

TRANS-PACIFIC SIMILARITIES IN FOLKLORE: A RESEARCH LEAD

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Over a period of a good many years Nordenskiöld, Wassén and various other scholars have directed attention to similarities in folklore between the Americas and various areas of the Pacific. The total number of closely similar myths they report, however, is not great and the geographical areas concerned are fairly widely scattered. There appears to be a strong probability that much of the similarity is the result of independent but convergent development.

My attention has recently been called (by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff and Sol Tax, personal communications) to additional trans-Pacific similarities or coincidences in folklore motifs which seem to suggest an interpretation other than independent development. This report presents such new data as are at hand with the intent of bringing the question to the attention of interested persons who may be able to pursue it further. The author also wishes to offer a suggestion to account for the similarities discussed.

The geographical areas concerned are mountain Luzon and inner Formosa in the Pacific, and northern South America and Central America in the New World. A substantial body of very similar and sometimes virtually identical folklore is found among the mountain tribes of Luzon and Formosa (Norbeck, 1950). Although there is no historical record of contact between the various tribes of Luzon and Formosa, the close degree of similarity in their mythology is not very surprising. The two areas lie close together and are inhabited by peoples of essentially the same physical stock and highly similar cultures. Similarities in folklore between such widely separated and culturally divergent areas as Luzon-Formosa and South and Central America, however, are not so easily understood.

The closest similarity noted between these two latter areas is in a single tale which contains a number of motifs. No comprehensive survey to determine the distribution of the tale has been attempted, and materials do not, in fact, allow a comprehensive survey. It may be noted that data presented in this paper come partly from unpublished sources; it appears highly probable that the distribution in the New World of tale motifs here discussed is much greater than presently available accounts indicate. As reported among the Atayal tribe of Formosa, the folktale in question is as follows:

In the time of our ancient forefathers there was a village of the Shiguts tribe where the life of the people was naturally out of the ordinary, so it is said. This Shiguts tribe is said to have eaten only the vapor of cooked rice and boiled vegetables.

A man named Sijuma went there and saw that, although they cooked the rice and boiled the vegetables, they still did not eat the bulk

and only inhaled the vapor. The Shiguts were surprised when they saw that Sijuma swallowed the rice and vegetables just as they were and wondered from where he would eliminate the food he had eaten. Thereupon Sijuma said, "My people are not like you, who have no anus. We successively eliminate the food we consume." Having said this he showed them by excreting right there, so it is said.

Then one of the Shiguts said, "We also certainly would like to emulate you, who do not eat the vapor of the cooked food. I wonder if there is any way to make an anal opening." Sijuma said, "In that case I shall make an anal opening for you. If that is done you can eat rice and vegetables as I can and will be able to eliminate successively." The Shiguts man said, "By all means please do make an anal opening for me," and was very happy, so it is said. Sijuma thereupon heated an iron, and when the iron became very hot he made the Shiguts turn his buttocks toward him and suddenly thrust the iron into his buttocks. The Shiguts died at once and so Sijuma secretly fled away.

This Shiguts tribe had very light bodies and ran swiftly. That is because they ate only vapor. When the other Shiguts awakened in the morning they saw that the man whose anus was pierced by Sijuma and who had been left by him was dead. Because Sijuma had run away they knew that he had killed the Shiguts. They thereupon immediately pursued him. Sijuma looked and saw that they were pursuing him and that he was about to be overtaken. He therefore immediately climbed a tree and hid in its branches. In a few seconds the Shiguts, like the rustling of the wind, came pursuing him, but since they did not find his footprints, they went back. After the Shiguts had left, Sijuma descended to the ground. He was afraid, however, that the Shiguts would again come searching for him, and so he took some betel nut and stuffed it into the hole of an anteater, and also plastered it around the hole. Then he himself was able to get home safely.

As was foreseen, after Sijuma had gone home the Shiguts came back to search and found the hole of the anteater. Seeing that there was blood [betel juice] they thought he was undoubtedly in this hole and thrust a spear in. They saw that the spearhead when withdrawn was dripping with blood, and thinking that Sijuma was without doubt dead, they again returned to their homes, so it is said (Norbeck, 1950, pp. 14-15).

Essentially the same tale is reported for the Apayao of Luzon, whose folklore also includes various other myths which closely resemble those of the Atayal (Norbeck, 1950, pp. 8-12; Wilson, 1947). The same motifs are also found in the folklore of the Indians of Colombia. As reported by Reichel-Dolmatoff (personal communication), among the Chamí Indians of the Chocó a similar tale recounts the adventures of a youth who fell into another world, underground:

...There were Indians there, very short in stature, who ate only the smoke of their food and nothing more. They would then throw the fish away. The youth began to eat the fish. "Why do you do that?" they asked him. "Because it is delicious," he said. They replied, "We can eat only the vapor because we have no anus." "I can arrange that for you," he said. "Yes, help us," they said. Then the man took a stick of chontaduro [a species of palm] and pierced them, making a hole, but many died. Others were benefitted and recovered. "Don't you know some other way?" they asked him. "I know no other way," the man answered. Then they said, "We shall have to drive him from here, for he is killing us off this way." (The tale continues with the flight of the youth and his escape from the underworld).

Another Chamí version of the foregoing tale (Chaves, 1945, p. 147) differs chiefly in that none of those who are pierced by the palm stick die. Still another Chamí version is as follows:

The son of Karagabi (a culture hero) knew much. Below the earth there was a country where there lived people called Aramuko. They ate only the vapor of their food and they did not defecate. The son of Karagabi said to them, "As you don't know how to defecate, I shall make you an anus, and then you will be able to eat all sorts of food." The Aramuko said, "Yes, do so." The son said, "It is easy." He then took a knife and cut each of them between the buttocks. But all of the Aramuko died (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1953, p. 165).

Slightly variant forms of the tale are also reported for the Catio, another Chocó tribe (Rochereau, 1933; Wassén, 1933).

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1951, pp. 61-64) reports the motif among the Kogi of northern Colombia of a fleeing man imitating a spot of blood in order to make his enemies think that he is already dead, and states that he believes the motif of vapor-eating peoples who have anuses made for them may be found over a wide area of Colombia and perhaps also Venezuela (personal communication).

A considerably divergent tale, containing however the motif of unworldly people for whom anuses are made by a mortal, is reported among the Warrau and Arawak of Guiana (Roth, 1915, pp. 126-27). This latter motif also appears among the Barama River Carib in a still more divergent tale, but other motifs of the complex dealt with here are not reported (Gillin, 1936, pp. 196-97).

Tax (1951, p. 2657) reports the following tale from Panajachel, Guatemala:

No. 149. The Totoncapeno who took a letter to heaven.

One time in Totoncapan, the parish priest sent an Indian with a letter for God, not being certain that he would arrive since it was practically impossible to reach Him.

The Indian, who was very faithful, tried to find a way to cross the sea because in order to arrive there it was necessary to do so and because they believe that the sky is joined with the earth but with the sea in between. There were many difficulties in order for the man to arrive at the other end of the sea. Since many years passed before he again encountered land, now he had no more to eat and he was very hungry; seeing some beautiful fields of maize with very good ears, he decided to pick one and he ate it. He had just barely cut it when he saw that the ear of corn cried out, crying for help because of its theft, which produced a disturbance among the inhabitants of the place, who quickly met and came to the place where the hungry man was, in order to punish him, in their customary manner. A strange thing that the traveller noticed about them was that they could not look towards the sky but only toward the earth or the ground; but finally they succeeded in catching the evil doer and they took him prisoner and conducted him to their king. The arms that they carried were strong poles and some iron arms. Neither could these men stand very well but they walked somewhat stooped over like monkeys.

Finally, when they arrived before the king, he examined or questioned him (the Indian) concerning the robbery, and the hungry man told the truth. Then the king asked him if it was true that he ate things. The other answered yes, which was useful to him in his crime since they were thinking of killing him very soon. In order to find out if what the Indian said was true, they brought him tortillas and other things, and the man ate in front of the multitude which had crowded around him. He was taken to where there was a cross, where they piled tortillas after having smelled them, since they could only eat in this way. Then the man ate more tortillas, there, saying that in his land they did not do thus but that everything was introduced (into the body). Then they asked him if he did not fill up and where did everything that he had eaten go? He answered that he had an anus, which they did not have and they obliged him to show it to them and he did so in front of all of them. Then the king was glad in the presence of such new things and he asked him if he knew how to cure them or make them the same (as he was) because it was better to eat things and not do as they were doing. The man, in order to save himself from them said yes, he could perform the operation. Then they all remained until the following day when he was going to proceed with a few (of them). The king was the first to submit to him and a few others followed him: with a kind of knife which he made out of wood. When he had finished, he asked them to take him quickly to the other side of the sea in order for him to bring them the remedy with which he would heal the wounds he had given them, which they did promptly and he went toward the sea again, in the direction of the end of the world and not in the return direction because he was going to heaven. He was going into the sea with his beast of burden when the men who did not eat came after him because the king had died because of his wound; they cried out to him and told him to return, but he pressed his guide forward in order to

put more distance between them. Finally he succeeded in arriving at the place where the sky joins the earth.... (The tale continues with a recounting, which shows strong Christian influence, of the man's visit to heaven and subsequent return to his earthly home.)

Among the Chamí, Kogi and Kankuama of Colombia, Reichel-Dolmatoff (personal communication) finds another myth with motifs similar to those of a tale reported from the Nabaloi of Luzon (Moss, 1924, pp. 341-47) and the Atayal of Formosa (Norbeck, 1950, pp. 17-19). This is a tale of a giant with skin so thick it cannot be pierced by arrows, who extends his arms or his immense penis across rivers to serve as a bridge, who violates and thus kills women, and who is himself finally put to death (Atayal version).

No attempt at a comprehensive comparison of the folklore of the areas in question has been made. Such a study might well prove worthwhile, but it is a project better undertaken by specialists in the ethnology and post-Columbian history of South and Central America. Dealing only with the scanty data presented herein, however, it seems improbable that the coincidences in motifs are simply fortuitous. The motif of a people who live by inhaling only the vapor of cooking food seems to be uncommon, appearing only once in Thompson's comprehensive index of folk-motifs (Thompson, 1932-36, p. 137). Moreover, the total complex of motifs in the first tale here discussed seems unlikely to recur in toto in widely separated areas if the tale is of independent origin.

In this connection, the transporting of American Indians from one area to another of the old Spanish colonies seems pertinent. Various Indian groups under Spanish control were transported as laborers, slaves or exiles from their homelands to other, sometimes widely separated areas of the old Spanish possessions. Spanish documents dealing with the transporting of Colombian Indians to the Philippines during the eighteenth century have recently been discovered in Bogotá (Juan Friede and Reichel-Dolmatoff, personal communications). Reichel-Dolmatoff (personal communication) states that "As early as 1540 some Indians from the Sierra Nevada [Colombia] were exiled to Mexico." To the knowledge of the writer, no thorough investigation of this subject has ever been made, but it appears to be a study that might shed considerable light upon the question of diffusion of culture traits within the New World and also between the New World and the Pacific islands.

Although supporting data assembled here are few, an hypothesis that repatriated American Indians served as the agency of diffusion of these tales seems at least worthy of examination. Colombian Indians transported to the Philippines as laborers on Spanish plantations might over a period of years of contact with peoples of the Philippines assimilate many culture traits including folklore. It may be noted that the tale motifs in question are reported only from the isolated interior tribes of Luzon, peoples with whom plantation laborers would not ordinarily have come in

close contact. The published mythology of lowland Christianized tribes of Luzon differs considerably from that of the mountain, "pagan" peoples. It is probable, however, that much the same folklore existed among both mountain and lowland peoples at the time of first Spanish contact and that many of the folktales vanished with acculturation, especially with Christianization. It is worthy of note that both of the tales dealt with here would be considered obscene by a Spaniard or a Christianized Filipino.

Assuming that the similarities in folklore are not simply fortuitous, it seems most unlikely that the motifs in question reached the mountain peoples of Luzon through the agency of Colombian Indians. Such an hypothesis would shed no light on Formosan folklore, and the similarity in mythology between Formosa and mountain Luzon appears very much closer than between either of these areas and Colombia. It seems more reasonable to conjecture that at least some of the American Indians transported to the Philippines were later returned to South America and resumed life with their own or other American tribal groups (or that Filipinos got to Colombia). I do not know that this happened, but I think it is a matter worthy of investigation.

The major problems which the foregoing suggests can be answered only by a thorough comparison of the folklore of the two areas and an investigation of the matter of the transportation of aboriginal groups from one area to another of both the Pacific islands and the New World in Spanish colonial times.

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