

xgɛdɔm halait

general.

Initiation of skagwet.

Tsibasa tries to get
his nephew in.

CANNIBAL HALÁIT

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

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

Any mention of death in the presence of an xgédem haláit 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 haláit attendants) would offer an arm from which the xgédem haláit would bite a piece of flesh, and the volunteer would be immediately compensated.

The real head of the xgédem haláit 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 haláit 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.

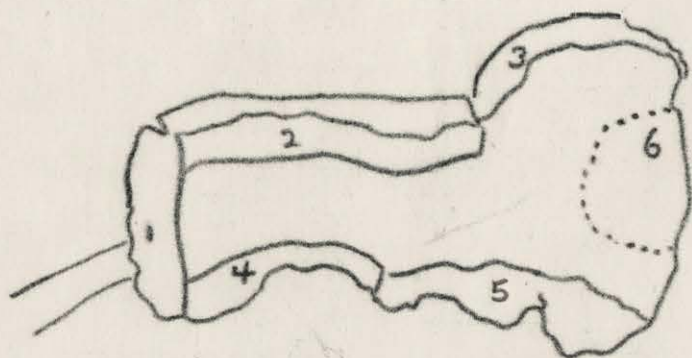
This initiation was the last of its kind among the tsəmsiyán and took place at Port Simpson shortly after the arrival

Beynon v. 2, 1956-57 (see p. 22 of notebook)

MAP TO ACCOMPANY STORY OF STORY OF
ALFRED DUDOWARD'S INITIATION INTO
THE xgédem haláit.

Key to numbers on map:

1. gidzaxláá tribe village
2. gin'adóiks " "
3. gin'ax'ngik " "
4. gitlán " "
5. git'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 *délhaláit* were carefully chosen and could attend any ceremonies of the *xgédem haláit* 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 *haláit* were immune. This was signified by the wearing of a cedar bark ring. Any one not a member of any *haláit* group would never show themselves, but would hide away for fear of their lives.

The initiate kept calling the *xgédem haláit* 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 (*laxs*), *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 *haláit* 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 yóp 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 (xgédet) 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 tsëmsiyán at Port Simpson. There does not seem to have been any among the nigsé 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 gitxámát and wetctá and leldí.

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 nulim group and was away on his probationary trip to the skies to acquire supernatural powers. It so happened that the xgédem haláit group were all gathered at git'amát holding their dances, and among them was wiséks, the gitxála chief who was an xgédem haláit. 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 xgédem haláit."

'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 xgédem haláit 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 haláit initiate, and so it was hoped that he would get recognition into the xgédem haláit

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 wiséks and told him that when he heard the prearranged signal (when all were asleep in the haláit house at Kitamat) he was to come out and lead them into the haláit house. Once they were in the house gunaxnútk, 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 haláit house that night chief tsibá'sa, accompanied by his initiate nephew gunaxnútk, landed there and gave the signal/^{so} that the gitxá'la man would come out and lead the initiate into the haláit 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 haláit 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 awaoke 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 gitxála 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 gitxála companions. He was very much angered that his plans had misvarried and that he had also broken the ^{sacred} 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 gitxála 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 gitxála 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 nulim 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 gitxáa 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.