

Oregon myth (Kitimat)

almost immediately she was cured. Later tsák took her as his wife.

There were many other haláits that were famous in the tsem-siyán groups. All swénsk haláits were hereditary, and all had the same pattern.

Beynon's last notebook

(from notes taken from late Henry Pierce of Port Simpson, also information from Helen Clifton)

Not far from Kitamat there was a large lake which a chief had to travel to get to his hunting grounds. Many times a being appeared on the lake and seized these people, and many were lost.

A young Prince of this house and two of his head men decided they would try to destroy this evil thing that brought such grief among them. They ^{decided to} ~~make~~ a large raft to attempt to capture the being in the lake, and went down to the shore, taking a canoe with them.

Soon they saw a large canoe coming down the lake, bearing only one person. The canoe seemed to be a live ~~being~~ being, which came down the lake without being paddled or sailed.

When the three men saw this they stopped working on the raft. The canoe then turned about and went back to the head of the lake. While the three men were trying to decide whether or not to follow it, the canoe again came down from the head of the lake, headed for the place where the three men were. Once more it turned about and went ~~back~~ to the head of the lake. Thus the three men knew that the being in the canoe wished them to follow, and they guessed that perhaps it had something to show them. So they went to the head of the lake, and there they saw the being in the strange canoe submerge and they knew that the canoe was a monster of the lake.

Next a house was seen to emerge from the lake, and a man was dancing in front of the house. The dancer was dressed in chief's regalia, and he led another man who seemed to be under a strange influence. The latter was calling out yóp yóp yóp . . .

Then the watchers saw that the man who was being led was running about in front of the house, devouring what appeared to

be the flesh of a child all the while he was dancing. Others in the house continually called out yóp yóp The dancer wore a cedar barkring around his neck and another on his head.

The house before which the dancing was taking place slowly sank into the waters of the lake until it disappeared.

The young chief of the party of three had recognized that it was obviously a chief they had seen dancing, and he at once termed the performance cannibal or xgédem haláit. (xgédem means partaking of human beings). This performance he claimed exclusively for chiefs or royalty.

The three men had been there for some time when they saw another house rise up, and before it stood what seemed the same being, singing "I will destroy everything of value that I see".

Then a man garbed as a chief, and wearing a cedar bark ring on his head and one around his neck, began to destroy valuable boxes and other property laying about. Yet he would not touch those things that had cedar bark rings on them. All the while the dancer was singing that he was destroying everything.

The chief of the three onlookers knew that the dancer was a chief, and claimed this dance as the exclusive right of chiefs, which would bear the name ludzistá (meaning to wantonly destroy, kwakú¹ language).

The watchers saw that compensation was made to the owner of the articles destroyed. The chief knew that this denoted wealthy standing, and that distribution of wealth in this manner showed one's disregard for wealth. He noted also that the people could protect goods they did not want harmed by laying a lu²i or cedar barkring on the article. Hanging in front of the dancing house

was a large cedar bark ring which made it taboo for any except initiated members of the haláit group in session at the time, and made known to all others that they must not enter.

(Beynon's note: I was told at Bella Bella that ludzistá actually meant "destroying things as if crazy".)

mi'etlá The three men waited about after the second house had disappeared into the lake, as they could hear strange noises and a continual singing. Then suddenly a third house appeared on the waters, and the same being stood in front of it, but this time there were many more people. This time the chief was in the role of master of ceremonies and the initiates were of the lakagst group.

The initiate was brought to the master haláit, ^{then} there was an exchange of valuable gifts to the haláit, who then rose while his attendants sang and beat with wooden beaters on a long flat board. The chief led the initiate, who was accompanied on each side by the singing and drumming attendants, to the centre of the house immediately under the smoke hole. While the initiate danced in a very insane manner the master of ceremonies took him and the initiate seemed to disappear, just as the master haláit made motions as if he had thrown the initiate through the smoke hole, saying "My son has gone to the heavens, there to acquire wisdom".

Then the master haláit returned to his seat and another initiate was brought before him. The person bringing the initiate called out, "Oh! Great haláit, install some of your wisdom and power into this poor ordinary person". Placing gifts in front of the haláit the donor called out "This is to partly compensate the great haláit for using his power for this poor ordinary person".

Then the haláit arose and led the initiate, who was dancing in frenzied fashion, to the middle of the house, as he had done

before, made as if to throw the initiate through the smoke hole. When the initiate had disappeared the haláit said, "My son has gone to the heavens to acquire wisdom, he will return soon".

And so this chief initiated the many who had gathered, and then retired to his secret chambers. His attendants, who were all dressed in dancing costumes, gathered up all the wealth that had been given the haláit chief and took it out.

The three watchers then saw that all was quiet in the third house. Next morning they heard the sound of whistling. They looked at the house, and the strange whistling came from all around the house and even in the woods, and soon there seemed to be a big crowd of people all watching the surface of the water. Soon there appeared a huge white swan (gák) bearing on its back the first initiate, completely nude. As the initiate landed at the house the haláit led him around the house and then into the centre, where he was made to dance wildly in time to the beating of the wooden sticks (spáx) on the flat board and the singing of the attendants.
of the master haláit

When the dance/was completed, he went to the initiate and removed the cedar bark ring from his head and took him to where his people were seated. They then led the initiate away to seclude him where he could not contact or influence anyone.

It was necessary that the initiate stay with the haláit until all the influence of the haláit initiation had left him, before he could be permitted to mingle with the people again.

Next day again the supernatural naxnóx whistlessounded and soon the master haláit came and led out the initiate. After the haláit had danced he removed another cedar bark collar from the initiate's neck. The chief sucked the back of the initiate and then blew what he had "removed" through the smoke hole, thus

removing the last of the haláit influence. At last the initiate was free of all the haláit influence.

Gifts were again distributed to the haláit and all the attendants.

As this dance was not performed by the chief but by the lakagét (ordinary people) class of people, the watching chief announced to his two companions "This will be for all the people. And as the action is that of a crazy person we shall call it crazy dance, mi'etla."

Then the third house sank down into the waters of the lake, but the three men continued to wait, as they heard what sounded like more singing. After a long wait they saw another house emerge from the lake. When this was fully afloat the three watchers saw the same performer. This time the sounds of the whistles were different, but as before they were blowing all around the house. The dancing was even wilder than that in the mi'etla, but all the procedure was the same. The initiate was brought before the chief haláit three times, and each time there was a distribution of gifts to the haláit and his assistants. Since the same procedure was used in this as in the mi'etla performance, except that the actions were wilder and crazier, the performance was termed ?nuim, meaning crazier.

(Both terms, mi'etlá and ?nuim, were of kwakú (wetsta) origin).

When this fourth performance had finished the house sank back into the lake. But still the three watchers heard singing coming up from the water, and soon the strange canoe which seemed alive came to where the men waited, and in the canoe was the being

who had done the dancing, and he spoke to the three men.

"You have now seen four dances. The first two will be only for chiefs, and the last two will be for all the people, but will be led by the chiefs. The chiefs will act as master haláits and they will also choose the initiates that will be members. The chiefs of the tribes will be the heads of these groups, mi[?]etla and[?]nulim, and they shall be compensated by the families of the initiates.

"The other two groups; the xgédem (Cannibal) ha[?]áit, and the ludzistá are to be the exclusive property of the royal groups of each tribe, and ~~only a few shall be permitted to enter.~~ shall be very exclusive. Now you return to your village and start these new dances and groups. Those of your people whom you thought to be dead are the ones that you hear singing, and it is they that have given you these dances."

The three men returned to their village of Kitamat, thinking they had been gone only a few days. They found that they had been gone several years and had been given up as dead.

They taught the people the new things they had learned, and soon were travelling from village to village teaching the people: first the Kwakú[?] people, then gitxalás and tsem[?]siyán, who in turn took the knowledge to the nisg.é tribes on the Nass and the gitksán on the Upper Skeena. Many of the southern tribes which are of southern interior origin did not have any of the coast haláits, and they now learned from the kwakú[?] tribes whose influence extended from Kitamat as far south as the Cape Mudge people and to some parts of Vancouver Island, as well as into the big coastal inlets.