

1916 Kitkatla

halait

ceks daughter "returns"

legex's slave burnt

Secret societies

gaxg'e't

gaxhes

'mitëm

haldal'ogit

*Somewhat unclear
& mixed up?*

HALAIT

There are two different forms of halait connected with each other, but used at different times in the life of an individual.

When a male or female child reached the age of reason when it could remember things the father called in the halait to devise some way of showing the child to the village in some supernatural fashion.

An informant, Joshua tsibase, relates such an incident.

This is the first form of halait a child sees. It is the aim of every parent to be able to present all their children to the village in this spectacular way. This ceremony requires much wealth, to be given away, and the halait has to be richly paid if he is successful.

One form is this: the child is supposed to be dead and the halait is to bring back its life. The child makes an appearance from some other part of the village after its remains have been supposedly burnt or buried.

Another ^{method} means: The halait makes a carving to represent the child and this is shown to the people at some distance. The carving is moved about by some mechanical means and the child appears to fall down dead. The father at once runs down and gets the body, hiding it from view, and then gives the child (dummy) to the halait who covers it from sight while singing a special song. He then brings out the live boy or girl and shows the child to the people.

The incident Mr. tsiybase refers to was when céks brought out his child to have the halait perform. This happened when the

informant was a boy and he says:

"The chief cks sent word to all the villagers to come to his house to see his young daughter go through the haláit.

"When all the people were gathered in the house the haláit (medicine man) made his appearance and began to sing a song. (This song became the property of the person about to be put through/the halait/ and was sung as a nurserysong by him or her in after years.)

"Then the medicine man told us: "You will see the child walking along the beach near the water. It is hiding in a stump near the water and she will come up the beach and will then fall down and die."

"The people went outside and I saw what was like a little girl, with no clothes on although it was bitter cold and there was snow on the ground. This body walked along the beach and then turned toward the people and walked a little way and then fell down. The people began to cry and sing dirge songs and then the medicine man came out of the house and went down to where the body lay and picked it up and carried it into the house. There the medicine man sang a dirge song over the body of the child until the child began to move about. Then the medicine man said: "The child is breathing again", and the father gave huge gifts to all assembled there."

The informant stated that he afterwards found out that the body they saw on the beach was a wooden carving which was moved about mechanically and finally destroyed.

This haláit is the first step of the child into the world, and if a child has not taken this step it is not considered, even when it has grown up. Whenever it pleased other people they might rebuke a person who had never been performed upon by the medicine man,

saying: "You have never had the haláit."

This custom the informant declares to be the same as that among the gitga²ate, gid²as²tsu, and tsem²siyán and nisg.a people, and he quoted another incident relating to the time of legéx of the gispaxlóts group of tsem²siyén. This was done in honor of legéx's daughter . She would be shown to the people the following year and legéx wished to show his people something really wonderful so the event would be remembered always among ~~them~~ the gispaxlóts.

legéx travelled everywhere in search of another man who resembled him and he found one in giga²ate who resembled him so closely that when they both stood together /no one could tell them apart/.

When he had found this man he returned to his waiting people at their home at Metlakatla. Chief legéx then hid himself from everyone and his double took his place. He stayed with the wives of legéx and in every way this slave was treated as the great chief. He wanted for nothing.

Soon it was time for the people to move to the Naas river for the oolichen fishing season where they would stay all spring. The wives of legéx ~~put him~~ put him in a huge box and placed this in the canoe and he was taken onto the canoes and cared for by them.

Everyone thought that the slave was the real legéx and no one knew that the real chief was hiding.

When they came back to Metlakatla from the Nass river the gispaxlóts people got ready for a huge feast, for legéx was going to show his daughter to all the people and the medicine man was to prepare something none would forget. His daughter was a great princess. His wife was a gitxalá woman and so he invited the gitxalá people.

informant was a boy, and he says:

"The chief ~~calls~~ sent word to all the villagers to come to his house to see his young daughter go through the haláit. He wished to make a great event of this because his wife was of the house of he·l, which is why the gitxalá people were invited.

"When all the people had arrived in the house the haláit appeared and said: "leg.éx is going to leave us, to die and be burned." The people thought that this was only going to be a trick and that a dummy would be used.

"The gispaxlót's people took legéx's double (and the real legéx was hiding, yet the double was taken before the people and sang a dirge song and fell down as if struck. The haláit picked him up and bound him and then the gispaxlót's headman said:

"We are going to burn the chief and the 'great haláit' will restore the chief to us.")

"A big wood pile was then made up, the body placed upon this and a great fire was started in order to burn the body. All the guests remained, and the gispaxlót's people started to sing dirge songs. When the fire was out nothing remained but bones. The haláit went and picked them up and brought out a huge box. It was in this box that the real legéx was hiding. The haláit took the bones and put them in the box and sang songs which he alone knew, then he breathed into the box and sang again. Meanwhile the gispaxlót's sang dirges and beat upon drums. When the haláit had worked over the box for a long time the singers stopped, the haláit slowly moved around the box, then stopped and breathed into it again, and sang once more. The song was supposed to be the breath of the dead man and the haláit-ne-man medicine man was returning it to the large box. When the song was finished the medicine man touched the

box and a noise was heard in the box. Again the singers sang and the women cried dirge songs. The medicine man stopped them and examined the box again. When everyone was quiet they heard more and louder noises in the box and the medicine man said: "He is just coming to life." Again the people sang dirge songs. The guests never went away and they never moved.

The medicine man again stopped and went to the box and called out: "Are you all right now, legéx?". The people heard gwaus and the medicine man said: "He is coming to life now", so the singers sang once more for a long time and then the medicine man came to the box and unlaced the cover. legéx stood up and all the guests were frightened because they thought this was a ghost (be'lx) and they went out. When they had returned legéx stood up and said: "I am come back again and I want to show my daughter to you." The girl was shown to all the people and the gispaxlóts gave away many presents to all their guests.

Beynon's note: (I have heard the same from different men of the gispaxlóts and the only difference in the versions is the character of the man who was burned in place of the chief. Instead of being a gitga'ate, he was a slave from gid.aganitz people in Alaska where he was captured . According to the way I have heard it related by the tsemseyán, gispaxlóts, legéx' object in giving this was to show the people that he had the best and strongest haláit. He invited not only the gitxála but all the different tribes, even to the gidag.-anitz tribes and the haides as well.

(In the tales I have heard from the gispaxlóts I don't remember any mention of the nationality of legéx' wives, nor any mention of his children.)

After a child had gone through this form of presentation to the tribe its importance was always recognized. It was almost necessary for a person to do this or he would leave himself open to taunts from the tribe when he grew up.

And men, especially chiefs, often used to use this in calling other chiefs to feasts, and the feast was known as halaiten.

The informant did not wish to go intimately into the branches of the halait secret societies, which are divided into three divisions:

1. *g. ax g'e't* *g. ax g'e't* partaking of human beings. The members of this branch were supposed to practise cannibalism, eating human flesh.
2. *g. ax h'e's* *gaxh'e's* partaking of dogs. Another branch in which the members were supposed to eat dogs.
3. *?m'it'em* *?m'it'em* meaning the name of the club (*mi-ls*) used by this group. This third group was used only by princes, nobles, and chiefs. The object of this was more to show wealth. Men only belonged and they had certain privileges. When a member of this *?m'it'em* intended to give a feast he would first enter the house of some great man, holding in his hand his *?m'it'em* (club) which is carved. The carving represented which of the four phratries the owner of the club belonged to. For example, ~~is~~ a *gispewudwade* of *temlax'am* would have a *medi'k* (grizzly bear club or a club to represent a bear.) If he was of *gitnugun'aks* he would have some crest of that place on his pole, and similarly for the other phratries.

When he had entered the house he would at once destroy something everything of any value and the persons fled from the house.

In some cases if he did not want to destroy but wanted any article

he would go around to various houses and touch such articles with his club and they became his property. Afterwards the man gave a feast and returned the value of all the things taken or destroyed to their owners. Sometimes, the informant states, the person would give three or four times the value of the things destroyed.

This was a very exclusive part of the secret society, and no one below the nobles and chiefs were allowed to become members and then only if they had wealth and only the people belonging to the semgiget (chief) class and nobles belonged to this society. lek'agiget never belonged to this society.

The other branch of the haláit (secret society) was g.axgét (partaking of human beings).

((The informant was loath to give information on this society because since he had been converted he and the rest of the people have not practiced it.))

The informant says the object of this society was more to make the people afraid, and the g.axgét society could do what they wished with the people, ruling them and having more power over them than some of the chiefs.

The informant says that an initiate in this branch would run around and grab any one of the people assembled and bite them. When he had torn out a piece of flesh with his teeth he danced the haláit dance. He assumed a haláit name. All the people have names different from the ordinary names and these names are not inherited, unless the person becomes a member of the haláit and then he inherits whatever name his uncle may have had. The names are never used outside of the haláit. And each chief has his own name, which refers in some way to the phratry of his father.

For example, if the father were a laxskik (eagle) the name would in some way refer to the eagle. The informant's name was xsta'mgam gipaikel xski'k "the noisy flight of the eagle". The informant says that this name was always called in full when the person entered a feast or haláit. It would be called out:

is ^zdxins wi xstangem gipaikel. xski'k
 now enters great noise of flying eagle

(Beynon's note: The informant would not give more more secret society names of other men and chiefs, as he was afraid the people would hear of it and be angry.) The other names were of a similar kind however, and always referred to the paternal side of the holder of the name.

The other society was of the same lines as the above (gaxgét). This was known as gaxh's "partaking of dog". Instead of eating human flesh the people ate dog flesh. The informant says they were a special kind of white dog kept for this purpose, which was always well fed before being killed for this purpose.

The informant says that the reason the people had to eat the raw flesh was to make them brave and always strong in battle.

This society had names similar to those of the gaxgét. The head of all three societies were the medicine men or haláits. The haláit had more influence over the people and the chief came to him to use his influence on the people.

The medicine man was supposed to be able to foretell any event and give warning of any approaching death. He was expected to be able to tell who was the cause of the death, for the people in olden times always believed some people caused the death of another by supernatural power, and this was always the way a person died.

*Some phonetic
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This person was a haldáogit (witch). Not only the woman, but also the men practised this so as to kill anyone they wished. They took some belongings--dirty wearing apparel, spit or sometimes their victim's excrement--and placed this in their box, known as galdem haldaogit, "vessel of the haldaogit". This box was always hidden, and they performed a kind of dance over it, thus causing the death of the victim.

The haláit was supposed to be able to find this out, and often when he was called in to restore someone to health he would say that a cure was impossible because a haldáogit had control of the patient.

The informant stated that this haldáogit was first brought among the gitxalá by the wetstá people. The olden time people used to go to the wetstá people and pay them a big price to cause the death of some enemy, and they soon learned how to practise this themselves.

(Beynon's note: The people still believe in this form of death at the present time /1916/ and in this village there is a sort of medicine man who accuses different people of practising the art of haldáogit. The only difference from the old practise is that this man uses his influence in a very different way from the old medicine men. His method is: he first chooses the person he wishes to treat and goes to them saying he has dreamt of them and can tell them what to do. He says he can forestall the event about to fall on that person and so the people give him money and presents. This medicine man stays and brings his naxnóxs (supernatural beings) to stay with him and advise him. All the villagers believe faithfully in this man.)

The informant says that the medicine men themselves were often haldáogit.

COPIES

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