

# LITERARY CALIFORNIA

## How The West was won and where we're heading

---

### The Native Californians

The oral tradition of the various native tribes and people of California preserved rich and thorough accounts of mythical explanation of the making of man and of his surrounding, with emphasis on landscape and animal life. The oral tradition was recorded and put down only lately (around 1900), and as with every oral tradition, most interesting for today's readers could be to imagine the texts' change throughout history with regards to the Natives' history and their actual situation. What historians have termed oral literature is to the people of Native Americans one crucial form of keeping in touch with their own history.

The coastal regions of California provided the tribes and bands with plant foods and game to live on, hence there was no farming besides a little tobacco. Hunter-gatherers, the Californian natives grew to a high population level and diverted into several cultural groups, of which the main language-based distinctions are the Hokan-spoken (e.g. the Chumash) of Southern California and the Penutian-spoken (e.g. the Maidu) of Central California. Their religious praxis included leading by single shamans or secret societies, serving the community by rites of passage and ceremonies.

Find additional information on the following web-pages:

<http://www.nativeweb.org> (Resource archive, world-wide)

<http://expage.com/page/chumashindians> (by Dr. John Anderson )

<http://www.santaynez.org> (Reservation / Politics / Casino)

<http://www.oceansonline.com/chumash.htm> (California's first oceanographers: The Chumash Indians)

<http://www.maidu.com>

The following texts represent the creation myth according to the Maidu, and legend of the making of man according to the Chumash of California.

### The Creation

In the beginning there was no sun, no moon, no stars. All was dark, and everywhere there was only water. A raft came floating on the water. It came from the north, and in it were two persons,--Turtle and Father-of-the-Secret-Society.

The stream flowed very rapidly. Then from the sky a rope of feathers, was let down, and down it came Earth-Initiate. When he reached the end of the rope, he tied it to the bow of the raft, and stepped in. His face was covered and was never seen, but his body shone like the sun. He sat down, and for a long time said nothing.

At last Turtle said, "Where do you come from?" and earth Initiate answered, "I come from above."

Then Turtle said, "Brother, can you not make for me some good dry land so that I may sometimes come up out of the water?"

Then he asked another time, "Are there going to be any people in the world?"

Earth-Initiate thought awhile, then said, "Yes."

Turtle asked, "How long before you are going to make people?"

Earth-Initiate replied, "I don't know. You want to have some dry land: well, how am I going to get any earth to make it of?"

Turtle answered, "If you will tie a rock about my left arm, I'll dive for some."

Earth-Initiate did as Turtle asked, and then, reaching around, took the end of a rope from somewhere, and tied it to Turtle. When Earth-Initiate came to the raft, there was no rope there: he just reached out and found one.

Turtle said, "If the rope is not long enough, I'll jerk it once, and you must haul me up; if it is long enough, I'll give two jerks, and then you must pull me up quickly, as I shall have all the earth that I can carry." Just as Turtle went over the side of the boat, Father-of-the-Secret-Society began to shout loudly.

Turtle was gone a long time. He was gone six years; and when he came up, he was covered with green slime, he had been down so long. When he reached the top of the water, the only earth he had was a very little under his nails: the rest had all washed away. Earth-Initiate took with his right hand a stone knife from under his left armpit, and carefully scraped the earth out from under Turtle's nails.

He put the earth in the palm of his hand, and rolled it about till it was round; it

was as large as a small pebble. He laid it on the stern of the raft. By and by he went to look at it: it had not grown at all. The third time that he went to look at it, it had grown so that it could be spanned by the arms. The fourth time he looked, it was as big as the world, the raft was aground, and all around were mountains as far as he could see.

The raft came ashore at Ta'doikö, and the place can be seen to-day.

When the raft had come to land, Turtle said, "I can't stay in the dark all the time. Can't you make a light, so that I can see?"

Earth-Initiate replied, "Let us get out of the raft, and then we will see what we can do." So all three got out. Then Earth-Initiate said, "Look that way, to the east! I am going to tell my sister to come up." Then it began to grow light, and day began to break; then Father-of-the-Secret-Society began to shout loudly, and the sun came up.

Turtle said, "Which way is the sun going to travel?" Earth-Initiate answered, "I'll tell her to go this way, and go down there." After the sun went down, Father-of-the-Secret-Society began to cry and shout again, and it grew very dark.

Earth-Initiate said, "I'll tell my brother to come up." Then the moon rose. Then Earth-Initiate asked Turtle and Father-of-the-Secret-Society, "How do you like it?" and they both answered, "It is very good." Then Turtle asked, "Is that all you are going to do for us?"

Earth-Initiate answered, "No, I am going to do more yet." Then he called the stars each by its name, and they came out.

When this was done, Turtle asked, "Now what shall we do?"

Earth-Initiate replied, "Wait, and I'll show you." Then he made a tree grow at Ta'doikö,--the tree called Hu'kiimtsa; and Earth-Initiate and Turtle and Father-of-the-Secret-Society sat in its shade for two days. The tree was very large, and had twelve different kinds of acorns growing on it.

After they had sat for two days under the tree, they all went off to see the world that Earth-Initiate had made. They started at sunrise, and were back by sunset. Earth-Initiate traveled so fast that all they could see was a ball of fire flashing about under the ground and the water. While they were gone, Coyote and his dog Rattlesnake came up out of the ground. It is said that Coyote could see Earth-Initiate's face.

When Earth-Initiate and the others came back, they found Coyote at Ta'doikö. All five of them then built huts for themselves, and lived there at Ta'doikö, but no one could go inside of Earth-Initiate's house. Soon after the travelers came back, Earth-Initiate called the birds from the air, and made the trees and then the animals. He took some mud, and of this made first a deer; after that, he made all the other animals.

Sometimes Turtle would say, "That does not look well: can't you make it some other way?"

Some time after this, Earth-Initiate and Coyote were at Marysville Buttes. Earth-Initiate said, "I am going to make people." In the middle of the afternoon he began, for he had returned to Ta'doikö. He took dark red earth, mixed it with water, and made two figures,--one a man, and one a woman. He laid the man on his right side, and the woman on his left, inside his house. Then he lay down himself, flat on his back, with his arms stretched out. He lay thus and sweated all the afternoon and night.

Early in the morning the woman began to tickle him in the side. He kept very still, did not laugh. By and by he got up, thrust a piece of pitch-wood into the ground, and fire burst out. The two people were very white. No one to-day is as white as they were. Their eyes were pink, their hair was black, their teeth shone brightly, and they were very handsome. It is said that Earth-Initiate did not finish the hands of the people, as he did not know how it would be best to do it. Coyote saw the people, and suggested that they ought to have hands like his. Earth-Initiate said, "No, their hands shall be like mine."

Then he finished them. When Coyote asked why their hands were to be like that, Earth-Initiate answered, "So that, if they are chased by bears, they can climb trees." This first man was called Ku'ksuu; and the woman, Morning-Star Woman.

When Coyote had seen the two people, he asked Earth-Initiate how he had made them. When he was told, he thought, "That is not difficult. I'll do it myself." He did just as Earth-Initiate had told him, but could not help laughing, when, early in the morning, the woman poked him in the ribs.

As a result of his failing to keep still, the people were glass-eyed. Earth-Initiate said, "I told you not to laugh," but Coyote declared he had not. This was the first lie.

By and by there came to be a good many people. Earth-Initiate had wanted to

have everything comfortable and easy for people, so that none of them should have to work. All fruits were easy to obtain, no one was ever to get sick and die. As the people grew numerous, Earth-Initiate did not come as often as formerly, he only came to see Ku'ksuu in the night. One night he said to him, "To-morrow morning you must go to the little lake near here. Take all the people with you. I'll make you a very old man before you get to the lake."

So in the morning Ku'ksuu collected all the people, and went to the lake. By the time he had reached it, he was a very old man. He fell into the lake, and sank down out of sight. Pretty soon the ground began to shake, the waves overflowed the shore, and there was a great roaring under the water, like thunder. By and by Ku'ksuu came up out of the water, but young again, just like a young man.

Then Earth-Initiate came and spoke to the people, and said, "If you do as I tell you, everything will be well. When any of you grow old, so old that you cannot walk, come to this lake, or get some one to bring you here. You must then go down into the water as you have seen Ku'ksuu do, and you will come out young again." When he had said this, he went away. He left in the night, and went up above.

All this time food had been easy to get, as Earth-Initiate had wished. The women set out baskets at night, and in the morning they found them full of food, all ready to eat, and lukewarm. One day Coyote came along. He asked the people how they lived, and they told him that all they had to do was to eat and sleep.

Coyote replied, "That is no way to do: I can show you something better." Then he told them how he and Earth-Initiate had had a discussion before men had been made; how Earth-Initiate wanted everything easy, and that there should be no sickness or death, but how he had thought it would be better to have people work, get sick, and die.

He said, "We'll have a burning." The people did not know what he meant; but Coyote said, "I'll show you. It is better to have a burning, for then the widows can be free." So he took all the baskets and things that the people had, hung them up on poles, made everything all ready. When all was prepared, Coyote said, "At this time you must always have games." So he fixed the moon during which these games were to be played.

Coyote told them to start the games with a foot-race, and every one got ready to run. Ku'ksuu did not come, however. He sat in his hut alone, and was sad, for he

knew what was going to occur. just at this moment Rattlesnake came to Ku'ksuu, and said, "What shall we do now? Everything is spoiled!" Ku'ksuu did not answer, so Rattlesnake said, "Well, I'll do what I think is best." Then he went out and along the course that the racers were to go over, and hid himself, leaving his head just sticking out of a hole.

By this time all the racers had started, and among them Coyote's son. He was Coyote's only child, and was very quick. He soon began to outstrip all the runners, and was in the lead. As he passed the spot where Rattlesnake had hidden himself, however, Rattlesnake raised his head and bit the boy in the ankle. In a minute the boy was dead.

Coyote was dancing about the home-stake. He was very happy, and was shouting at his son and praising him. When Rattlesnake bit the boy, and he fell dead, every one laughed at Coyote, and said, "Your son has fallen down, and is so ashamed that he does not dare to get up." Coyote said, "No, that is not it. He is dead."

This was the first death. The people, however, did not understand, and picked the boy up, and brought him to Coyote. Then Coyote began to cry, and every one did the same. These were the first tears.

Then Coyote took his son's body and carried it to the lake of which Earth-Initiate had told them, and threw the body in. But there was no noise, and nothing happened, and the body drifted about for four days on the surface, like a log. On the fifth day Coyote took four sacks of beads and brought them to Ku'ksuu, begging him to restore his son to life. Ku'ksuu did not answer. For five days Coyote begged, then Ku'ksuu came out of his house bringing all his bead and bear-skins, and calling to all the people to come and watch him. He laid the body on a bear-skin, dressed it, and wrapped it up carefully.

Then he dug a grave, put the body into it, and covered it up. Then he told the people, "From now on, this is what you must do. This is the way you must do till the world shall be made over."

About a year after this, in the spring, all was changed. Up to this time everybody spoke the same language. The people were having a burning, everything was ready for the next day, when in the night everybody suddenly began to speak a different language. Each man and his wife, however, spoke the same. Earth-Initiate

had come in the night to Ku'ksuu, and had told him about it all, and given him instructions for the next day.

So, when morning came, Ku'ksuu called all the people together, for he was able to speak all the languages. He told them each the names of the different animals, etc., in their languages, taught them how to cook and to hunt ' gave them all their laws, and set the time for all their dances and festivals. Then he called each tribe by name, and sent them off in different directions, telling them where they were to live. He sent the warriors to the north, the singers to the west, the flute-players to the east, and the dancers to the south. So all the people went away, and left Ku'ksuu and his, wife alone at Ta'doikö.

By and by his wife went away, leaving in the night, and going first to Marysville Buttes. Ku'ksuu staid a little while longer, and then he also left. He too went to the Buttes, went into the spirit house, and sat down on the south side. He found Coyote's son there, sitting on the north side. The door was on the west.

Coyote had been trying to find out where Ku'ksuu had gone, and where his own son had gone, and at last found the tracks, and followed them to the spirit house. Here he saw Ku'ksuu and his son, the latter eating spirit food. Coyote wanted to go in, but Ku'ksuu said, "No, wait there. You have just what you wanted, it is your own fault.

Every man will now have all kinds of troubles and accidents, will have to work to get his food, and will die and be buried. This must go on till the time is out, and Earth-Initiate comes again, and everything will be made over. You must go home, and tell all the people that you have seen your son, that he is not dead." Coyote said he would go, but that he was hungry, and wanted some of the food. Ku'ksuu replied, "You cannot eat that. Only ghosts may eat that food."

Then Coyote went away and told all the people, "I saw my son and Ku'ksuu, and he told me to kill myself." So he climbed up to the top of a tall tree, jumped off, and was killed. Then he went to the spirit house, thinking he could now have some of the food; but there was no one there, nothing at all, and so he went out, and walked away to the west, and was never seen again. Ku'ksuu and Coyote's son, however, had gone up above.

## The Making of Man

After the flood, Sky Coyote, Sun, Moon, Morning Star, and Eagle were discussing how they were going to make man. Eagle and Sky Coyote kept arguing about whether or not the new people should have hands like Sky Coyote's. Coyote said that all people in this world should be in his image, since he had the finest hands. Lizard was there also, but he just listened night after night and said nothing.

At last, Coyote won the argument and it was agreed that people should have hands just like his. The next day they all gathered around a beautiful white rock that was there in the sky. It was so fine and smooth on the top that whatever touched it would leave an exact print. Coyote was just about to stamp his hand down on the rock when Lizard, who had been standing silently just behind him, quickly reached out and pressed his own perfect hand print onto the rock.

Coyote was furious and wanted to kill Lizard, but Lizard ran down into a deep crack and escaped. Since Eagle and Sun approved of what Lizard had done, Coyote couldn't do anything about it. If Lizard had not made his print, we might have hands like a coyote today!