

## CANNIBAL HALÁIT

xgédem halait (x--partaking of; gsdem--human;  
halait--society or group)

This was the most exclusive group among the tsemseyán, for only two men, sqaqwét, chief of the git'andé, and saxsa'axt, chief of the gitwelgiyóts, belonged to the xgédem halait.

Any mention of death in the presence of an xgédem halait would cause them to become agitated and crave for human flesh. Until their craving was satisfied they had to be attended to and tied to the attendants. In order to satisfy their craving for human flesh very often a volunteer of chiefly rank (one of the halait attendants) would offer an arm from which the xgédem halait would bite a piece of flesh, and the volunteer would be immediately compensated.

The real head of the xgédem halait was the Kitamat tribe. It was here that all the big initiations were made.

The announcement of the death of any individual in the presence of an xgédem halait would be done thus: "So and so has become a salmonberry".

The following account is of the initiation of sqaqwét, (Alfred Dudoward), laxskik chief of the git'andé.

Informant: Mrs. Helen Clifton, a young woman who was a laxskik from Kitamat. It was she who volunteered her arm to be bitten by the initiate, sqaqwét.

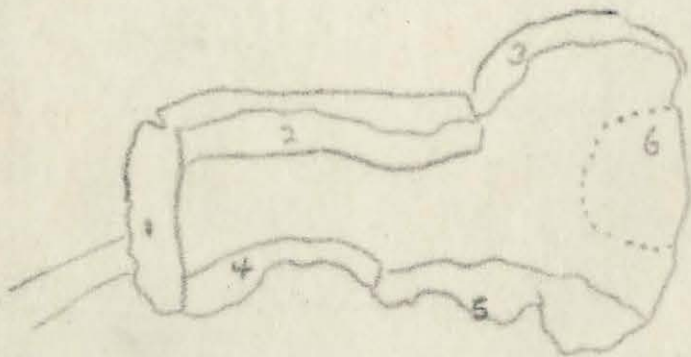
In charge of the ceremony were: saxsa'axt, chief of the gitwelgiyóts tribe, wiséks, chief of the gitxala, and chief 'entewiwálp of the gitga'te.

This initiation was the last of its kind among the tsemseyán and took place at Port Simpson shortly after the arrival

MAP TO ACCOMPANY STORY OF STORY OF  
ALFRED DUDOWARD'S INITIATION INTO  
THE xgdem halait.

Key to numbers on map:

1. gidzaxiáá tribe village
2. gin<sup>o</sup>adóiks " "
3. gin<sup>o</sup>ax<sup>o</sup>ngik " "
4. gitlán " "
5. git<sup>o</sup>andó " "
6. This was a shaded in grove where several houses were built  
in which initiates into the various haláits were taken  
while on their "voyage to the skies".



ISLAND SECTION OF PORT SIMPSON



of the missionary William Duncan to Port Simpson. In fact, at the time of his initiation Dudoward was a member of Duncan's Church and because of the initiation was expelled from his Church standing by Duncan. This so aroused Dudoward's anger that he and his wife went to Victoria and finally got the Methodist Church to establish at Port Simpson. Duncan had moved with his converts to Metlakatla, B. C.

The attendants or *delhalait* were carefully chosen and could attend any ceremonies of the *xgédem halait* anywhere. The actual master of ceremonies being *saxsá'axt*, chief of the *gitwelgiyóts*.

The initiate was led out, fastened with heavy braided pack straps. The initiate attempted to break away from his attendants to bite the spectators and only those who were members of any *halait* were immune. This was signified by the wearing of a cedar bark ring. Any one not a member of any *halait* group would never show themselves, but would hide away for fear of their lives.

The initiate kept calling the *xgédem halait* call, *yóp yóp* . . . and appeared to be in great agony, snapping at the spectators where he was being paraded along in front of the *git'andó* village.

Finally Mrs. Clifton (*áxks*), *laxskik* from Kitamat, called: "Come here my brother, come! I offer you myself." So saying she bared her arm, offering it to the initiate, and again she said: "Come brother, satisfy your wants." The initiate then took a bite of her flesh and satisfied himself and was apparently satisfied.

As he was being led back to the *halait* house the initiate was aroused again and this time he was led down to the beach. There the initiate began to scent around and then began to dig a hole.



The people saw that he dug out what appeared to be a child's body, which he began to devour in front of them all. He began to call out the haláit call yóp yóp . . . Then the master of ceremonies came down and led the initiate up /to the house ?/ Then the initiate was covered with a cedar bark mat, and disappeared. It was then announced that he had gone to the heavens.

Many days later the people heard the haláit call of the xgédem haláit "yóp xóp hóp hóp". They knew the initiate was to return from the heavens. Again only those who had been members in any haláit (secret society group) donned their cedar bark rings and headdresses. They then gathered near the place where the initiate would be taken. The others who were not members of any haláit group would hide away and not appear, as it would be dangerous for them to be attacked by the initiate.

This initiate was fastened by knitted pack straps and led by the master haláit. All the while, as if in a frenzy, he would try to break away from those who were leading him. He continually moaned and appeared in a very ferocious state, calling out yóp . . . hóp hóp.

In this way he was paraded along the front of the village continually trying to break away to appease his hunger for human flesh. When he had called out many times and appeared in an exhausted state a woman stepped forward and called out: "Come great supernatural (haláit), come satisfy your hunger from my arm." She then approached him, offering her bare arm. The initiate bit her flesh and swallowed this, then appearing satisfied he was led into the haláit house in a subdued state.

The woman who had twice given the initiate her arm was again compensated and she herself then was a member of the Cannibal (xgfdet) group.



The initiate then was led to a secret chamber so that he might gradually work off the haláit influence and the craving for human flesh. There were many tabus to be observed. At no time must the death of anyone be announced in the hearing of an xgédem haláit, as this would arouse his desire for human flesh. In making a death announcement the messenger would always say that so and so had become a salmon berry.

The announcement of a death to the chief was a formal procedure which was necessary when any of his tribesmen died. The gift of ground hog skins accompanied such an announcement. In the case of other tribal chiefs the gift increased in value according to the rank of the deceased chief. If no announcement was made then no attention is paid to the death.

But it is taboo to mention death to an xgédem haláit, as it roused him to a frenzy.

This particular initiation was the last among the tsemseyán at Port Simpson. There does not seem to have been any among the nisgá nor have I been able to record any among the gitksán. Among the gitsel'áse and gitsemgélem, we have two mentioned: wideldál and ni'sg.él. There was one among the gitxála and also among the gitg.á'ete. It is said there were many among the gitlamát and wetctá and heldú.

Membership was very restricted. For instance: among the gitxála people wiséks, although not the head chief of the gitxálas, was the xgédem haláit, whereas tsibasá, who was the recognized head chief of the gitxála tribe (as the head of the majority group) had endeavoured to make an entry into the xgédem haláit but was never able to do so. He attempted to crash one of his nephews into this group but was never able to do so.



At this time his nephew was an initiate into the nuim group and was away on his probationary trip to the skies to acquire supernatural powers. It so happened that the xg'dem halait group were all gathered at git'amát holding their dances, and among them was wiséks, the gitxála chief who was an xg'dem halait. Knowing they were all gathered at Kitamat, 'tsibasá suddenly called his own headmen together saying "I want my nephew gunaxnú'tk, who is now away in his own initiation to make his reappearance at Kitamat. This must be done at once as all the ceremonies there will be over in a very few days. You must gather the fastest paddlers we have as he must make his reappearance at Kitamat and must do the same here the next day. Thus I will out-do the xg'dem halait."

'tsibasá was a very strong and tyrannical chief who expected everyone to bow to his wishes. He was warned that his plans would end in disaster both for himself and his nephew but he was determined to carry them out.

Very early the next morning while it was still dark he took his strongest young men and his fastest long canoe and went to where his nephew was hiding to take him on board. A lighter canoe had gone ahead to contact some of the gitxála who were with wiséks, in order to enlist their aid in 'tsibasá's plans. It was night when they approached the Kitamat village.

It was 'tsibasá's plan that his nephew should make his reappearance from the skies very early the next morning in the xg'dem halait house at Kitamat, and then disappear and make a second reappearance at gitxála. Thus his reappearance at both places would be more spectacular than that of any other halait initiate, and so it was hoped that he would get recognition into the xg'dem halait



group.

The first canoe, which had arrived secretly at Kitamat earlier in the night had contacted one of the gitxá'la group who were with wisé'ks and told him that when he heard the prearranged signal (when all were asleep in the halá'it house at Kitamat) he was to come out and lead them into the halá'it house. Once they were in the house gunaxnú'tk, the nephew of tsibá'sa, would go in and make a fast appearnace and then come out again. When he had done so he would make a fast return to gitxá'la with tsibá'sa's group and make his reappearance there.

When all were asleep in the Kitamat halá'it house that night chief tsibá'sa, accompanied by his initiate nephew gunaxnú'tk, landed there and gave the signal/<sup>so</sup> that the gitxá'la man would come out and lead the initiate into the halá'it house.

They waited but no one came in answer to the signal. The gitxá'la man nisxts'is had fallen asleep and did not hear. Finally one of tsibá'sa's head men entered the halá'it house (even though it was taboo for him to do so) and walked to where he thought the gitxá'la people were sleeping. He went to the wrong place and awaokke a Kitamat man and said to him: "We have been waiting for you to come, it is now nearing daylight." When the Kitamat replied the gitxá'la man realized he had made a mistake and at once escaped.

The Kitamat man immediately gave the alarm, announcing that someone had come into the house, and that this was a taby which was punishable by death. But in the confusion the gitxá'la group of tsibá'sa got away. Travelling very swiftly they soon landed at gitxá'la, although the distance between the two villages was about 100 miles.



When the haláits in session at Kitamat learned that tsibása had planned to have his nephew make his appearance there and that someone had broken the tabu on entering the haláit house, the Kitamat xgédem haláit house announced: "When that initiate appears at gitxáa he will drop dead before e has made one circle around his house, and whoever it was that came in here and broke out tabu shall also fall dead."

All this was unknown to tsibása and his gitxáa companions. He was very much angered that his plans had miscarried and that he had also broken the <sup>sacred</sup> tabus of the haláit. He was aware that if it ever became known that it was he who had planned this breaking of the haláit tabus he would be put to death. So he planned that his nephew, the initiate whom he had taken to Kitamat, should reappear to his gitxáa people immediately on his arrival so that none should know they had travelled to Kitamat with the initiate.

It was very early in the morning when they landed at gitxáa and immediately plans were made to have tsibása's nephew land as if he had just returned from the heavens.

The people of the village were suddenly awakened by the blowing of the naxnóx (supernatural) whistles, and those belonging to the nuim group immediately recognized them and got up and went to the beach where they knew the initiate would land. They saw a huge canoe coming in and the initiate sat in the middle on an elevated platform. When the initiate landed he was led around the village and then to the haláit house where he was attended by the master of ceremonies.

There he was first to be led around the house in front of the guests, followed by his attendants. One of these attendants



was the man who had entered the haláit house at Kitamat. When the initiate had made one complete round of the haláit house and reached the place he started from he suddenly dropped dead. When the attendant who had broken the Kitamat haláit house tabu had completed the round he also fell dead.

There was great mourning in the house of tsibása. tsibása had himself brought on the curse of the Kitamat haláit when he broke the tabu by entering the wutahaláit (great haláit or xgédem haláit) sacred initiation house.

When the gitxáia people returned from the xgédem haláit ceremonies at Kitamat they heard what had happened to the initiate and knew that these were the ones who had broken the haláit tabu.



gitxata narxox feast

Use of narxox involving steps  
throwing narxox

Amlakam file

46. A CHALLENGE FEAST OF TSEEBESAE

(Informant: Henry Watt, Neesnawhl, a Gispawade a member of Tseebesae's house, at Gitrhawla. Narrative recorded by William Beynon, in 1948-9.)

A great rivalry always prevailed between the high chiefs of the Gitrhahla and the Gisparhlaw'ts tribes [of the Tsimsyan Proper]. Legyarth had proclaimed himself the foremost chief of all the Tsimsyan and had established the privilege of being the last of any guests to come to any feast. No feast could begin until he had come in. But his authority was always being challenged by Tseebesae, head chief of the Gitrhahla. Also in the halla-its, each would always try to outdo the other in having the best narhnorhs and even the most modern devices.

So this time, there was a great athlete among the Gitrhahla, and another among the Gisparhlaw'ts. Each of these men were great wrestlers and had never been defeated. Each had killed many of <sup>his</sup> their competitors as they would wrestle, until one had his back broken and had died. Neither of these two had ever met and there was much talking between all the tribes as to the outcome of a match between them should they meet. It was a foregone idea that they would be forced to meet, through some pre-arranged way by ~~xxxx~~ them. One would be so provoked that there would be no way for them but to meet together in combat. With this in view Tseebesae said to his headmen, "I am going to invite Legyarth, and perhaps we may provoke the Gisparhlaw'ts in some way. There will be nothing else he can do but to have his strong man to challenge ours." The strong man of the Gitrhahla tribe was 'As'yairnsk, a Kanhade, and the strong man of the Gisparhlaw'ts was B'uk a Gispawade. Messengers were sent to the Tsimsyan, that there would be a great feast. As the messengers went to everyone of the Tsimsyan chiefs, they said, "My master invites you. There will be great happiness in my master's house and he wants to share it with all his fellow chiefs." It was not thus made known just what the purpose of Tseebesae's feast was for. When the messenger had finished their errand, they returned, and a few days after would be the time when all the invited chiefs would set for {arhklaeh}, the village of Tseebesae. The guests