

1. J.W. initiation into mite

2. Secret Societies in general

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mite

xg edam, Initiation of A.D

lut'siste

dog eaters

An initiate's experience of her initiation into the ?mi?etlá haláit group.

Informant: Mrs. Julia White, aged about 80 years.
Name: łóxs, meaning moon. laxskik, gispaxló?ots

I was told by my mother, the wife of suhaláit, gispewudwada, gispaxló?ots, that I had already been initiated as a tsí?k. This had been my first initiation as a small child, some years before, and now I was to complete my initiation, being made to disappear and go into the heavens. I was 10 years old at this time, so I remember everything that was done.

First my paternal aunts took me into the haláit's house, and there my father led me to where ni's?wamá, the gispaxló?ots chief, was sitting. He addressed the chief: "Come, great haláit, Come! Put into this humble person some of your great power so she may appear ^{as} made a person among her fellow people." This he repeated many times, and as he finished he placed his gift of blankets in front of the chief, saying "This is for the powers of the haláit to walk on." This was compensation for the chief's services.

There were many other initiates, as it was now the season of the haláits. When all the gifts had been placed before him, chief ni's?wamá, wearing a gweshaláit and his headdress of eagle ?amhaláit and carrying a dancing rattle, came to where each initiate stood. We were now to be made to disappear into the heavens, there to gain supernatural powers through the influence of the haláit chief who directed them. The chief waved his robe over me and then made motions of blowing through his cupped hands up into the smoke-hole. At the same time the surrounding attendants hid me under their cloaks and I was taken away to a secret room at the rear of the house, to be cared for by my paternal aunts.

I was allowed to talk to no one but my paternal aunt,

who fed and cared for me.

I remember looking through a hole in the wall of the house and seeing some of my playmates. My aunt had gone out for a little while, and since I was alone I called out to my playmate and we spoke through the hole in the wall. She had never been initiated and thus was but an ordinary person, with whom I was not to mingle. I was supposed to be under some strange influence, but I felt no different than when I first came to be an initiate.

My aunt came in and caught us and reprimanded me severely, saying : "You are now being made a person, being elevated above the ordinary people, so you must observe all tabus, which means that you must have nothing to do with anyone until the great haláit has withdrawn his haláit influence from you."

So for many more days I was kept alone in this secret chamber. Then one night I heard a loud calling of naxnóx whistles outside the walls, which continued throughout the night. Just before midnight several male attendants came for me, and I was taken with my paternal aunt to a little hut and hidden at the rear of the haláit house.

In the meantime, I had a companion who was in every way like me, who could pass as ~~me~~ ^{me} double.

My double was taken away the same night, to act in my place. Now it was time for me to return from the heavens on the back of a huge swan in front of the gispaxló'ots village. Early that morning there was a continuous sounding of naxnóx whistles among all the gispaxló'ots houses, then all those of the mi'etl'oe group came out and gathered at the beach below the haláit house. At daybreak the people saw a huge swan rise from the water, with a small girl (my double) seated on it. The naxnóx whistles sounded near the swan and after floating near the shore it began to sink, and disappeared. As soon as it disappeared I was taken from the hut and hidden in the shrub back of the gispaxló'ots houses. The naxnóx whistles sounded around me then ni's'wamá, the haláit came and led me up and down in front of the gispaxló'ots houses. My parents had hung ^{up} a long line of blankets, robes, and lengths of cloth, for distribution to all the members of this haláit group. Having made my return from the heavens a cord was tied to me and I was led nude to the haláit house. The great haláit nis'wa'mák began to dance and sang his power songs as he led me about the house in front of all the 'mi'etla. Then I was again led to the secret chamber. I was kept alone and could not mingle with the people until I was rid of the supernatural influence of the great haláit. My aunt attended me night and day. The gifts supplied by my father and mother were distributed to all the haláit group in the haláit house; the haláit himself was compensated, and also my paternal aunts were rewarded for taking care of me. The lú'i (cedar bark ring) the haláit had placed around my neck had to be worn throughout my initiation period. After many days confinement, the naxnóx whistles sounded one night outside my hut and a large stone was thrown against the wall, signifying that the next morning I would again be taken to the haláit. Very early the next day my aunt gave me food (I was not allowed to touch any

of the food containers, and I sucked water through a drinking tube). Then the naxnóx whistles sounded all around the village to summon the inhabitants to the haláit house, where the great halait would remove more of the supernatural influence from me. ^{After} This ceremony I would have but two bark circles around my neck, yet I still must wait some time before all the haláit influence would be taken from me. When I was led into the haláit house to stand before the great halait ni·s'wa'mák all of the people there began to sing his haláit power song. The haláit came down from his seat dancing and rattling his rattle. The attendants and others beat time on a beating board (ganspá. gan means board, spá means beater) with their spá·ś (sticks used to beat time with). The haláit then came to me and led me to the rear of the house, beating the ground and dancing around me. Then he placed his hands upon me and made as if to take something from me and throw it through the smoke-hole. He sat down and I was again led into hiding under the care of my paternal aunt. My parents again compensated the haláit, my paternal aunts, and the other guests.

There were other initiates at the same time, but I never came into contact with them. After a long period of seclusion a stone was thrown against the wall of the house one night, and soon the naxnóx whistles began to sound in the bushes at the rear and finally in the house itself. This was the signal that next day I would be taken to complete my initiation into the mietlá group. Next morning I was led inside the haláit house and my parents placed gifts before the haláit chief ni·s'wa'mák, saying "This is for the powers of the great haláit to walk upon." The attendants took the gifts and placed them where the haláit sat, and he arose and dressed in his haláit garments. Swinging his rattle and dancing in time to the spa·(beaters) while singing his haláit song, he came to where I was

standing and removed the cedarbark ring from my neck and rubbed my body as if to remove something from it. This he took in his cupped hands and blew through them. As he did so a naxnóx whistle sounded outside, in the bushes at the rear of the house. Then he threw all the haláit influence through the smokehole and I was now purified. He then led me around the house and finally I was allowed to sit with my parents. When the gifts had been distributed to all I was allowed to return to my parents' home, ~~a-member~~ now a full member of the mi'etlá group, privileged to attend all festivities of this group and to receive gifts.

SECRET SOCIETIES

The haláit seasons are declared open when ni's'wéks, chief of the gin'adóiks tribe, ~~pronounces~~ pronounces it so, this being his special privilege among all of the haláit groups in the tsemsiyán tribes. ni'swéks bore the haláit name wixstáng.óm lách'c, meaning (wi--great, xstáng.óm--noise of, lách'c--heavens) "Great noise of the heavens". No other haláit would start the drama season (which took place in the winter, when the fishing and hunting were finished).

The secret societies were divided into many groups; ^{There were} groups to which only chiefs and those of royal rank could belong; and two groups 'nú'lim and mi'etla, which all ranks were compelled to join, in each tribe. Where there were several chiefs in a tribe, one became the head of one ~~group~~ of the latter two groups and was considered the wihaláit, and the other chief became the head of the other group. When there was only one chief house in the tribe the head chief would share the leadership of the haláit group with one of his nephews, who would be his successor. The regular way of getting initiates was to divide the people. Husband and wife never belonged to the same haláit group. There was no set rule about

which group an individual should belong to, the usual procedure being that one of the haláit chiefs noticed when one of his tribesmen became wealthy and had children who were not as yet initiated into any group. He would send one of his haláit attendants to the parents, insisting they have the child initiated, telling them that it was the wish of the chief that the child should become a member of his group.

These overtures were usually made in a round about way. Should the parents ignore this, a more direct approach is made, approximating a command. The parents are told that it would be well for the health of the child to become an initiate. In the case of a very small child the initiation period could extend over two or three haláit seasons, in accordance with the wealth and standing of the initiate's family.

The halait initiations were a source of income for the chiefs and between them they kept the two groups fairly equal. The paternal aunts and uncles, who had the initiates in their care under the direction of the chief haláit, also shared in the tributes. The whole expense fell to the parents. The maternal uncles or aunts were not called upon to contribute, as in other instances.

There were other groups of haláits, but these were restricted to royal groups.

When-~~ta~~ During the haláit season the chief's house (or a larger building if such was available) was used and a ^{lu'i} ~~slu'i~~ (cedar bark ring) was hung outside and the house was thus tabooed for the uninitiated. Only those of a particular group could come in, and they were privileged to wear cedar-bark rings as collars and headdresses.

Should an uninitiated person come in, he would have to become an initiate or be threatened with death by the powers of the haláit.

Thus when the haláit whistles sounded all the uninitiated would go into hiding so as not to come into contact with any of the haláit groups that were in session.

Sometimes the haláit sessions would last a number of days and nights, and in later days when liquor was introduced the sessions were drunken and sexual orgies.

Secrecy was impressed upon the initiates: they might never divulge what took place. This was impressed on the initiates by the haláit and the attendant paternal aunts; reinforced by the threat that the haláit had great supernatural powers which enabled him to see and hear everything, and that his punishment would be death.

There were differences in the sounds of the whistles used by the two haláit groups, thus the members of the haláit group recognized the sound of that group's whistles and went at once to the haláit house of their own group.

At each initiation a scar was made on the lobe of the initiate's ear, one scar for each initiation period. The individual having three such scars was thus identified as having qualified for the entire initiation period, and was regarded as an elevated person.

The haláit performances originated with the southern people, the wutstás, who are also credited with the origin of the swénsk haláit.

The xgédem haláit (Cannibal group) was the most exclusive group, existing among the tsemsiyán only in two tribes and two royal houses, those of sq'agwét, of the git'andó, and saxsa'axt of the gitwelgiyóts. Their attendants or telhaláit were also considered to be associated with this group. This was the most feared haláit group, and whenever their naxnóx whistles of this group (which gave forth the sound

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hóp hóp, hóp hóp) were heard, everyone disappeared from sight.

While an initiate is supposedly hungry for human flesh, he will not bite anyone except a member of the group.

I remember an initiation, that of a former sgagwét (Alfred Dudoward) of a member of this Cannibal group.

At daybreak one morning around the git?andó village the hóp hóp of the whistles sounded, and soon this sound came from the gitwelgiyóts village, which was across about where the bandstand is located in the village of Port Simpson now and soon saxsá?axt came from his house, wearing a bearskin garment, and accompanied by his attendants. Throughout the night before there had been a constant weird whistling and sounding of hóp, hóp . . . There was great fear among all the people and no one dared venture from the houses at night. All knew by the whistles that there would be an initiation the next day.

When saxsá?axt came out and went across to the git?andó village, ^{the} ~~another~~ initiate, sqaqwét, was being led down from the house to the beach in a very excited state. He was being led by the xgédem haláit from Kitamat, sen?axé't, who was the head of this group.

The initiate was becoming more and more frantic, endeavouring to break away from his leash to bite the onlookers. Unable to do so, the initiate was paraded in front of the git?andó village and then led up into the woods behind the village.. Soon the people heard the hóp hóp call of the naxnóx whistles. Then the noise ceased. The initiate had disappeared into the heavens, to acquire more powers.

Everyday there sounded the hóp call of the group, and then some days later the hóp calls came from all around both the git?andó and gitwelgiyóts village. Then all of the xgédet group began to

gather at the git[?]andó village, for they knew that the initiate was ready to return. As the hóp hóp calls became louder and more frequent the initiate was led down to the beach, frantically attempting to escape from the control of the attendants. He attempted to bite and chew the spectators. His attendants ran from side to side warning the people, "Take care, the haláit is beyond our control. He may do you harm."

Then the initiate went down to the edge of the village and began to dig into what looked like a grave, and dug out what appeared to be the remains of a child, and this the initiate began to devour. As he chewed the blood ran down his face and many ran away in fear.

Somewhat appeased, the initiate began running about, continually calling out hóp hóp . . . and the master of the haláit ceremonies began to call out "Who will feed the naxnóx" (meaning the initiate). No one responded and the initiate became increasingly frantic and soon appeared almost insane.

It was then that the niece of san[?]axé[?]t, the Kitamat chief, came down to the initiate and said "Come, great haláit, come appease your hunger." So saying she bared her arm that the initiate might eat of her flesh. The initiate, in a very frenzied state, bit her arm, and then appeared exhausted now that his hunger was satisfied. The young woman said "Poor naxnóx, have you now satisfied your hunger?"

The initiate and the rest of the group were then led to the house of the git[?]andó chief, and once there, the Kitamat chief and saxsa[?]axt began to dance and all the haláit attendants beat wooden drums. Again the initiate was led about, and once more made to disappear. Then gifts were distributed: first to be compensated were the Kitamat chief sen[?]axé[?]t, then ^{saxsa[?]}saxsa[?]axt, then the woman who had offered her arm for the initiate to bite.

This woman always accompanied her uncle on these initiations because it was her especial privilege to be bitten by initiates. She had many scars on her arms to show how many initiates had bitten her. This was the initiation of the git[?]andó xg[?]edem haláit.

The other privileged group of haláits had the power of destruction. This also was a group exclusive to the royal chiefs. Only a few had this privilege, which was originally given from Kitimat where it originated. This haláit belonged only to gin[?]ax[?]angik.

The informant said that "Some of the gin[?]ax[?]angik chief's paternal origin were of kitamat and from this connection came the lu[?]sistá haláit. It was their especial privilege, afterwards used by various other chiefs among the tsemseyán."

The usual way in which the chiefs destroyed the valuables of fellow chiefs and tribesmen was to rush into the houses of fellow haláits and without warning break up boxes and other valuable property and wantonly scatter fire and mud around the house.

No-one would interfere with the actions of this haláit, but if the owner wished to protect certain of his property he would place a lu[?]i (cedar bark ring) on it. Since the lu[?]i had been used in a haláit performance or initiation it was believed to have certain supernatural qualities, and the destroying haláit would not touch the articles a lu[?] i protected.

Excrement was also thrown around the interior of the house. Attendants followed the destroying haláit, laden with the wealth of the performer, and made immediate restitution for the damage he did, saying "This is to pave the way for the great haláit to walk upon."

A person injured in any way was immediately compensated. No reprisal could be made.

This form of haláit was called lutsistá (meaning ? Informant says the word is of kwakú·l origin).

The performer would continue around the village, entering the houses of all those to whom he actually wished to distribute gifts.

DOG-EATER

There was another group of haláits whose initiates had to devour the flesh of live dogs. This was called xhaset or gaxhá·set. (x--partaking of, haset-- dog; gax-- partaking of, haset--dog). Among the tsemseyán there were only a few members, and these mostly belonged to gispaxló·ots and gitxá·a groups. Most of the members were those who were unable to qualify for admission into the xg·édet haláit group.

leg·éx of the tsemseyán had brought this performance to his people from the ?wutstá (Bella Bella).

The initiation was the same as the xg·édem haláit, except that instead of human flesh being eaten by the initiate, the flesh of a live dog was consumed.

There were not a great many initiates. ^{Note} Their secret house was away up in the woods behind the gispaxló·ots. There was a trail lined with dog skeletons. supposedly the food supply of the initiates while they were under the influence of the great haláit.

Dog-eater

x Note

Since the informant was of legéx' tribe, the gispaxló'ots, he was not very free with information about this tribe.

There is an old saying among the other people that the gispaxló'ots origin was from dogs.

There are various myths and narratives to this effect which I am certain have already been recorded, but in ~~the~~ event that I am mistaken I will rewrite one from my old notes. I am not certain that I have recorded it as yet.

COPIES

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There were differences in the sounds of the whistles used by the two haláit groups, thus the members of the haláit group recognized the sound of that group's whistles and went at once to the haláit house of their own group.

At each initiation a scar was made on the lobe of the initiate's ear, one scar for each initiation period. The individual having three such scars was thus identified as having qualified for the entire initiation period, and was regarded as an elevated person.

The haláit performances originated with the southern people, the wutstás, who are also credited with the origin of the swénsk haláit.

The xgédem haláit (Cannibal group) was the most exclusive group, existing among the tsamsiyán only in two tribes and two royal houses, those of sq'agwét, of the git'andó, and saxsa'axt of the gitwelgiyóts. Their attendants or telhaláit were also considered to be associated with this group. This was the most feared haláit group, and whenever their naxnóx whistles of this group (which gave forth the sound

hóp hóp, (hop ho)) were heard, everyone di^sappeared from sight.

While an initiate is supposedly hungry for human flesh, he will not bite anyone except a member of the group.

I remember an initiation, that of a former sgagwét (Alfred Dudoward) of a member of this Cannibal group.

At daybreak one morning around the git[?]andó village the hóp hóp of the whistles sounded, and soon this sound came from the gitwelgiyóts village, which was across about where the bandstand is located in the village /of Port Simpson/ now and soon saxsá[?]axt came from his house, wearing a bearskin garment, and accompanied by his attendants. Throughout the night before there had been a constant weird whistling and sounding of hóp, hóp . . . There was great fear among all the people and no one dared venture from the houses at night. All knew by the whistles that there would be an initiation the next day.

When saxsá[?]axt came out and went across to the git[?]andó village another initiate, sqaqwét, was being led down from the house to the beach in a very excited state. He was being led by the xgédem haláit from Kitamat, sen[?]axé[?]t, who was the head of this group.

The initiate was becoming more and more frantic, endeavouring to break away from his leash to bite the onlookers. Unable to do so, the initiate was paraded in front of the git[?]andó village and then led up into the woods behind the village.. Soon the people heard the hóp hóp call of the naxnóx whistles. Then the noise ceased. The initiate had disappeared into the heavens, to acquire more powers.

Everyday there sounded the hóp call of the group, and then some days later the hóp calls came from all around both the git[?]andó and gitwelgiyóts village. Then all of the xgédet group began to

gather at the git[?]andó village, for they knew that the initiate was ready to return. As the hóp hóp calls became louder and more frequent the initiate was led down to the beach, frantically attempting to escape from the control of the attendants. He attempted to bite and chew the spectators. His attendants ran from side to side warning the people, "Take care, the haláit is beyond our control. He may do you harm."

Then the initiate went down to the edge of the village and began to dig into what looked like a grave, and dug out what appeared to be the remains of a child, and t^tis the initiate began to devour. As he chewed the blood ran down his face and many ran away in fear.

Somewhat appeased, the initiate began running about, continually calling out hóp hóp . . . and the master of the haláit ceremonies began to call out "Who will feed the naxnóx" (meaning the initiate). No one responded and the initiate became increasingly frantic and soon appeared almost insane.

It was then that the niece of san[?]axé^{*}t, the Kitamat chief, came down to the initiate and said "Come, great haláit, come appease your hunger." So saying she bared her arm that the initiate might eat of her flesh. The initiate, in a very frenzied state, bit her arm, and then appeared exhausted now that his hunger was satisfied. The young woman said "Poor naxnóx, have you now satisfied your hunger?"

The initiate and the rest of the group were then led to the house of the git[?]andó chief, and once there, the Kitamat chief and saxsa[?]axt began to dance and all the haláit attendants beat wooden drums. Again the initiate was led about, and once more made to disappear. Then gifts were distributed: first to be compensated were the Kitamat chief sen[?]axé^{*}t, then saxsa[?]axt, then the woman who had offered her arm for the initiate to bite.

This woman always accompanied her uncle on these initiations because it was her especial privilege to be bitten by initiates. She had many scars on her arms to show how many initiates had bitten her. This was the initiation of the git'and' xg'edem haláit.

The other privileged group of haláits had the power of destruction. This also was a group exclusive to the royal chiefs. Only a few had this privilege, which was originally given from Kitimat where it originated. This haláit belonged only to gin'ax'angik.

The informant said that "Some of the gin'ax'angik chief's paternal origin were of kitamat and from this connection came the lufsistá haláit. It was their especial privilege, afterwards used by various other chiefs among the tsemsiyán."

The usual way in which the chiefs destroyed the valuables of fellow chiefs and tribesmen was to rush into the houses of fellow haláits and without warning break up boxes and other valuable property and wantonly scatter fire and mud around the house.

No-one would interfere with the actions of this haláit, but if the owner wished to protect certain of his property he would place a lu'i (cedar bark ring) on it. Since the lu'i had been used in a haláit performance or initiation it was believed to have certain supernatural qualities, and the destroying haláit would not touch the articles a lu' i protected.

Excrement was also thrown around the interior of the house. Attendants followed the destroying haláit, laden with the wealth of the performer, and made immediate restitution for the damage he did, saying "This is to pave the way for the great haláit to walk upon."

A person injured in any way was immediately compensated. No reprisal could be made.

This form of haláit was called lutsistá (meaning ? Informant says the word is of kwakú'a origin).

The performer would continue around the village, entering the houses of all those to whom he actually wished to distribute gifts.

DOG-EATER

There was another group of haláits whose initiates had to devour the flesh of live dogs. This was called xhasset or gaxhá'set. (x--partaking of, hasset-- dog; gax-- partaking of, hasset--dog). Among the tsensiyán there were only a few members, and these mostly belonged to gispaxló'ots and gitxála groups. Most of the members were those who were unable to qualify for admission into the xg.édet haláit group.

leg.éx of the tsensiyán had brought this performance to his people from the ?wutstá (Bella Bella).

The initiation was the same as the xg.édem haláit, except that instead of human flesh being eaten by the initiate, the flesh of a live dog was consumed.

There were not a great many initiates. ^{xndc} Their secret house was away up in the woods behind the gispaxló'ots. There was a trail lined with dog skeletons. supposedly the food supply of the initiates while they were under the influence of the great haláit.

Dog-eater

x Note

Since the informant was of legéx' tribe, the gispaxló'ots, she was not very free with information about this tribe.

There is an old saying among the other people that the gispaxló'ots origin was from dogs.

There are various myths and narratives to this effect which I am certain have already been recorded, but in ~~the~~ event that I am mistaken I will rewrite one from my old notes. I am not certain that I have recorded it as yet.