

# The Tribes of Baja California and P. Baegert's Book

**Paul Kirchhoff**

Translated and edited by Don Laylander

## Abstract

Paul Kirchhoff's 1942 essay, which is presented here for the first time in English, was a key landmark in the use of the peninsula's rich ethnohistoric and ethnographic records to try to reconstruct the region's complex cultural prehistory. Kirchhoff interpreted that past primarily in terms of inferred waves of migration and cultural diffusion from beyond and within the peninsula. However, he also considered environmental influences, local innovations, cultural conservatism, the effects of isolation, and cultural decay. His interpretation foreshadowed and perhaps surpassed in nuance and sophistication William Massey's subsequent development of the "Layer Cake" model for Baja California prehistory.

## Editor's Introduction

Paul Kirchhoff (1900–1972) was a distinguished German-Mexican anthropologist. Born in Westphalia, northern Germany, he studied in Berlin, Freiburg, and Leipzig, shifting his focus from Protestant theology to philosophy, then to economics, and finally to ethnology (García Mora 1979; Jiménez Moreno 1979; Zapett Tapia 1987). His research, teaching, fieldwork, and participation in international conferences brought him into contact and collaboration with most of the prominent German, British, French, American, and Mexican anthropologists of his time.

Kirchhoff's 1931 doctoral dissertation at Leipzig addressed *Die Verwandtschaftsorganisation der Urwaldstämme Südamerikas* (*The Kinship Organization of the South American Forest Tribes*). Robert H. Lowie (1933:182) wrote, "With this, his first publication,

Dr. Kirchhoff at once takes rank among the foremost living students of social organization." Innumerable other scholarly publications by Kirchhoff would follow during the next 40 years.

Working initially in Germany, Kirchhoff visited England and the United States as early as 1927. Between 1936 and 1947 his base was in Mexico. The main institutional settings of his work in Mexico would include the Museo Nacional de Antropología, the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (of which he was one of the founders), and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Due to his Marxist political affiliations, his German citizenship was withdrawn under the Nazi regime in 1939, and in 1941 he became a Mexican citizen. From 1947 to 1954 he was based in the United States, primarily at the University of Washington where he was a colleague of William C. Massey, another pioneer in Baja California anthropology. However, McCarthy-era fears over past leftist affiliations caused him to be denied reentry into the U.S. in 1954 (Tuohy 1998:91). From that year until his retirement in 1965 and his death in 1972, he lived and worked primarily in Mexico, although he also traveled to the United States, Germany, and other parts of Europe.

The geographical scope of Kirchhoff's studies and publications was very wide. His primary focus was on the pre-Hispanic cultures of Mesoamerica—a regional label that he himself first introduced into the

anthropological literature. However, his investigations extended to northern Mexico, the U.S. Southwest, South America, and even East Asia, South Asia, Tibet, and Ireland, as well as to general issues of ethnological method and theory.

The present essay reflects a strongly diachronic orientation that was in keeping with Kirchhoff's intellectual roots in German historicist ethnology, as well as with both Mexican and Marxist research interests. It contrasts with the strongly synchronic, ahistorical orientation of much of British and U.S. anthropology during the heyday of functionalism and structuralism.

Kirchhoff's essay was written as an introduction to the unique account by the eighteenth-century Alsatian Jesuit missionary Johann Jakob Baegert, who worked among the Guaycura of southern Baja California (Baegert 1772, 1942, 1952, 1982). The 1942 edition of Baegert's book, with Kirchhoff's introduction, was reprinted in a facsimile edition in 2013 by the Archivo Histórico Pablo L. Martínez in Baja California Sur. M. Elizabeth Acosta Mendía, director of the Archivo Histórico, graciously granted permission for the publication this translation.

#### **Translation of Kirchhoff's (1942) Essay**

Owing to its peninsular character, location, length, and climate, Baja California was predestined to play a most interesting role, although an essentially passive one, in the indigenous history of the continent [Figure 1].

According to what we know or can infer, the migrations of the American tribes followed in broad terms a north-to-south direction. Those tribes that reached the mouth of the Colorado River or the region west of it in their migrations were able to continue south as easily as other tribes to the east of them. However, for those entering a peninsula, their subsequent history had to be very different.

This is a very large peninsula, in fact, one of the largest in the world. To reach its southern tip, the immigrants had to cross a distance equal to that between Mexico City and San Salvador, or between New York and Chicago, or between Berlin and Rome. Considerable time had to pass before they realized that they had entered into a cul-de-sac.

From the onset there was a notable difference between the migration of the group of tribes that entered this cul-de-sac and the migration of the others who were able to continue south across a wide front formed by the entire region between the mouths of the Colorado River on the west and the Rio Grande on the east. Getting into the quite narrow cul-de-sac of the California peninsula brought with it as an inevitable consequence those tribes' very considerable isolation. It is probable that rather than the coming of a single group of immigrants, several waves came, entering through the same northern gateway. It is unlikely that more recent groups would have been able to make direct contact with more than the rearguard of the peninsula's earliest immigrants, because except in very rare cases, the narrowness of the cul-de-sac blocked migratory movements passing by the side of already established groups. In the great majority of cases, new immigrants could advance only by pushing others to the south, with the result that an ever greater number of tribes separated the latter from the northern gateway by which they themselves had entered the peninsula.

In many, if not all cases, the recent arrivals must have had certain advantages over their adversaries through participating in cultural advances (new weapons and techniques and new social organization and ideology) that had been made in other parts of America but had not yet penetrated to Baja California's isolated tribes. The process of tribes' continuous displacement toward the south, which must have characterized population movement east of the Gulf of California over a long period, would have met a limitation that was difficult

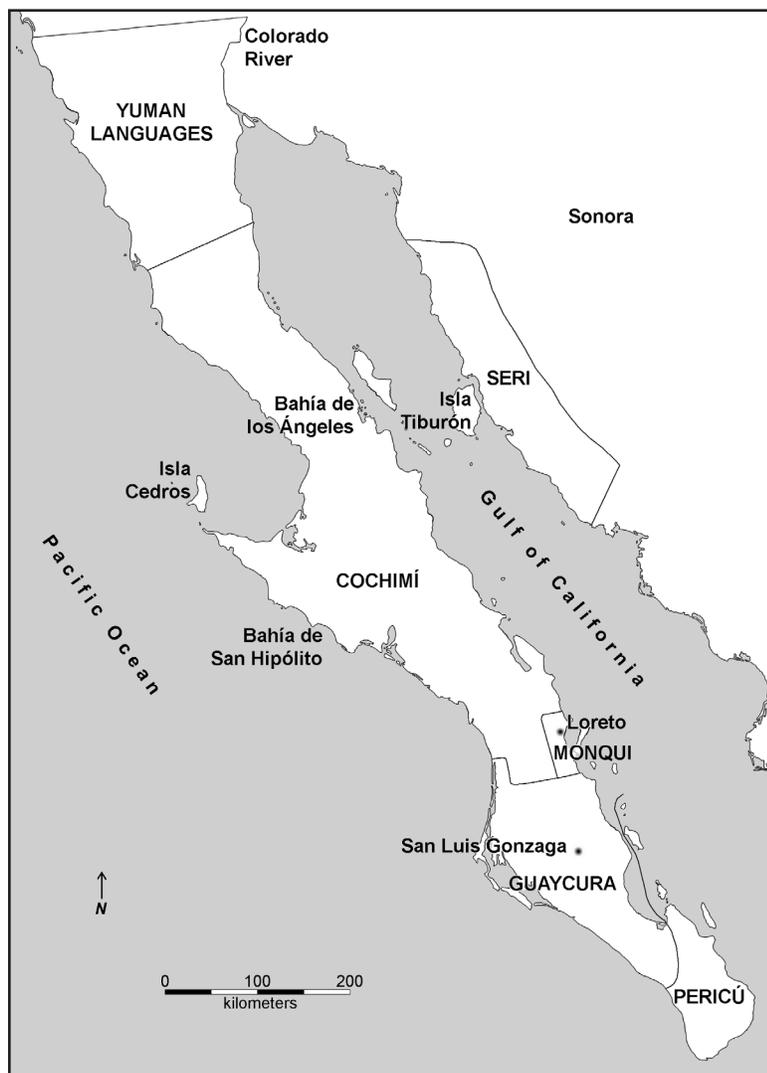


Figure 2. Linguistic groups of aboriginal Baja California (after Laylander 1997).

to overcome in Baja California. This limitation was precisely its peninsular character, aggravated by the fact that while migration routes through other peninsulas of comparable length (Malacca and Kamchatka) have their natural continuations in island chains, Baja California's southern point is a true *finis terrae* (land's end).

Sooner or later the peninsula's population had to reach a maximum, at which point there was no room for new immigrants unless they possessed a very distinct and

much more advanced culture that would have permitted them to make entirely new uses of the peninsula's scarce natural resources. Once the new immigrants met a stronger resistance due precisely to the impossibility of their adversaries pushing other groups even farther south, it seems unlikely that they would have continued fighting with much determination to break through, because by that time tribes near the peninsula's entrance would generally have known how little attraction there was in the southern regions (with the exception of the peninsula's tip itself).

Although traditions survived among the northern tribes of Baja California down to recent times concerning tribes' eviction to the south as a result of warfare, the migrations of whole groups probably go back to a very remote period. What more properly characterized later times was the transmission of new inventions, customs, and ideas from tribe to tribe, without the latter any longer moving far from the places it had long occupied.

The direction of these new influences undoubtedly was mostly the same one followed by the migrations of populations: from north to south. Studying the geographical distribution of tools, technology, knowledge, customs, and ideas among Baja California's tribes and neighboring regions shows this clearly.

However, it is necessary to consider two other possibilities: first, influences (and perhaps even an actual immigration) from the Sonora coast across the natural bridge of the northern half of the Gulf of California formed by Isla Tiburón and other islands; and second, the arrival of small groups of people directly by sea, coming from more distant regions, whether from the coasts north or south of Baja California or from remote Pacific islands. It seems likely that such influences, if they reached our peninsula, affected only small parts of it.

Indeed, we have not been able to discern in Baja California any clear indications of influences by sea. Moreover, the similarities between some of the peninsula's tribes and the Seri on the other side of the Gulf of California need not be the result of influences coming from the Sonora coast to Baja California but might have gone in the opposite direction, or instead they may be traces of an ancient culture that was common to the tribes both west and east of the Gulf of California that had reached both regions directly from a location farther north without having to cross the Gulf.

Even if we have to take into account some cultural interactions or migrations coming to Baja California or parts of it without passing through the normal gateway of our "cul-de-sac," that is to say, through the region that connects the peninsula with the continent, such exceptions would be very few and would not change the essential and characteristic situation that had to shape the whole life and evolution of the Baja California tribes. We refer to the fact previously stated that the great majority, if not all, of those tribes and those new cultural influences reached the peninsula through the fairly narrow "door" in the north.

All this resulted, roughly speaking, in a graduated series from south to north with the earlier and more primitive immigrants and cultural influences remaining in the south of the peninsula and with more recent immigrants and influences the nearer we approach to the entry into our "cul-de-sac."

In the entire continent it would be difficult to find a region of equal size that would offer us equally favorable conditions for a study of the effects of isolation versus contact with other peoples and external influences.

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Despite these regional differences that divided Baja California culturally into a series of stepped zones from south to north, with the northernmost in many respects being more similar to those situated immediately north of the peninsula than to the southernmost, there were nonetheless some characteristics common to all the Baja California tribes and at the same time their exclusive property, not found even among the tribes of southern Alta California. The existence of those traits common to the peninsula's north and south seems to us to indicate that, although some outside influences could reach at least the northern tribes and a few reached even farther south, for others the "door"

of our cul-de-sac constituted a barrier sufficiently effective to preserve in the cultures of all Baja California tribes a certain basic uniformity, although only in relatively few aspects, that differentiated the peninsula as a whole from the rest of the Americas.

One of these traits apparently common to all the tribes of Baja California, but unknown outside of it, is the unusual cape used by shamans in their curing and other ceremonies that was made with hair from the dead or in some cases from the sick.<sup>1</sup> Another trait, a negative one, that is common to all the peninsula's tribes is the ignorance of cultivation, which in pre-Columbian times had arrived just at the peninsula's entrance without passing through it. All the inhabitants of Baja California, without exception, had remained at the level of gatherers, hunters, and fishers. However, these cultural traits, including negative ones such as the absence of cultivation, are not sufficiently numerous and distinctive to warrant our considering Baja California as a whole as being a single cultural area.

Most of the traits common from north to south in Baja California had geographical distributions that greatly exceeded the limits of the peninsula, so they cannot serve to establish a special cultural unity among the different parts. To a large extent the traits and cultural complexes involved, although they had wide distributions outside of Baja California (for example, the custom of toasting seeds, shaking them together with live coals in a pan), were nonetheless confined to certain parts of the zone that U.S. anthropologists sometimes have called the "Greater Southwest" and that we propose to call "Arid North America," a region encompassing the southwestern U.S. and northwest Mexico.

This was a cultural region that to a degree coincided with a natural region characterized by a dry climate and a special vegetation resulting from that climate.

In Arid North America's culture is seen, on the one hand, an undoubted common base that was fairly

ancient, intimately linked to the region's natural peculiarities, and characterized by a lifestyle based on gathering and, to a lesser extent, hunting and fishing. On the other hand, in some places there had been a profound transformation of that common base by the introduction of a more advanced way of life based on cultivation.

Wherever this transformation did not take place, such as in the Great Basin, northern Mexico, and other areas, a particular type of culture is found that we also find in Baja California, but not in the whole peninsula, only in the north. All these regions undoubtedly represented a fairly ancient cultural stratum that had disappeared in other parts of Arid North America.

However, we cannot consider this culture as the most ancient one, because in Baja California it clearly appears as a relatively recent stratum, superimposed over another, older one that has been preserved with a certain purity only in the south.

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In this interesting situation every one of the sources on Baja California's southern tribes has very great importance. They exist in very limited numbers, and among them Baegert's book, without any doubt, occupies the first place. In fact, it is the only source that describes more or less completely the culture of a single tribe. The well-known books of Venegas-Burriel and Clavijero, not to mention the sources of minor importance, are compilations of information contributed by others. Even when they provide more information on one or two tribes than on the rest, in no way do they share the most marked characteristic of Baegert's book, that of being, in its ethnographic part, essentially a tribal monograph based on the author's personal observations.<sup>2</sup>

The other cited authors, who like Baegert were Jesuits, in collecting the observations of their colleagues were

not able to include those of our author, who lived in isolation from the centers of mission activities and apparently did not follow the custom of so many other Jesuits of an extensive correspondence with his peers and superiors. Thus, even if the merits of Baegert's observations were not as great as we anthropologists think they are, they would always remain an indispensable source for the study of primitive forms of human life.

Even individuals such as Gerard Decorme, author of a recent book on *La obra de los jesuitas mexicanos durante la época colonial, 1572–1767*, who criticize the “complete lack of imagination” that, according to them, our author demonstrated in his description of the land, its inhabitants, and their conversion to the Christian religion, have to admit and even admire “the accuracy and sincerity of P. Baegert's reports.” If in this way Baegert's work, “of our three books on California<sup>3</sup> undoubtedly the most realistic and pessimistic,” has only the merit for the Jesuit historian that it “serves better to see the shadows, real enough, of the work of the Jesuits in that noble conquest,” on the other hand it provides the student of native life in Baja California the most realistic picture that can be found in the ethnographic literature.

It is this realism of Baegert, this accuracy and sincerity, and in a certain sense precisely this pessimism engendered by the spectacle of so primitive a lifestyle, that allowed him to make a most important contribution to what seems to us to be the permanent value of the work of the missionaries, and among them first of all the Jesuits: the enrichment of our knowledge of ourselves through the study of hundreds of peoples and cultures in all parts of the world.

Baegert's pessimism was the result of the surroundings in which this missionary lived for 17 years, just as the monographic character of his book was the result of our author having passed all those 17 years at the same mission without participating in

the continuing series of changes in place that characterized the lives of the other Jesuits in Baja California, who after a few years in a given place almost always moved forward to found new missions. The mission of San Luis Gonzaga where Baegert worked was the most isolated of all, not in the distance that separated it from others but in being outside the routes that connected the more important missions, and it was in the poorest part of the peninsula with respect to plants and animals that could serve the inhabitants as a basis for their food and their crafts. The isolation of Mission San Luis appears to have been a simple continuation of its region's isolation during periods prior to the arrival of the missionaries.

It cannot surprise us that the inhabitants of this corner of the peninsula should reflect in their culture the poverty and isolation of their land, nor should it surprise us that a man who lived alone among them for so many years, separated not only from the European culture that had shaped him but isolated even from the small part of that culture that the Jesuits had succeeded in transplanting to other parts of Baja California, knew better than others how to grasp the primitiveness and backwardness of his parishioners, giving us a book whose realism and pessimism must search for their equal in all missionary literature.

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There can be no doubt that not everything that our author declared to be nonexistent among the natives studied by him was in fact absent from their culture. We must recognize that he lacked eyes to see some phenomena—first of all, oddly enough, everything relating to religious ideas and customs.<sup>4</sup>

However, in other aspects of native culture, those that by their more material character lend themselves better to direct observation, his descriptions are so detailed that in most cases we can be sure that what he did not mention either did not exist or at least did

not have much importance. With even more reason we can accept his negative statements when they involved things that he had the opportunity to observe daily. Thus, when our author, attempting to refute the claims of others, tells us, "As yet I have seen many elders and also middle aged men with pierced earlobes, but not one with a perforated nose," we are persuaded that this custom, apparently present in the great majority of other tribes, was not known among the Guaycura of San Luis Gonzaga. Its absence is one of several existing indications that these natives occupied a special place among the tribes of the south, in that certain cultural elements having a nearly general distribution on the peninsula had not been diffused to them, for reasons already discussed, and that some customs had been preserved that had disappeared among their neighbors. We cite as examples the use of intestines to carry water and the idea already mentioned of descent from birds, stones, etc.

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The natives described by Baegert, or at least the majority of them, were Guaycura, according to his own testimony and that of other missionaries. Within this ethnic group, Baegert distinguished a series of "tribes." "It may happen," our author tells us, "that a single mission consists of a thousand souls and yet that it may have among its parishioners as many different tribes as Switzerland has cantons ..." He cites as proof the fact that there were eleven tribes among his own parishioners, whose numbers in his time were no more than 500 (they would have been more before the arrival of Europeans on the peninsula).

Of this large number of tribes, only one or two are mentioned in other sources as parishioners of neighboring missions, although the names of others may perhaps have been hidden under synonyms; nonetheless, it is very probable that the number of those "tribes" would have been considerable. But the problem is in knowing exactly what Baegert understood by

this word "tribe." He himself says merely concerning one out of his mission's eleven tribes that they spoke "another distinct language," contrasting them with "the rest of my people." Thus it is clear that ten of the eleven tribes spoke a single language, although perhaps with distinct local dialects among them. Consequently, it seems that Baegert's "tribes" were more properly local groups that lived in specific rancherías within the territory of their respective tribes (which were, in this case, two).

Baegert says nothing about differences in customs among the inhabitants of different rancherías often separated by great distances. However, other authors referring to other parts of the peninsula mention customs that were known only in certain rancherías and, in extreme cases, in only one.

With regard to languages (and tribes, if we use this word in the sense of the set of rancherías that spoke a single language), different missionaries recognized a different number: three, four, or even more. The languages of the Pericú in the peninsula's extreme south and of the Guaycura appear to have been distinct from each other and from the languages of the north.

The Jesuits called most of the natives in the area north of the Guaycura "Cochimí," without providing data capable of verifying the ethnic unity of the inhabitants of those extensive regions. From the linguistic data that they themselves did provide, marked differences emerge between the "Cochimí" of different areas, but the scarcity of material does not make it possible to decide whether different languages were involved or only different dialects of a single language.<sup>5</sup> (While the Pericú and Guaycura languages are considered to have been isolates, Cochimí formed part of the Yuman family, the majority of whose members lived outside the peninsula.)

The cultural differences between some Cochimí and others are even more marked than the linguistic

differences. In fact, the territory inhabited by “Cochimí” was so large that the southernmost among them were almost not involved with the cultural diffusions from the north that represented such a considerable part of the northern Cochimí’s cultural heritage. As a result, the differences between the two were so profound that the southerners had more in common with the Guaycura and Pericú, that is to say, with tribes of very different origin, than with their congeners, the “Cochimí” of the north. This makes it difficult to assemble a list of cultural traits common to all the Cochimí that were not also known among other tribes of the peninsula’s south and north and even beyond it. The only trait that seems to have been typically Cochimí in the sense of being distinctive to all the subdivisions of that tribe was that of using netting in portable “cradles.”

This interesting situation calls for an explanation. Were the southern Cochimí distinguished from the northerners and the other Yumans because they were representatives of an ancient Yuman culture, essentially the same as that of the Guaycura and Pericú, or should we think that the southern Cochimí were originally non-Cochimí who, with the arrival of Cochimí from the north, learned their language and assimilated a small part of their culture? The author of these lines is more inclined toward the first hypothesis, recognizing, however, that only a comparative analysis of the culture of all the tribes of Yuman affiliation, both within and outside of the peninsula, would make it possible to arrive at greater clarity about such an interesting problem.

In the course of their history, different tribes of the Yuman family must have undergone cultural influences that were highly varied in their origin and intensity, with the result that there existed among them differences much more marked even than those between the southern and northern Cochimí that we have already mentioned. The extreme contrast within this family of tribes is undoubtedly represented by the southern

Cochimí and the tribes along the lower courses of the Colorado and Gila Rivers who knew cultivation on lands fertilized by the rivers’ inundation and who manufactured ceramics, to mention only two distinctive traits from their economic lifeways.

Indeed, we find very marked cultural differences in Baja California not only among different Cochimí but equally among different Guaycura (for example, between those of San Luis and those of Loreto, if indeed Guaycura were present in both regions) and among different Pericú, to such an extent that the Guaycura of Loreto seem to have had more things in common culturally with the southern Cochimí than with the Guaycura of San Luis, who were distinguished from both by their simpler and poorer culture. This lack of correspondence between ethnic divisions and the geographical distribution of cultural elements and complexes was in all likelihood the result of diffusion that reached only certain parts of different tribes when those had already ceased their migration and found themselves in regions with variable degrees of accessibility to those influences from the north.

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In attempting to sketch in broad terms the probable course of Baja California’s indigenous history in the following paragraphs, we will give as much importance to the absence of cultural traits and complexes as to their presence, as long as this involves traits and complexes that in other parts of Arid North America or of the American continent in general seem to be characteristic of the stage of our peninsula’s inhabitants, that of gatherers-hunters-fishers.

One of the first things that caught the attention of the Jesuits stationed among the tribes of Baja California (of which for a long time they knew no more than the part that corresponds more or less to the present Territorio Sur<sup>6</sup>) was that the natives did not have dogs. Furthermore, they did not use salt in preparing their

food despite significant deposits of this mineral being found in some tribes' territories.<sup>7</sup>

Until the year 1746, about 50 years after the Jesuits had begun their work in Baja California and 210 years after the arrival of the first Europeans, Padre Conzag in an exploratory trip to the northeast saw the first dog on the peninsula at the rancheria near Bahía de los Ángeles. From this point forward, all North American tribes without doubt since pre-Columbian times knew the dog<sup>8</sup> (and also fleas, unknown where the dog was unknown). Can we deduce from this distribution of dogs in North America that the first immigrants in Baja California formed part of a group of tribes that did not yet know the domesticated dog? We believe so. Certainly in no case of the absence of a given cultural element from a certain ethnic group can we completely rule out the possibility that it once existed and was later lost. However, this appears unlikely in this case, mainly because the limit of dogs' distribution coincides roughly with the limit of the distribution of other cultural elements absent in the south but present in the north.

For North America (and not just Arid North America) this is an absolutely unique case. It is true that farther north among the tribes bordering Alta California's San Francisco Bay on the north and in part on the east dogs were very rare, as Alfred Kroeber has shown recently. But to find tribes that were completely ignorant of domesticated dogs we have to turn to South America (the region of the sources of the Xingú River in Brazil and Tierra del Fuego). The absence of the dog in most of Baja California is the more noteworthy in that immediately to the north of the peninsula in southern Alta California a region begins in which dogs habitually served as food, while farther to the east, with the Comanche, the area of the use of dogs as pack or draft animals reached the limits of Arid North America.

The custom of not using salt was not as exceptional in North America as the absence of dogs because

according to Kroeber's investigations there was a considerable group of tribes in northwest North America that like those of Baja California did not know the use of salt. Within Arid North America, however, the case of Baja California was entirely exceptional to such a degree that exactly to the north of the peninsula an area begins in which the custom of abstaining from the use of salt on ritual occasions prevailed. That custom, according to the valid observation of Kroeber, could only have arisen in a region where the use of salt had strong roots. In fact, this region appears to have been a simple continuation to the north, or more properly to the northwest, of that part of Mexico (and Central and South America) where ritual abstention included chili and other stimulants or foods in addition to salt.

Another of the most notable negative cultural characteristics of the tribes in the southern part of the peninsula was the absence of dwellings with roofs or with walls that could serve at the same time as roofs. The only dwellings that are known<sup>9</sup> had the form of simple walls, whether of stacked rocks or woven branches, and with a circular or rectangular plan, that protected only from the wind and not from rain, which indeed was very rare in this region. Similar constructions are known in other parts of Arid North America but never as the only type of dwelling.

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Together with dogs, salt, and huts, the Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries encountered among the peninsula's northern tribes, beginning with the northern Cochimí, a whole series of other cultural elements and complexes unknown among the southern Cochimí, the Guaycura described by Baegert, and the south's other tribes. Certainly not all the cultural traits of northern Baja California were found up to the same point. Some had penetrated farther south than others, perhaps as a result of having been introduced earlier. Additionally, it seems that some had entered either initially or exclusively into the northeast part of the peninsula and

others into the northwest, although it must be recognized that in some cases the impression that this was the case may be due simply to insufficient information about the presence or absence of such traits among tribes in different parts of the peninsula's north.

It seems to us a very interesting task for the future to try to learn the probable places of origin of those innovations in the north and the likely periods of their arrival in Baja California on the basis of a study of their distributions within and outside the peninsula. The only thing that can be affirmed now is that they appear to have come to the peninsula's north from different regions and at different times.

The list of these intrusive elements is quite long. Without exhausting it, we can mention the following traits: dogs (perhaps only in the northwest); salt (only in the northeast); huts (of different types and in addition to small structures, "a very large hut entirely covered with rough palm leaves, quite wide, into which 50 people could fit" was mentioned at a place on the Pacific coast, Bahía de San Hipólito); a whole range of weapons for hunting and warfare, including boomerangs (of the non-returning type), maces and clubs of different shapes, slings, pits with spikes, shields, and quivers for arrows, which were shot with bows throughout the peninsula but without quivers being known except in the extreme northwest; fishhooks; skin capes as garments for women and tribal chiefs; flat cradles to which the child was tied (to the south, containers were used, such as turtle shells, baskets, or netting, in which the child was put); the use of clay to make vessels and pipes to smoke wild tobacco, which the shamans used primarily in their curing and other rites (to the south the pipes were of stone); the preparation of food by boiling (which in Baja California appears to have depended upon the possession of vessels that could be put over a fire, that is, vessels of clay, while the technique of making a liquid boil in a vessel by means of hot rocks was unknown throughout the peninsula); a whole complex of ritual customs of

putting a person, such as the newborn child of a mother after childbirth in a preheated pit, covering it with sand or rocks; the steam bath; the bullroarer, used in men's ceremonies from which women were excluded; dramatic portrayals of mythological traditions; idols; sand paintings; and patrilineages.

All these traits, the result of a series of waves of cultural diffusion that reached some of the peninsula's northern tribes, were absent from the tribes farther south. All of them, on the other hand, were known among tribes immediately north and northeast of Baja California, or at least at a not very great distance from it. The pottery of the peninsula's northeastern tribes, for example, was merely a geographical extension of the region along the Colorado River's lower course, where agricultural tribes made objects of fired clay; undoubtedly, this art was diffused from them to the northeastern tribes of Baja California.

Other cultural traits within the peninsula that were only encountered in the north seem to have been geographically isolated for all America, being known either exclusively in those parts of Baja California or only there and in quite distant regions.

Two examples of the first type are the curious custom prevailing among some of the northern Cochimí of eating the same bite of meat or fish several times, having it go down to the stomach tied by a string that brought it back up, repeating this action several times and often joining several people together for this, as if it were for a banquet, and the custom observed only in a single rancheria in the northeast of fixing netting to carry children on the bent end of a pole while holding it at the other end to carry it on the shoulder. The first of these two customs probably should be considered as a local solution to the great problem that faced all Baja California's tribes, that is, of making the most of their scarce food resources, which caused certain tribes to the south, as well as certain tribes in other parts of America (Sonora; the Goajira peninsula in

South America) to prepare the undigested pitahaya seeds found in excrement as food. The second custom that we cited may have been a modified combination of two techniques, the peninsular (Cochimí) one of carrying children in netting and the one in Sonora (Seri) and other parts of the Pacific coast as far as Panama of carrying two burdens in nets attached to the ends of a pole resting on the shoulder. It is significant that the custom we are discussing was known only in that part of the peninsula that can be considered a continuation of the Sonoran coast on the other side of the Gulf of California.

Two other traits known in isolation in northern Baja California were the use of lip plugs in the extreme northwest and an article of female clothing of some northern Cochimí that consisted of a fiber strip passed between the legs. The latter was in marked contrast with the two cloths, one in front and the other behind, that were worn by all of the peninsula's other women including the other Cochimí as well as the women in wide areas outside the peninsula and adjacent to it. We can suggest no hypothesis concerning the problem of how and from where this style of dress reached some Cochimí to the exclusion of those to the north and south (both of whom wore the cloths in use throughout the peninsula). The lip plugs used at the rancherías of the northwest coast could have been derived from the distant coast of British Columbia, perhaps by way of the Santa Barbara Channel Islands facing the southern California coast, whose inhabitants showed in their culture so much resemblance to the northwest coast of North America.

The absence of all the traits and complexes enumerated in the preceding paragraphs from the culture of the southern tribes, beginning with the southern Cochimí, gives us a strong impression of poverty. Indeed, the culture was characterized more by the absence than by the presence of particular cultural features. Among that group of tribes, the Guaycura studied by Baeger seem to have represented the extreme of cultural

poverty, there having been absent from among them even elements that were present in nearly all the southern tribes, such as, for example, the above-mentioned custom of piercing the nasal septum.

However, even if the fundamental characteristic of the southern tribes' culture was its poverty, and the explanation of this poverty was that many cultural elements and complexes that we find among the gatherers-hunters-fishers of other parts of Arid North America had not penetrated as far as them but only to the tribes of the peninsula's north, there still remain some very interesting positive characteristics of the southern tribes' culture. While the famous human hair capes were also found among the northern tribes that were so distinct in other respects, there was another trait connected with the shamans that, according to our sources, seems to have been confined to the south or perhaps only to a part of the southern tribes. We refer to some intriguing "*tablas* with signs" that the shamans used in their curing and other rites, whose meaning, at least in the region of Loreto, they taught to novices in special "schools." From the available evidence it is likely that these *tablas* were used only among the southern Cochimí, the Guaycura of Loreto, and perhaps some Pericú, their use being unknown among other Pericú and the Guaycura of San Luis.<sup>10</sup>

The presence of a cultural element of this sort among tribes of Baja California's south, undoubtedly rooted there since a quite remote period, is surprising. Should we consider the custom of using those ritual *tablas* as part of the culture of the first immigrants or at least a certain portion of them, or should we look for the origin of those extraordinary "*tablas* with signs" in distant regions inhabited by people of more advanced culture than that generally found in Baja California, regions from which they arrived directly in the south of our peninsula without passing through the northern gateway? Even in that case there is one fact that suggests that these *tablas* formed part of the southern tribes' culture since times prior to the arrival

of the previously discussed innovations in the north of the peninsula, and that fact is that remarkable trait's distribution, which extended precisely as far north as the southern Cochimí and excluded the northern Cochimí, like so many other southern traits, positive or negative.

Among the Guaycura of San Luis, Baegert not only noted the absence of some cultural traits present in other southern tribes, but he also encountered others that no author mentioned for those other tribes, for example, the use of intestines to carry water and the belief in descent from stones and birds. We find among the Pericú much greater numbers of such traits that are unique in their presence within Baja California. Not only their culture but also the natural environment in which most of them lived had very special features.

Although in general the natural conditions in Baja California worsen progressively from north to south, the peninsula's southern extreme is far from being the most adverse region. On the contrary, near the southern tip rainfall abruptly increases and with it the density of the vegetation and above all the number of species exploitable by man, largely unknown in the remainder of the peninsula (among which certain palms stand out for their usefulness). The contrast is notable between the habitat of most Pericú—we say most, since a part of them lived in an unfavorable environment—and that of the Guaycura of San Luis described by Baegert, although they adjoin each other; these are two extremes with respect to the series of environments found in Baja California.

The differences between the two cultures, which were marked despite some basic similarity, were certainly the direct or indirect result of the environment within which they developed. The Guaycura of San Luis not only knew nothing about fishing, which was so important among the Pericú because their territory did not extend to the coast, but they also lacked a range of plants for subsistence or material use that made

the economic base of their southern neighbors more varied and more stable. At the same time, the San Luis region's sterility must have formed a quite effective barrier against contact with new groups of immigrants (who surely headed toward more favorable regions, which in this part of the peninsula meant the land of the Pericú) and against new cultural influences. In fact, certain influences reached this southern extreme that generally were only found in the north and about which we will say more below.

But first we need to mention a fact of great interest and importance: the preservation among the Pericú of cultural traits of undoubted antiquity that had disappeared in the rest of Baja California. The most interesting element among them is the dart-thrower, or atlatl, a weapon that at the time of Europeans' arrival was unknown not only among the rest of the peninsula's tribes, even the others in the south, but in almost all of Arid North America.<sup>11</sup> However, we know through archaeological discoveries that in the not very remote past, in the U.S. Southwest among the so-called Basketmakers, this weapon was used before the bow was known. The survival of the dart-thrower among the Pericú in Baja California's extreme south shows the respectable antiquity of their culture, or at least a part of it.

In addition to atlatls and darts, which were fire-treated to harden them, the Pericú used bows and arrows. Their neighbors to the north, beginning with the Guaycura of San Luis, only knew the latter.

We do not know whether the tribes to the north of the Pericú who, it seems logical to believe, arrived after the latter, originally also used dart-throwers, later replacing them with bows when they learned this innovation from tribes farther north, or whether they arrived already equipped with this new type of weapon. Furthermore, we do not know whether the Pericú in immigrating into the peninsula already knew of the bow, together with the dart-thrower, or

whether they later added it to their culture under the influence of tribes to their north. In any case, despite the presence of the bow in absolutely every Baja California tribe, the dart-thrower also appears here as the older weapon just as in the rest of the New World and the Old.<sup>12</sup>

Even more surprising is the fact that the boomerang, which in the Old World was also earlier than the bow and more or less contemporary with the dart-thrower (in Australia both weapons were used, to the exclusion of the bow), appeared in Baja California as a quite recent element, whose use among some tribes of the peninsula's north was added to that of the bow already known previously.

Another cultural element whose distribution in Baja California coincided roughly with Pericú territory was the boat made from trunks of the tree called *corcho*. However, it is difficult to decide in this case whether this was a more ancient type of watercraft than the type used by the peninsula's other tribes, namely *balsas* made from bunches of tule, or whether the latter on the contrary represented the older form and the Pericú boat was an adaptation to local material. We are not helped in settling this question by the additional information that on Isla Cedros, off Baja California's Pacific coast and apparently occupied by Cochimí, tree trunks were used (in this case, cedar) in a somewhat different form.<sup>13</sup>

One is tempted to attribute to simple environmental influences the Pericú's use of salt and the construction of huts whose roofs protected them from their territory's rains. It would be difficult to attribute the presence of these cultural traits at Baja California's two extremes, separated by a distance of more than a thousand kilometers, to diffusion through the peninsula from north to south.

However, in addition to these two, there were other cultural elements that were common to the tribes of

the extreme north and the Pericú of the extreme south and whose presence among these cannot be explained in any way by environmental influence. Among those, we mention the use of hooks in fishing and of capes in women's clothing.<sup>14</sup>

These and other truly surprising similarities between the tribes of the extreme north and the extreme south are explained, it seems to us, by north-to-south diffusion, but perhaps not by land but along the Pacific coast.

In fact, there were certain traits in Pericú culture (such as the existence of two groups of shamans with religious traditions that were not only distinct but antagonistic) that lead us to believe in the coming of a group of strangers originating from a somewhat superior culture, who, together with these traditions, could have easily introduced the other elements mentioned above. The barrenness of the regions to the north of the Pericú could explain why those strangers originating in the distant north had pursued their travels along the coast until they reached the much more attractive land of the south's last tribe.

In this way, the presence of relatively recent elements in Pericú culture is explained together with older traits that were known throughout the peninsula, such as dart-throwers.

\* \* \*

Although it seems to us an undoubted fact that there is a certain correlation between the very marked differences in environment and in culture of the Guaycura of San Luis and those of the Pericú, it need not be thought that the influence of the more favorable conditions under which the latter's life developed was manifested only in their greater receptivity to new cultural traits. It may have resulted also in a greater preservation of ancient traits, as we see in the already discussed case of the survival of the dart-thrower.

Taking this idea to its ultimate implications, we might think that in a remote past, with the Guaycura and Cochimi already established on the peninsula, there existed in those tribes' culture everything or at least much that was known only among the Pericú at the arrival of the Europeans, having in the interim been lost among the Guaycura and Cochimi through the negative influence of the environment in which they lived. Thus, as an example of a direct influence, they would have stopped constructing huts because in their territory rains from which they needed to protect themselves did not fall. As an example of a rather indirect influence, the women in a culture impoverished by its isolation in a barren environment would have stopped making and wearing capes, being satisfied with the two cloths (which were also used by the Pericú women, by the way).

Even if this explanation of the cited traits and the large majority of individual elements in which some of the peninsula's tribes differentiate themselves from others is rejected, this author nonetheless recognizes the very deep traces that a general process of stagnation and impoverishment has left, to a greater or lesser degree, in the culture of all Baja California's tribes, including the Pericú.

The most isolated group, the Guaycura of San Luis, show us this process in its most advanced state. The extreme fragmentation of those Indians' social life, described in such dark yet strong colors by Baegert, certainly does not give us the image of a "primitive" tribe in the sense of a group still very close to the first true men, but rather, on the contrary, of a tribe with a history as long as those of many other more fortunate groups, but a tribe that lacked all those stimuli and opportunities that allowed others to move up in their evolution step by step.

The Guaycura of Baegert, from a certain point in their history forward, not only did not continue to rise, but by the logic of the historical processes that do

not allow any people to remain for more than a brief moment at the same point of their evolution, began to descend and were continuing to descend when our author knew them.

The great merit of Jacobo Baegert is to have grasped this situation, although without understanding it theoretically, and to have described it in a very vigorous style with that "realism and pessimism" that his colleague Decorme criticized and that the anthropologists have praised.

March 5, 1942  
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#### Endnotes

Notes in brackets are those of the editor; all other notes are by Kirchhoff.

1. [On human hair capes, see Aschmann 1968; Meigs 1970.]
2. The most important work, still unpublished, of Padre del Barco, a photographic copy of which was brought from the National Library of Rome to Mexico's Museo Nacional de Antropología by Miss Eulalia Guzmán, belongs to the same class of sources as the cited works of Venegas-Burriel and Clavijero. [The cited works are Venegas 1757, 1759; Clavijero 1789, 1937. The work of del Barco has now been published in Spanish and, in part, in English: Barco 1973, 1980, 1981.]
3. The two others to which Decorme [1941] refers are those of Venegas-Burriel and Clavijero.
4. However, we also find concerning this aspect some interesting information from this author that is not found in any other source, but without for that reason

doubting its veracity; for example, the traditions concerning descent from birds and stones.

5. [On the still-unresolved question of Cochimí languages or dialects, see Mixco 1978, 2006.]
6. [Now the Mexican state of Baja California Sur.]
7. Concerning the use of salt among the Pericú of the extreme south, see below.
8. [The lack of domesticated dogs among several groups in western North America is indicated by Jorgensen 1980:386.]
9. Except among the Pericú; see below.
10. [*Tablas* were painted wooden tablets. The use of *tablas* was more widespread in Baja California than Kirchhoff realized; see Cassiano V. 1987; Davis 1968; Hedges 1973; Meigs 1974; Ritter 1979]
11. [On the question of the distribution of atlatls and darts in Baja California during the contact period, see Massey 1961; Laylander 2007.]
12. With respect to the New World, however, it is necessary to recognize that we do not yet know with certainty which of the two weapons was used by tribes much more ancient than the Basketmakers (Folsom and Cochise cultures, etc.) that have been discovered in North America during the last decades.
13. [On Baja California watercraft, see Des Lauriers 2005, 2010; Heizer and Massey 1953.]
14. It is interesting that both traits were found among the Pericú only in some rancherías and not in all of the tribal territory.

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