

New Mexico Anthropologist

Volume 3 | Issue 5

Article 5

12-1-1939

The Southern Ute Dog-Dance and its Reported Transmission to Taos

Marvin Opler

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nm_anthropologist

Recommended Citation

Opler, Marvin. "The Southern Ute Dog-Dance and its Reported Transmission to Taos." *New Mexico Anthropologist* 3, 5 (1938): 66-72.
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nm_anthropologist/vol3/iss5/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Anthropologist by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

THE SOUTHERN UTE DOG-DANCE AND ITS REPORTED TRANSMISSION TO TAOS

MARVIN K. OPLER

The contacts between the Southern Utes and their Pueblo neighbors are of significance in determining certain aspects of southwestern history. In a two volume work entitled *Pueblo Indian Religion*, Dr. E. C. Parsons makes illuminating comments on this problem by suggesting that several Plains traits reached the eastern Pueblos by way of Ute contact. According to her data, Ute dances were given at Taos; Ute shamans were invited there to cure, and on occasion Taos patients were brought north to Ute country in order to receive the benefits of curing practices in vogue among their neighbors. This interchange of visitors from each tribe is said to have continued until Taos doctors were utilizing Ute methods of curing; it is said to have proceeded to a point where "possibly Tanoan practices or traditions about women scalpers or scalp custodians were also derived from the Utes who became militarized along Plains lines when they took over the horse complex."¹

Dr. Parsons goes on to relate how women camp followers among the Ute scalped and stripped the enemy and how Ute warriors distributed loot to those who greeted them after a victory and to poor persons who subsequently danced in their honor. The participation by women in scalping, in victory celebrations, and in custody of scalps is, of course, a well known practice among the Tiwa- and Tewa-speaking Pueblos; while the gift-giving feature of both Taos and Ute wardances is called by Parsons "the throw-away of Plains and Pueblos."²

Much has been written concerning borrowings in Pueblo cultures but never before, to my knowledge, has the line of diffusion suggested by Parsons been alluded to or thoroughly tested by field-work among the Southern Ute. For this reason, her observations represent a challenging lead to a new field of inquiry. It is the purpose of this paper to add confirmation to her conclusions by adducing data from recent field work among the Ute; by discussing the reported transmission of at least one dance to Taos Pueblo; and by bringing to bear on the question of Ute-Pueblo contact the few historical references to the subject that are now extant.

Data on Ute-Pueblo contact are by no means extensive. From Bandelier we learn that the Ute probably ravaged the neighborhood of Pecos even before Coronado's journey of 1540.³ Yet as Bandelier points out, elsewhere, attacks on the Rio Grande pueblos were only occasional interruptions of lengthy periods of trade; trade with Taos

1. Parsons, E. C. *Pueblo Indian Religion*, University of Chicago Press, 1939, Vol. 2, p. 1039.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1039.

3. Bandelier, A. F. "Report upon the Ruins of the Pueblo of Pecos." *Archaeological Institute of America, Papers, American Series*, no. 1, 1881, p. 111.

figures prominently in his accounts.⁴ The Ute themselves insist on early trade relations with the Rio Grande pueblos; Taos, Picuris, and San Juan are especially important in this regard; and Ute informants report as a common occurrence, following the introduction of the horse, the sending of packtrains from Tewa and Tiwa pueblos north to Ute settlements.⁵ Friendly contacts and intermarriages⁶ are also reported in the literature. As we have seen, Parsons has repeatedly called attention to Ute visits at Taos.⁷ That peaceful trade often marked these contacts is indicated by a *bando* issued from Chihuahua in 1778, "prohibiting settlers and allied Indians from visiting the Utes for purposes of trade and barter."⁸

In view of the close connection between the Southern Ute and Taos pueblo, it was not surprising to learn that at least one dance had been transmitted to Taos, as the Ute claimed, around 1897. This dance was called by my informants the *sari'nguap*, or Dog-dance, and it was reported to be, itself, an intrusive element which came ultimately from the Sioux by way of the Northern Ute of White River. There is at least one mention of a dance called the Dog-dance, at Taos, or *halowa*, at Picuris.⁹ In addition, there is a description of a dance at Taos said to come ultimately from the Sioux, which bears a marked resemblance to a part of the Ute Dog-dance; according to Taos choregraphy, this is a dance in which men and women alternate in a clockwise circuit, the men often throwing blankets over their partners as they go around with shuffling steps.¹⁰

Before describing the counterpart, and in Ute opinion, the immediate antecedent of the Taos Dog-dance, it is necessary, first of all, to discuss the background of customs and institutions in Southern Ute society which provided so perfect a setting for the introduction of this dance from Sioux sources. The Dog Company, or *sari'dzka*, is the only institution which ever arose among the Ute at all comparable to the Plains societies. Moreover, the Dog Company and the idea of Dog-dances can be roughly dated. Following the introduction of the horse, band camps under the authority of war-leaders sprang into existence. While formerly foot expeditions to the Plains were rare, according to Ute informants, now the buffalo hunt under the authority of a leader, preceded by scouts and cautiously directed came to be a common occur-

4. Bandelier, A. F. "Final Report on Investigations among the Indians of the Southwestern United States," Archaeological Institute of America, *Papers, American Series*, no. 3, Cambridge, 1890. See, for example, p. 164.

5. Field work among the Southern Ute took place in 1936 and 1937 under the auspices of the Department of Anthropology, Columbia University.

6. Bandelier, A. F. Final Report, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

7. Parsons, E. C. *Taos Pueblo*, General Series in Anthropology, no. 2, 1936, pp. 13, 60.

8. Twitchell, R. E. *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico*, Vol. 2, 1914, p. 263.

9. Parsons, E. C. "Picuris, New Mexico," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 41, 1939, p. 219.

10. Parsons, E. C. *Taos Pueblo*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

rence. As a result of this, a new incentive lured the Ute to Plains country. Now, with band mobility increased by the introduction of the horse, it became necessary to renew the supply of horses by raids on enemy camps. The horse, which allowed the Ute to concentrate into the band camp, now came to be sought in enemy territory. Whenever Plains Indian camps were sighted, and Comanche in particular, Utes were dispatched to cut away fast, picketed mounts from the center of enemy villages and to drive off as many of these as possible. The centralized population, coincidental with the band camp, required an increased food supply and the horses so instrumental in obtaining this increase. Warfare flared on the southern and eastern borderlands of Ute territory as hunting and raiding progressed. A necessary result of these hostilities was the increased importance of the war leader and the band camp. Only the band camp was guarded by a company of scouts and only there could one find a group sufficiently large and powerful to take a lively interest in raiding. Safety for one's kin, and a share in war-booty were guaranteed, therefore, solely by camping with the band.

Working in close coöperation with the scouts who guarded the camp, although not formally associated, was the band society of young men called the *sari'dzka*, or Dogs. This group, comprised of recruits and war-orphans, constituted the military training society of the Ute band. Living a short distance from the main band camp, these young men received instruction in buffalo-hunting and warfare from a few older men, designated to supervise and control the Dog Company. With the Dogs lived one older woman, called *Bi'a*, or mother, and it was she who cooked food for the boys and acted as their go-between with people in the main camp. The entire group served the function of camp watchman, climbing up into the hills every morning and evening to survey the surrounding country side. When the band camp moved, the Dog Company acted as a rear guard in the hills above the main body. Their name, *sari'dzka* corresponded to their careful vigilance for hostile invaders. When no danger threatened, the Dogs serenaded the camp from the hills above the camp or entered it to organize dances. A common type of Dog-dance was the Round dance reported above for Taos, in which the men and women alternate in a clockwise circuit; in Ute practice, the men often threw blankets over their partners and kissed them.

There are certain parallels, reported by informants, to the Sioux Dog-dance which, according to their testimony, is said to have been introduced later at a time when the original Dog Company and the warlike band of Ute society had both ceased to function. For example, the Dog Company occasionally was fed stews of dog meat said to impart the alertness and agility necessary for successful membership. Young men who had been out with girls from the band camp the night before were forbidden to partake of the ceremonial feast; in this way sentimental lovers were discovered and severely lectured for yielding

to romantic impulses. While dog, as a food, was held in great disgust among the Ute generally, its ritual function in this connection was highly prized. In the reservation period of Ute history, however, the Dog Company was no longer useful as a protective and military organization and it soon degenerated into a singing and dancing society and then passed out of existence, entirely. To meet the new mode of life, the Ute invented new dances and borrowed others from neighboring tribes. The Dog Company which no longer served a useful function was left behind as a reminder of the dead past. Nevertheless, the Dog Company provided an appropriate background for the introduction of the Sioux Dog-dance of reservation days. The setting was complete by the time the Sioux version reached the Northern Ute of White River. It was not long before the Southern Ute appropriated the dance also.

According to Ute informants, this dance was passed on to Taos pueblo. As one informant said:

We gave them all our headdresses and taught them all the songs. Some Taos Indians saw this Dog-dance and liked it, so we gave them the dance. When we took it over from the Northern Utes, we gave them, each one, a horse for the ceremony. But we just gave it to our Taos friends in 1897.

Another informant said:

This Dog-dance came in from the Sioux after the *sari'*-*'dzka* was pretty much gone. We had it here quite a while. My father, Buckskin Charlie, was a leader. The Northern Ute had it first; then soon after, we took the dance and passed it on to Taos. They cooked and ate dog meat in this dance just as the *sari''dzka* used to do. They used to hold it over there by the ball ground near the agency. One man, usually an old member of the Dog Company, used to be across the Rio de los Pinos cooking the dog meat. He used to boil it three or four times so it was good. I tasted it once and it was a little like prairie dog.

The actual ceremonial was a rather complex set of dances rather than a single organized dance progression. There were two men, formerly of the Dog Company, who carried whips; one had a whip of deerhorn and rawhide and the other had two sticks to which rawhide thongs were attached. These men served the function of making the people dance, as in the Ute Bear-dance. If anyone stopped in the middle of a dance, he was promptly lashed by the two men in charge. The leader with the deerhorn whip wore a crow-feather necklace; the one with sticks had two eagle tail feathers stuck in a silk handkerchief headband at the back of his head, and also attached in the same position, a small glass mirror. His sticks were painted red. A third dance leader likewise carried a red stick, but did not perform the whipping function; his customary dress was an otterskin shirt with looking glasses on it, and he wore his hair loose.

The dance principals wore porcupine headdresses dyed with red

or yellow paint, G-strings, arm bands of porcupine, dyed yellow, and horse tails were hung from the back of their porcupine headdresses. Cuffs of porcupine skin were sometimes added. Usually one dancer wore a coyote skin hanging from his head with the tail in the back to add variety to the scene. The dancers went around somewhat in the manner of the familiar free-style crow-hop of Ute war dances. The leader in the otterskin shirt danced to one side, back and forth, while the others danced in a circle but without a central fireplace. When the dog meat was brought over from across the river, special songs were sung, and the general dancing stopped. Then the leader carrying the sticks and wearing the eagle tail feathers went up to the dog meat in the center and danced alone. He ran toward the meat four times and struck it each time as everyone shouted; he then danced around the meat four times and then placed the sticks in the ground on the north side. Next one of the leaders, the one with the deerhorn whip, put on a feather bustle and danced alone. After this a fire was built, sweet grass was burned and the bustle of the dancer was waved over the fire four times.

The dancing is done to the accompaniment of a large hoop drum or war-dance drum. At a signal from the drummers, the three leaders arise and dance around the meat four times again, whereupon, the cook passes the meat through the fire four times until it touches the ground the last time. The leader wearing eagle tail feathers now dances again, carrying four tiny arrows about four inches long and a tiny bow. He dances up to the meat four times, placing an arrow on it each time. Then the food is ready to be passed around.

The purpose of consecrating the dog meat at such length is justified in terms similar to those used in reference to Dog Company feasts of former years. It is said that if a person eats dog meat ceremonially in this fashion, he will become energetic, strong, and active like the dog. He will henceforth exercise a great deal, run quickly, and be hardy. This notion corresponds with other ideas of the Ute concerning the magical qualities of food; if one was stout, it was because he had eaten a great deal of fat meat, notably porcupine; if huge, because he had eaten bear; if swift and graceful, because he had eaten deer, and so forth.

The dance itself bears out the notion of the swift and agile qualities of dogs. In the choreography, one movement follows the next in swift succession, the dancing is rapid, and there is great display of virtuosity. The dancing is now interrupted as the three leaders pass out the meat. Each dancer, as he passes by the meat, leans down and touches the dog's penis, if he had not had intercourse with his wife the night before. He then touches two sticks to his mouth and says "*Akla'sa!*" (Informants say this is their version of the Sioux word for "thanks"). Then they pass the food around.¹¹

11. At the annual San Ignacio Fiesta on July 31, 1937, the Ute enacted for my benefit two methods of passing out the dog meat. In the first version, they repre-

Following this ceremonial feasting, there is a mock battle between the three dance leaders in which they pretend to whip each other. The leader in the otter skin shirt goes through the motions of beating the others and finally makes the others shake hands. The other dances which follow are joined in by all participants in the feast and represent the kind of social dance organized by the *sari*"*dzka* in the old days when they entered the band camp.

The social dancing, or partner dancing, is usually set off by a dance progression of male dancers (representing the Dog Company of former days). War-bonnets are placed over to the west and the dancers line up facing them. First they crow-hop in position and then approach the bonnets with the man on the extreme left leading them single file. This dancing is done in the clockwise circuit which passes before the war-bonnets. The third time the dancers pass around, they reach down and pick up the war-bonnets as they go by, and then break into free-style dancing. This is called the Preparation dance or the Dressing-Up dance.

The Preparation dance is followed by a cycle of social dances in no definite order. Among them is the Round dance described above for Taos pueblo and claimed by informants to be an older type of social dance organized by the Dog Company. Another Dog-dance, or *sari*"*nqap*, was a partner dance in which the women chose male partners, or else the man could get up and dance and then a woman would come and dance with him. The step was to bend the knees in place, and the men often took blankets, and covering their partners kissed them. In this dance, a rattle was used or the people just sang. The two dance leaders carrying whips exercised their prerogative of whipping those who refused to dance or who stopped dancing with their partners. For a man or a woman to accept an invitation to dance there was the obligation later of returning the invitation by a gift.

sented the way in which the dog meat was given to young recruits in the old Dog Company of the day when the warlike Ute band was in full swing. All the young recruits, represented by older members of the Dog Company, were sitting over to the east. John Russell, as leader of the Company (an older man, experienced in raiding and in the buffalo hunt) took a pop bottle which he pretended was a dog and put it over to the east. Then he picked up the bottle and a red stick used as a fork and danced over to where the men were sitting. He placed the stick on the bottle and then thrust it towards the mouths of the seated men, one at a time. The singers kept up their song to the accompaniment of the drumming. The men jumped back to indicate their distaste of dog meat, and the onlookers laughed at this humorous display every time it happened.

The Plains Dog-dance method of serving the meat was then represented. They put a rag on the ground, tied it in knots, to represent the dog. It was knotted except for an end sticking up which looked like a tail. The dancers filed by, clockwise, while the singers held forth, and tried to pick up the "dog" by the tail with their teeth. In so doing, they did not stop in the dancing. Those who could do this were applauded, while the less successful dancers caused much merriment among the onlookers. The dog was then offered to the crowd.

This activity was followed by the usual Dog-dances described below.

The songs for these social dances were called Dog-Company songs or *sari''u''wi''ev*.

Among other social dances in the cycle was the Daylight Dance, reported by Lowie for the Uintah Ute,¹² in which the men and women formed a ring, men alternating with their female partners, joined hands and went around in a clockwise circuit to their own singing or to the added accompaniment of a rattle. In addition, the older women might perform a Lame dance, or the warriors of old might perform any of the war dances. The social dances had little real connection with the ritual aspects of the dog-eating feast, but they added to the spectacle and provided amusement for all present. Whether or not the ceremonial function of the dance in imparting vigor and health was recognized at Taos, my informants did not know. At any rate, the ceremony is no longer practiced on the Southern Ute Reservation and the social dances are enacted only on fiesta days for the enjoyment of the people.

Reed College, Portland, Oregon.

CONTEMPORARIES OF CORONADO AND HIS ENTRADA*

By DONALD D. BRAND

I. EXPEDITIONS AND EMPIRES

In February, 1540, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado (1500-1554), governor of Nueva Galicia, started northward in search of fabulously rich cities. His expedition spent more than two years in the unmapped lands between the Colorado river and the Great Plains, but returned to Mexico in the summer of 1542, disillusioned and in rags. Although of prime interest to Southwesterners, Coronado's *entrada* was but a piece in one of the most brilliant mosaics that history provides. On the opposite side of North America, Fernando de Soto (1496-1542) had led Spanish troops (1539-42) from Florida to beyond the Mississippi river (across portions of at least nine southern states), where he died in 1542. As Coronado was returning to Mexico City, in 1542, Juan Rodrigues Cabrillo (?-1543), discovered and explored the coast of upper California. Far to the northeast, Jacques Cartier (1491-1557) was making his third exploratory trip (1541-42) to Canada. Southward, between Coronado and Mexico City, the Mixton Rebellion (1540-42) ran its course, and was suppressed by Antonio de Mendoza (1490-1552), first viceroy of New Spain (1535-51) and greatest of all Spanish viceroys in the New World. In the Mixton Rebellion was killed Pedro de Alvarado (1490-1541), conqueror and governor of

12. Lowie, R. H. "Dances and Societies of the Plains Shoshone," American Museum of Natural History, *Anthropological Papers*, Vol. 11, p. 832.

* The dates given have been obtained from the most reputable sources available, but in many cases (especially dates of birth) a range of several years should be allowed.