

gidzintk

hilaxε return of wiseks
daughter in ganomk'somas

Burning of legε's slave

widεdelε

nissetnε'ts

From notes and informants: Stewart Iaxsik, Kincolith, Emma Wright, Gilaxtamks; Helen Clifton, Hartley Bay

MAGIC naxnóx ^{Heber} Helen Clifton

gidz'ntk
 There was a group of people known as the gidz'ntk group, who were the *inner* council or secret council of the chief. Everything pertaining to magic or the supernatural was made /?/ by this group under the authority of the head chief of the tribe. This gidz'ntk group was the most exclusive group in the tribe and membership was a hereditary privilege.

The mechanical masks representing supernatural powers (naxnóxs) were made by this group.

Whenever the head chief wished to outdo some magic feat of a rival chief he called upon his gidz'ntk group to formulate a more spectacular feat of magic.

For example, wiséks, a gispewudwada, gitxáæ wanted to make his daughter's reappearance from the heavens in her haláit initiation in the nulim secret society very spectacular. He went to his gidz'ntk group and told them "I want the reappearance of my daughter to be the most outstanding of all. I have invited as my guest of honor legéx, chief of the gispaxlo'ots, and I would like him to be surprised at our supernatural qualities. I want my daughter to return from her voyage to the skies (hiláxs) in front of the village of Kitkatla emerging from the waters inside of my crest ^{g?} ktsemáos (Snag of Sands). The crest will open up and disclose my daughter standing inside. Then it will close again and sink into the water and immediately my daughter shall be found standing on the bank behind all the spectators, and will be immediately led by the master haláit to the haláit house."

Then the giszóntk¹ group gathered together in a conference to discuss how to bring this performance about. The gidzóntk group was made up of the carvers, the song composers, the storytellers and the leading advisers of the chief.

To become a member of the gidzóntk one must have hereditary rights and pledge absolute secrecy about everything that took place in the secret meetings. Here it was that the candidates were selected for the haláit secret society of which the chief was head (either ?nułim or ?mi?tła). This group had charge of the initiate from the time of his disappearance until he reappeared from his trip to the heavens. It was this group who assisted the chief in all his appearances while making the initiate a member of the haláit group. Sometimes these duties lasted from the winter till early spring or the oolachen fishing season, December until March or April, since the initiation was not finished until the new member was rid of the last trace of haláit influence. The length of each initiation largely depended on the wealth and social standing of the initiate.

The tribute would be paid by the initiate's family, both paternal and maternal, to the presiding chief, who in turn compensated his assistants or the gitzóntk group who actually did the work.

So in this case the gitxála wiséks wished to have his daughter initiated in a spectacular fashion, showing her paternal origin by returning from the heaven's using one of her father's crests, the ganem ktsem?aos, the snag of the sandbar.

1. gidzon -- inner or secret. Literally this means an inner chamber or secret chamber to which only members of the particular group are permitted entrance. Each chief had such a particular group and also such a chamber in his house in which the secret conferences were held.

The gidzónk group settled upon a way to use this crest and when the initial period of sending the child into the heavens and awaiting her return was concluded they were prepared for the performance.

The guests of honor were the gispaxló'ots tribe with their chief ləgəx. It was to astound this guest that wiséks had desired such a spectacular performance in his daughter's initiation into the 'mi'tla secret society. The daughter had already completed her preliminary initiation as a tsik a year earlier.

The guests were all quartered in the gitxála chief wiséks' house and the houses of wiséks tribesmen held ləgəx's gispaxló'ots tribesmen.

One night there came a loud crash at the rear of wiséks' house and then was heard the blowing of the naxnóx whistles of this group. (Each secret society had reed whistles which gave a distinct sound). Then there was more crashing of rocks outside the house, and this continued throughout the night.

Thus all knew that the initiate daughter of wiséks was to return from her voyage to the heavens on the next morning. This crashing of rocks on the houses and the continual sounding of naxnóx whistles was the sign that all members of the 'mi'tla ~~group~~ were to gather by the beach in front of the village early the next morning.

Next day, two large canoes were seen approaching the crowd of people gathered on the beach and the sounds of the naxnóx whistles became more and more frequent as the canoes drew closer. as the canoes stopped some distance from the shore the people saw a large tree-like snag emerge from the waters and open to

reveal the daughter of wiséks, completely nude, standing inside.

The master of ceremonies then announced, "The daughter of my master has returned from her journey to the heavens, where she has acquired much power and she will now appear among her fellow ^íʔmíʔetia."

The hollow tree began to close again and the naxnóx whistles sounded to the rear, along the shore, and the people looked and beheld the initiate standing on the bank behind the spectators. She was being led in front of the village and the tree had disappeared.

This performance was accomplished by having another child double for the initiate in the hollow tree. When it sunk from sight the double was quickly taken aboard one of the attendant canoes, while the whistles of the haláit were being sounded on shore. Thus everyone saw the initiate whom they thought they had just seen submerge in the hollow tree.

legéx, the guest of honor, and his gispaxlóʔots group were very much astounded, and legéx gathered his council group (gidzónk) on his return home, and told them: "I am going to outdo the haláit of wiséks. I must show the gitxála that I have greater haláit powers than they. I will show them that I can be put to death by cremation and my ashes gathered up and placed in a box, and then after the dancing of my shamans (halaíts) I shall be restored to life.

legéx, the gispaxlóʔots chief, then sent his councillors on a very secret mission to look for a double for himself. This man must resemble legéx in every respect. The councillors found a male slave among the Chilkats who was the exact double of legéx,

purchased him, and returned secretly to Metlakatla, B. C. The slave was landed at night, and at the same time legéx went into hiding so that the slave might appear as legéx, even to assuming legé' rights with his wives.

When it was time for the people to move to the Nass for the oolachen season, legéx remained behind with several of his wives and councillors. They then began to spread rumours that legéx would show his haláit powers to be greater than any other haláit. The rumour grew, and it became known that legéx was to be cremated and his ashes placed in a box, whereupon the haláits in whom he had vested his powers would restore his body to life again.

Every time the gispaxló'ots tribe moved from place to place in order to gather food and furs they either left legéx behind in an empty village or placed him in a large box and carried him about.

Meanwhile the gispaxló'ots extended to the slave every courtesy and mark of respect shown to legéx. It was not difficult to keep the people away from legéx, as in olden times very few people ever came in contact with the chiefs. But in this case they made legéx (i.e. the slave) as conspicuous as possible. Although the Chilkat slave knew he was to be sacrificed, he played the part of legéx, even fooling the gispaxló'ots, and only the secret group knew what was happening.

Finally the haláit season arrived, when all the chiefs showed their haláit powers to all the others. This season was always opened by ni·swéxs, chief of the gin'adóiks tribe, and it was also his duty to close the season, for this was his special privilege.

When this drama season was opened the gispaxló'ots sent their messengers to the ^{Kitkata} gitxá'la people inviting them to be the main guests, as well as inviting all the chiefs and people of the tsemseyán tribes. It was many days before the messengers returned, as they were entertained by each chief and tribe they visited.

When the messengers returned from their visiting preparations were made for the performance. The gitxá'la and other tribes made their encampment near the gispaxló'ots village of laxmes'óle (lax--in, mes-- white , 'ol--bear, "village of white bear"). When the people heard the beating of the huge haláit drum the guests began to go to the gispaxló'ots village. When all the guests had assembled in the house of legéx, he arose and began his halait reception dance, spreading eagle down upon all the guests.

When this was finished the master of ceremonies for the gispaxló'ots tribe greeted the guests and announced, "My master is going to show his fellow chiefs and their people his great supernatural powers. He will be cremated and his ashes placed in a box, then the haláit dancers in whom he has placed his great haláit powers will sing and dance his power songs and dances, in order to restore him to life again. This will be done in front of you all in this house, and no one shall leave until all is finished."

Turning to his tribesmen, the spokesman said to the slaves: "Bring in the wood and prepare to make the funeral pyre upon which our master will be burned."

The slaves then made a huge pile of pitch wood, and oolachen oil was poured on this and then the slave who was impersonating legéx was seated on top of the pyre, dressed in chief's regalia.

The pyre was lighted and in full view of all the guests the slave was burned, until nothing but ashes remained. These were gathered and placed in a box which had been put in the middle of the floor and then covered.

Next, the dancers came out and began to sing the power songs of legéx. They took the lid from the box and called into the box, "Are you alive yet, my master?"

When there was no reply the master of ceremonies urged the dancers on. They kept up the dancing all night and next morning they again removed the lid and called into the box, "Have you come to life yet, my master?"

Then they heard a very weak and feeble voice coming from the box, "I am gradually getting stronger. Keep on singing."

Again the master of ceremonies urged the dancers and singers until they were all in a frenzy now that they had heard their master's voice.

Next day the master of ceremonies removed the lid of the box and called, "Master, are you getting stronger?" They now heard the reply of the chief in a much stronger voice, "Yes, I shall soon be able to rise but I am too weak to move yet. Keep on with your singing and dancing, as that will strengthen me."

So the dancers and singers were even more energetic in their performance. Next day the master of ceremonies took off the lid of the large box and called to the chief, "Have you gotten stronger, my master?"

The voice of legéx was almost normal as he called out, "I am as well now as I can be for a while. I am not very strong." Soon legéx stood up in the box and he appeared very weak and pale. He had now overcome all other haláit performances and he began to

distribute gifts to all his guests. He had overcome his gitxála rivals.

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Another feat of magic that is always spoken of among the tsemsiyán:

There were two great halaits: one among the gin[?]ax[?]angik and one among the gitsel[?]ase on the Skeena River. It was winter time and the coast people were at their winter village of Metlakatla, B.C., while the gitsel[?]ase were at their Skeena village, and the river was frozen over and the country covered with snow, which made travelling impossible.

The name of the gitse[?]l[?]ase shaman or halait was wideldál (wi--great, deldál--reverberating) and that of the coast shaman was ni[?]s[?]e[?]lnáts. ni[?]s[?]e[?]lnáts was sitting by his fireside, in deep thought. Finally he said out loud, "Oh! If my brother wideldáá would only think of me and send me some tem[?]it (cluster berry)."

These two villages are about 125 miles apart. While ni[?]s[?]e[?]lnáts was expressing this wish, a very strong wind struck the smoke hole of his house, and down the smoke hole came a huge quantity of tam[?]it. This he gathered up and fed to his people as having been sent by his brother wideldál.

Now wideldál was sitting by the fire in his own village of the Skeena River, and he thought of his brother ni[?]s[?]e[?]lnáts on the coast. He thought, "Oh, if only my brother ni[?]s[?]e[?]lnáts would only send me some fresh cockles which I crave very much to eat."

Not long after he had expressed the thought a great noise was heard by the people, coming from the smoke hole of the house, and then a huge quantity of cockles came down the smoke hole. These were all fresh and he cooked and served them to his household.

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MAGIC naxnóx Helen Clifton

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For example, wiséks, a gispewudwada, gitxááe wanted to make his daughter's reappearance from the heavens in her haláit initiation in the nułim secret society very spectacular. He went to his gidzóntk group and told them "I want the reappearance of my daughter to be the most outstanding of all. I have invited as my guest of honor legéx, chief of the gispaxlo?ots, and I would like him to be surprised at our supernatural qualities. I want my daughter to return from her voyage to the skies (hiláxs) in front of the village of Kitkatla emerging from the waters inside of my crest ganem ktsemáos (Snag of Sands). The crest will open up and disclose my daughter standing inside. Then it will close again and sink into the water and immediately my daughter shall be found standing on the bank behind all the spectators, and will be immediately led by the master haláit to the haláit house."

Then the giszóntk¹ group gathered together in a conference to discuss how to bring this performance about. The gidzóntk group was made up of the carvers, the song composers, the story-tellers and the leading advisers of the chief.

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The guests of honor were the gispaxlo'ots tribe with their chief legéx. It was to astound this guest that wiséks had desired such a spectacular performance in his daughter's initiation into the 'mi'tla secret society. The daughter had already completed her preliminary initiation as a tsik a year earlier.

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