaeological record but rather a gradual addition of the so-called "Yuman" items to the earlier culture termed "La Jollan" (Brand pers.com.; Moriarty 1966). The La Jollan culture has been dated by Carbon 14 as existing from 3000 to 4000 years ago. Linguists, looking at the degree of difference which exists between the languages of the Quechan and Kumeyaay seem to consider that the split between the two took place up to 2000 years ago (Langdon, Hinton, pers.com.). The evidence to be presented here appears to agree with those archaeologists who see a gradual transition between the archaeological material cultures termed "La Jollan" and that termed "Diegueño" or "Yuman I". The data consists of myths describing geological events and of the relationship of geographical patterns of southern Kumeyaay band territories to geological features.

The first important myth referring to a geological event is the Kumeyaay origin myth. The basic outline of the story starts with a Creator God who creates two brothers who exist under water. The eldest closes his eyes to rise through the water to the surface and then he creates dry land. Then his brother comes up to land with his eyes open and is blinded. Next, after several attempts, the first brother creates men and women. The crucial point here is that the brothers lived under the water and came up to dry land to create the Kumeyaay humans. To correlate with geology, studies over the past twenty years have revealed that at the close of the Pleistocene, beginning about 12,000 years ago, the sea level rose in several stages. The last relatively rapid rise ended about 7,000 years ago (Van Andel 1981). Several of these rapidly rising stages were of sufficiently short duration that one could look out and say, "Grandpa used to live out there, under the ocean". Since 7000 years ago, the ocean has risen about 60 feet at a much slower but not at a steady rate. The last rise that was rapid enough such that a generation would note the rise occurred by 7000 years ago. If this story and the rising sea level stood alone it would not necessarily indicate antiquity
for the Kumeyaay. However, several other myths indicate approximately the same geological age.

Further, this Kumeyaay creation myth contrasts with one of the legends recorded by Fr. Geronimo Boscana (1933) for the coastal San Luiseno and San Juaneño. The Luiseno myth states that during the creation time, the sea was drying up and the fish became more and more crowded and, not having room to live, were dying. The story continues that before all died, the water rose again giving the fish space to live. This story more nearly correlates with events which would have occurred at Lake Cahuilla (Lake LeConte or Blake Sea, now known as the Salton Sea). Originally the Lake Cahuilla Region was a northern extension of the Gulf of California which was divided from the gulf by delta deposits of the ancient Colorado and Gila-Salt drainages. When the combined rivers swung north on their delta, they filled the Cahuilla basin, often to overflowing. When they swung south on the delta and became entrenched in that direction for a period of time, the lake formed by the northward swing would begin drying. It has been estimated that approximately 60 years are required for the lake to dry completely under modern climatic conditions (Waters 1980). During its drying phase, as the lake became smaller and saltier, fish would be dying in large numbers around its edges. Another swing of the river north on the delta would refill the basin allowing the surviving fish to live. Therefore the myth that Fr. Boscana believed a product of "fertile heathen" imaginations, described actual recurring events at Lake Cahuilla and suggests that locale as the origin of the coastal San Luiseno-Juaneño people. This contrasts with both the Kumeyaay creation myth and with the Kumeyaay legends about Lake Cahuilla.

The second Kumeyaay myth concerns the development of the differences between the language of the Kumeyaay and that of the Quechan as reported by both northern and southern Kumeyaay. According to the elders who repeated this story, in the past both the Quechan and the Kumeyaay spoke the same language. Then the waters rose in the desert and remained there a long time cutting off contact between the two areas. It was not possible to go back and forth regularly as they had done earlier. When the waters finally went down again, the Kumeyaay discovered that they were no longer speaking the same language as the Quechan. The languages had become different.

While other high lake intervals probably existed between the beach level dated at 25,000 B.P. and the post 2000 B.P. levels, they have not definitely been identified and dated. The geologists have indicated that since 2000 B.P. at least 4 lacustral intervals have reached the 40 ft. level (Waters 1980, Waters et al 1980) which would separate the two populations. The first of these rises is dated approximately between 700 to 850 A.D., the second between 950 A.D. and 1150 A.D., the third between 1200 and 1350 A.D. These high lake level dates are reported to be accurate to +/- 50 years. Some of these high lake levels (or the repetition of high lake levels) could correlate with this Kumeyaay story and thus account, at least in part, for the differentiation of the Quechan and Kumeyaay languages. Additional partial filling of the lake basin could have occurred many times from partial overflow through the extensive distribu-tory system of the delta, especially during recurring short moist climatic cycles (Fritts 1965).
The third Kumeyaay myth having a geological basis concerns the Sweetwater River and its origin in the Cuyamacas. According to Johnson (1916),

"The Indians claim that Corta Madera Mt., or Hilsh Ki'ê (Pine tree), as they call it, was once a part of the Cuyamacas, and dwelt in what is now the lower part of Green Valley. They tell a story of a great upheaval of nature which took place in prehistoric times, after which Hilsh Ki'ê was discovered far removed from his brother peaks."

According to this story, the Cuyamaca Peaks, numbering more than now, were brothers that quarreled over a spring (a young woman), "Ah-ha Wi-Ah-ha" (Water Cold Water), who had betrothed herself to "Ah-ha Coo-mulc" or "Water Sweet". Her betrothed wished to carry her away, far below the mountains. The brothers fought over this, with "Hilsh Ki'ê" protecting, the spring's right to join "Water Sweet". However, he lost the battle and fled, finally resting at what is now Corta Madera.

The crucial geological event is not the battle of the mountains but the running away of the spring to join "Water Sweet". This story presents a mythical description of a stream capture. Geologically, that portion of the Sweetwater River flowing through the Cuyamacas originally was a consequent stream flowing in a southwesterly direction all the way to the ocean. As the western portion of what is now the Sweetwater River worked headward, due its shorter distance to sea level, it was able to cut off the headwaters of the consequent southwest flowing stream. This southern mountain region also has numerous faults which, with earthquakes and differential uplifts, has also affected the flow direction of a number of other streams and probably also increased the height of Corta Madera allowing the grown of long needle pine trees which distinguish the Cuyamaca Peaks. While no date has been placed upon the stream capture, the erosion along the path of the capture seems to indicates an age greater than 2000 to 3000 years ago.

The final evidence for an early occupation of this region by Kumeyaay ancestors concerns the relationship of geological features to inland band routes for reaching their areas of coastal rights which for several southern Kumeyaay bands differ from the standard southern California pattern. Both inland San Luiseno bands and the northern section of Kumeyaay bands (as far south as the Cuyamaca Mountain and Laguna Mountain bands, including Cuyapaípe), on their annual trips to the coast for seafoods and coastal materials went along trails which paralleled the modern streams but generally along ridges or gently westward sloping mesas. However, members of the Tecate, Old Campo, and Nehi bands indicated that they went to the coast, not along the modern streams, but across ridges to beaches which existed to the southwest of their main territory, that their coastal rights were at those beaches.

Examining the topographic maps for this inland region and northern Baja California, the inland streams are seen to flow first toward the southwest and then most interior drainages turn sharply to the northwest. Along the coast and south of Tiajuana, the coastal
streams and valleys head northeast from the coast and are aligned with the inland streams above the points at which the inland streams change direction to flow northwestern. These short southern coastal streams end in high mesas or ridges which separate them from the inland drainage. The short coastal streams are apparently the continuation of the earlier streams consequent upon original southwest sloping surface which preceded the Tiajuana uplift. The Tiajuana uplift occurred after the beach terrace was formed which is presently about 5' above sea level at San Diego and gradually rises to 25' above sea level at Tiajuana. The highest part of the uplift centers inland and south of Tiajuana. Thus, these southernmost inland Kumeyaay bands are apparently following a route to the coast established before the Tiajuana uplift changed the pre-existing stream direction to its present pattern which starts toward the southwest and then turns sharply northwest to the coast. This particular southern group of inland bands are the only ones that have been recorded as having this unusual route. All other bands have been recorded as following the standard pattern, that is, they follow the modern stream to the coast regardless of its changing directions. Therefore, this evidence suggests that for these southern Kumeyaay, this particular route had been established when it had paralleled the stream pattern which existed prior to the development of the Tiajuana uplift.

Two other features of Southern California cultures need to be examined in conjunction with these myths, marriage patterns and dialect differences. First the analysis of the San Diego Mission Marriage Registers (Shipek 1983) indicates that a number of intertribal marriages were already in existence when the Spanish arrived. The early records indicate both intervillage marriages between widely separate Kumeyaay regions and also numerous marriages between Kumeyaay and all of the surrounding ethnic nationalities with marriages to Cocopa Quechan, and San Luiseno being the most frequent of the intertribal marriages. Thus since intermarriage and, from other ethnographic sources (Davis 1919, Luomala 1973, Shipek 1983) ceremonial and trade relationships were equally as frequent, contact between the Quechan and other river Yuman-speaking peoples were on a regular basis. Thus any period during which contact was impossible - as when Lake Cahuilla was full - would have a major effect on the interrelationships and thus increase language differences. However, the regular intermarriage patterns did not in themselves cause language merging or confusion. For example, the Dominican missionary for the Kumeyaay area of Northern Baja California from 1772 to 1790, Fr. Sales wrote that he knew one Kumeyaay woman who had had 3 husbands, each from a different tribe and speaking a different language. Commenting on the "polyglot household", he wrote that the children by each father spoke the father's language as well as the mothers.

While discussing language level difference, and the development of such differences, one San Luiseno legend must be repeated. According to Boscana (1933) the coastal San Juaneño section told of a band becoming so large that it pressed its resources and split. A group left under the leadership of the Old "Noot'is" daughter and upon leaving, they deliberately changed some of the words in their language,
because to become a separate band, they must speak a separate language, thus recognizing that linguistic change would occur after separation. However, for these ethnic nations holding such beliefs and practices, the rate of language change at both dialect and language level could actually be more rapid than the "normal" expected rate of language change.

Conclusion

These several myths relating to geological events combined with the unusual pattern of southern band routes to the ocean present evidence that ancestors of the present Kumeyaay occupied this region for longer, possibly much longer, than 2000 years. That they are possibly the direct descendants of the creators of the archaeological "La Jollan" culture is suggested when this evidence is combined with the archaeological evidence at stratified sites of a gradual transition from the La Jollan Culture to that designated Yuman 1. However, it must also be recognized that a possibility exists that Yuman speaking peoples entered this region in much the same manner that the Shoshonean speaker peoples must have originally infiltrated the region which they occupied at the time of Spanish contact. Evidence exists that the San Luiseno were still using these methods to continue expanding after 1769 (Bean per. com.; White 1963; Shipek 1977). After a raid or battle, they arranged for some of their women to marry the opposing band. Gradually, more of their members infiltrated into the other band until the band became "Luiseno" in character. A variant method would not involve a raid or battle, but simply a small group entering and asking permission to stay, and then marrying the local women. Gradually, as more and more entered, their numbers simply submerged the original inhabitants, changing or modifying the language spoken to that of the newcomers.

Footnote

(1) A comment must be made concerning the archaeological evidence derived from the examination of material culture remains. They sort and classify the tools and pottery based upon a variety of material features observed in these items. Archaeologists name and classify "cultures" based upon recurring combinations of material items which differ both areally and through time. Thus descendants of the same people in the same area may have an entirely different material culture than that of their forebears. Furthermore, at the time of Spanish contact, Kumeyaay territory extended from the ocean over the foothills and mountains to the desert, including a small extension to the Colorado River. Within this widely diverse ecological region, at any one time, material differences would exist between ceramic and tool complexes found at the coast and those in the mountains or in the desert. However, these represent ecological differences rather than ethnic differences, because many tools needed and used in one ecological zone were neither needed, nor carried (Shipek 1968) into another ecological zone for use by the identical individual. This characteristic may be assumed to have existed in the earlier periods.
also. Further, over time as the local population became more efficient in learning to use and process all the potential foods in the region and earlier major foods became relatively unimportant, new or different tools might be developed and the use of older tool forms cease. Thus material tool complexes could change in one location and also vary over space with only one ethnic group occupying a region as diverse as that of the Kumeyaay.
Fr. Geronimo Boscana, Chinigchinich in Chinigchinich, a revised and annotated version of Alfred Robinson’s translation of Father Geronimo Boscana’s Historical Account of the beliefs, usages, customs, and extravagancies of the Indians of the Mission of San Juan Capistrano called the Acagchemen tribe. Edited by P.T. Hanna. Santa Ana: Fine Arts Press. (1933).


OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON LINGUISTICS

Number 13


James E. Redden, Editor

The papers were presented in the order in which they were read at the
meetings except for those in the 1983 conference which were rearranged
through it was not formally

The 1983 HOKAN-PENUTIAN LANGUAGES Conference was at the University of
California, San Diego, June 19-21, 1983. We greatly acknowledge all the
work done by Margret Higgin and others in the Department of Linguistics
in 1983, which made the meeting so enjoyable and productive.

The 1984 HOKAN-PENUTIAN LANGUAGES Conference was at the University of
California, Berkeley, June 22-24, 1984, and was held in honor of Bronislaw
Malinowski. We thank you to Lauretta Nunez and others in the Department
of Linguistics at USC for all the work they did in making the meeting enjoyable
and productive.

The 1985 HOKAN-PENUTIAN LANGUAGES Conference was at the University of
California, Los Angeles, June 19-21, 1985. We are again indebted to Margret
Higgin and the Department of Linguistics at USC for all the work they
did in making the meeting enjoyable and productive.

The 1986 HOKAN-PENUTIAN LANGUAGES Conference will be held at the University
of California, Santa Cruz, June 19-21, 1986, as part of the Mary Jane
Festval Conference.

Only a very few copies of the proceedings of earlier meetings are still
available from the Department of Linguistics, Southern Illinois University,
Carbondale, IL 62901. We are endeavoring to save and make copies of
these proceedings in some annual form.

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PREFACE

In 1981 the Hokan-Yuman Languages Workshop began meeting jointly with the Penutian Languages Conference. In 1982 the Hokan-Penutian Languages Conference began meeting with specialists from other disciplines, anthropologists, archeologists, geographers, and others. Because of the very diverse nature of such a group, various specialists desired to publish their papers in a variety of places in order for specialists in their disciplines to have ready access to them. This meant that there were no proceedings for the 1983, 1984, and 1985 Hokan-Penutian Languages Conferences. Papers from linguists who gave papers at these three meetings have been assembled in this volume.

The papers are presented in the order in which they were read at the meetings except the Callaghan paper on patridominace and Proto-Utian, which was discussed at length at the 1984 meeting, though it was not formally presented.

The 1983 Hokan-Penutian Languages Conference met at the University of California, San Diego, June 16-18, 1983. We greatly acknowledge all the work done by Margaret Langdon and others in the Department of Linguistics at UCSB, which made the meeting so enjoyable and useful.

The 1984 Hokan-Penutian Languages Conference met at the University of California, Berkeley, June 22-24, 1984, and was held in honor of Abraham Halpern. Our thanks go to Leanne Hinton and others in the Department of Linguistics at UCB for all they did to make the meeting enjoyable and productive.

The 1985 Hokan-Penutian Languages Conference met at the University of California, San Diego, June 19-21, 1985. We are again indebted to Margaret Langdon and the Department of Linguistics at UCSB for all the work they did in hosting another pleasant and useful meeting.

The 1986 Hokan-Penutian Languages Conference will be held at the University of California, Santa Cruz, June 23-27, 1986, as part of the Mary Haas Festival Conference.

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James E. Redden
Carbondale, May 1986
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