

## Yuman Singers: Myths, Dreams, and Tradition

### Cantantes Yumanos: mitos, sueños y tradición

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#### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to outline some of the implications of the existence of singers in Yuman culture by examining how they are formed and why it is vital for the community to preserve these traditions. We focus on describing so-called identity creation, social specialization, and the origin of social hierarchy. Likewise, we endeavor to demonstrate the role singers play in their communities through anthropological literature, historical sources, and ethnography, on the basis of which we explored the life stories of three singers.

*Keywords:* 1. Yuman culture, 2. singers, 3. ritual specialization, 4. gourd rattle, 5. Baja California.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende aclarar algunas implicaciones provocadas por la existencia de los cantantes en la cultura yumana: su proceso de formación, así como la razón por la cual es de vital importancia para la comunidad conservar estas tradiciones. Nos enfocamos en describir la llamada creación de identidades y la especialización social, así como el origen de la jerarquización social. Asimismo, intentamos evidenciar el papel que desempeñan los cantantes en su comunidad por medio de la literatura antropológica, las fuentes históricas y la etnografía; a partir de la cual hemos indagado en los procesos biográficos de tres cantantes.

*Palabras clave:* 1. cultura yumana, 2. cantantes, 3. especialización ritual, 4. bule, 5. Baja California.

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## INTRODUCTION

Pablo Picasso claimed that “inspiration exists, but it has to find you working,” a variation of which –“God helps those who help themselves”– would be endorsed by Johannes Brahms, who, to quote him more accurately, would say that “inspiration is something that does not belong to us, but which we can make ours in our own right.” Likewise, Mozart, a clear representation of inspiration grounded in effort and discipline, sums up our key focus in this work: how much Yuman singers owe to a natural gift and how much is the fruit of efforts, and where they draw their inspiration and work from. Why are some able to specialize in singing and what are the implications of this social practice for Yuman culture?

This article aims to offer an anthropological view of singers in Yuman groups (the Kumeyaay, Paipai, Kiliwa, and Cocopah).<sup>3</sup> Firstly, the study will explore the origin of the songs, which can be explained by mythology and, therefore, we will offer a brief overview of myths that make reference to this tradition. Then, we will endeavor to elucidate how the singing tradition is passed on today, and by drawing from sources, understand how the role played by singers has changed, particularly with respect to the hierarchy of power and their social function. Although the clans of the region –formerly hunter-gatherers– define themselves as stateless societies, the hierarchy in place entailed a slight verticalization of power (Viveiros de Castro, 2009, p. 124); as the chiefs of certain lineages became warriors famous for their courage and strength, or renowned hunters, so healers or singers also rose up the hierarchy.

Accordingly, in addition to reviewing the mythology and the general composition of songs, this work will explore the roles played by singers and the forms of initiation entailed by this knowledge specialization. This stock of knowledge enables us to tackle the crux of the matter at hand: Are singers ritual specialists? What is their initiation process like? How did they become singers? And what is their role in Yuman culture today?

Singers were the safeguards of ancestral knowledge of the tribes of northern Baja California, as they held particular prestige in Yuman cultural tradition –knowledge pertaining to a way of life in deserts, mountains, and seas, in which hunter-gathering and fishing established a distinct view of the world, which the history of the region has transformed, albeit not in the same way as other areas of Mexico. In this regard, Olmos states that “although it was customary to teach this activity in the religious orders that took part in the conquest of the region, the musical tradition of the missions did not directly merge with the age-old practices of indigenous groups, as occurred in other regions in the south of the country” (Olmos, 2008, p. 9). Rather, this historical process brought about a substantial change in the way of life, bringing an end to migratory movements across vast

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<sup>3</sup>The complexity of naming these peoples calls for a wide-ranging discussion that falls outside the scope of this work. The original Spanish version of this article has followed the spellings used in the catalogue of national indigenous languages produced by the INALI (National Institute of Indigenous Languages).

swathes of land and leading to settlements of sedentary communities –a historical process that has gradually changed certain practices and caused the loss of languages, while contributing to the creation of an ethnic consciousness within which it is believed that singers play a fundamental role.

As a result, this article seeks to show the role played by singers in Yuman communities by analyzing anthropological literature, historical sources, and ethnography. This ethnographical analysis served as the basis for studying the life stories of three singers: Juan Carranza, Alonso Pesado, and Delfina Albañez –the first of whom is Kumeyaay, the second Cocopah, and the third Paipai.

The Yuman region spans southern California, western Arizona, and northern Baja California. In linguistic terms, the Yuman languages comprise the Pai group, including Hualapai, Yavapai, and Havasupai from the state of Arizona, and Paipai in Baja California; and the River group from the other side of the border, in California and Arizona, including the Mojave, Quechuan, and Maricopa people. This large family includes, in Mexico, the Kumeyaay and Cocopah peoples, who both belong to the Delta-California language subgroup, while Kiliwa stands out as the only Yuman language with no linguistic affiliation to the other languages in its group (Mixco, 1994, p. 139). Music and dance are defining characteristics in the Yuman region. There are five variants of songs (Olmos, 2008): festive, game, cradle, funerary, and healing songs.

Now, considering that myths tell the story of the origin of all things, and particularly the origin of songs, this instantly lends ancestral legitimacy to singers' day-to-day activities. This study will discuss the kind of knowledge transferred through their actions, which may have been acquired as a natural gift or inherited, and the ways in which this knowledge transfer occurs –namely, the initiation and learning process required to become a singer. Consequently, this work will also explore the contexts of enunciation and the function of the different kinds of songs. This will make it possible to define the social function of Yuman singers in the past in order to perform a comparative analysis with modern-day singers.

#### THE REGION FROM A MYTHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Myths provide information in several ways, two of which are worth highlighting at this time. On the one hand, an initial look at the mythology of the region, despite its differences, reveals a shared mythological corpus between these groups, according to Laylander (2001) and Waterman (1910), among others. On the other hand, certain exploits by the creator gods tell of a common origin for the neighboring tribes. Some myths say that after the creation of man, culture, and the different languages, the peoples simply spread out, while others recount how some decided to head south, and others east or west, populating the area from the mountains of San Pedro Mártir to Colorado River in the north, in what is today known as the Mojave territory.

The Kumeyaay, along with the Luiseño, Juaneño, and Gabrieleño people, were called the Indians of the mission (Harrington, 1908). However, it is acknowledged that the Kumeyaay are more culturally affiliated with the Yumans. According to the myth recorded by Constance Dubois (1904, p. 218) the god Mastamho, upon creating the Colorado River, also created light, made the earth flat, saved people from flooding, separated the tribes, taught them to farm, and established clans, such that he came to be acknowledged as the source of any supernatural power. Afterwards, like in many other collections of myths produced since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the myth describes a long migration that supports the legitimacy of certain tribes' claim to a share of land. In addition to naming neighboring tribes, with whom cultural objects and women are exchanged and war is waged, myths generally give names to the land and, in doing so, mark an inhabited space—in other words, a cultural landscape—that begins to take shape (Gabayet & González, 2012, in press). In the case of the Mojave people, the tales tell of their return to their native land, which has been occupied by other groups and must be reclaimed through war. Although the Mojave inhabit a region at the fringes of the southwestern United States, the region's similarity to the cultural region of California is striking, as is the similarity that exists across the region as a birthplace for tribes and songs—as will be seen later through the connection that exists today and in ethnohistorical documents.

#### THE ORIGIN OF SONGS IN MYTHS AND THE MYTH OF THE BEGINNING IN SONGS

Songs recount the creation of the world, while also claiming that at the same time the song originated, like a *mise en abyme*. How does this work? Two narratives come together in the Yuman mythological corpus: a creator god, often the brother of another god who falls by the wayside, and a serpent that contains knowledge of everything and explodes, showering the earth with rituals, crafts, songs, healings, names, clans, and livelihoods, according to authors such as Meigs (1939), Álvarez de Williams (2004), Kelly (1977), Waterman (1910), Forde (1931), Davis (1919), Dubois (1904, 1901), Kroeber (1925), and Laylander (2001).

Laylander (2001, p. 161) reports that according to the myth, knowledge, learning, and songs fly out from the belly of the Kumeyaay and Paipai mythological serpent. The serpent is summoned from the sea in a ceremony with a series of entwined branches and grew until it exploded. The Cocopah, Quechan, and Mojave versions differ in the way this snake is present.

Another example is that the men of the earth created the world in song (Meigs, 1939; Mixco, 1983), and uttering the words while singing triggered creation. In 1932, Densmore made a series of recordings of the Cocopah, Quechan and Yaqui people, with Olmos (2008, p. 15) adding that one of the songs does indeed recount that:

Upon the death of the god Sipa (a superhuman or deity of the land), men and animals held hands to shield his body from cremation; in this extract, the coyote is able to suddenly jump over the barrier protecting Sipa's body and manages to steal his heart to take it to the birthplace of the sun, as told by Juan Albañez in the Paipai tradition, but which is also part of the Kumeyaay repertoire. This song, although first recorded in 1928, is still sung today by the Diegueño Kumeyaay peoples (Olmos, 2008, p.14).

In 1910, T. T. Waterman recorded that, for the Kumeyaay, the first men lived on the Wikami Mountain, in Mojave territory. The man had been made of clay, and the first woman from one of the man's ribs. At the time, it was said that you could hear the singing and dancing of all the dead returning to the place where everything was created. There was a snake outside in the ocean toward the west called Maihaiowit. He was the same as Teaipakomat, but had taken another form. The huge snake had swallowed all knowledge. The arts were inside her: singing, dancing, basket-making, and everything else. The people in Wicuwul wanted to hold an image ceremony. They had made a ceremonial house, but didn't know what else to do. They couldn't sing or dance or make speeches. One man, who was smarter than all the others, was sent to ask the huge snake for the songs and dances. He transformed himself into a bubble for protection, but the snake still swallowed him. Inside the snake, he went north, south, and east looking for an exit. He was a powerful medicine-man, and with a flint he opened up the monster. He entered the snake's circular house through a hole on the top. The snake asked who he was, so he answered, "I it-is, Uncle". So he told the snake what he wanted and the snake accepted, "You go ahead," he said, "and I'll catch up with you." As the snake slithered by over the summit of the mountains, he left a white streak that can still be seen today. First he stuck his head in the ceremonial house, and then his body. He barely fit. The people were alarmed by the snake's size and set fire to him. All the knowledge came flying out, and each tribe received something: for some, the wildcat dance; for others, the wakeruk; others are good at the peon game; others became good healers or orators, but not everyone. Maihaiowit's head became Cerro Prieto outside Mexicali, and his body was left on the banks of the Colorado River. For the Mojave people, the mountain is called Avikwamey, and the monster Humasareha (Forde, 1931, p. 204). This myth not only gives rise to songs, but also funeral rites.

### *Religion, Myths, and Musical Style*

Regarding musical style, which we will describe briefly, Herzog (1928, p. 109) mentions that, with respect to so-called primitive music, the music of the Mojave, Quechan and Kumeyaay peoples can be described as stylistically integrated, in reference to certain characteristics that can be attributed to this cultural area, as there is no similarity to indigenous groups from the south-west like the Puebloans, Navajo or Apache. Thus, rising pitch is referred to as a recurring feature of singing itself, which comes to shape the tonality and the formal structure. As a result, says Herzog, a rising melodic expansion develops and the main motif is extended, creating an integrated, consistent form. The key commonalities

in Yuman music include the coherence of songs in long series, in addition to a strong connection to myths and the use of the gourd rattle (*bule*), which becomes an important feature for Yuman singers. As Alonso Pesado, a Cocopah native from Pozas de Arvizu, says, the gourd rattle is a sacred instrument that must be respected: “And also, you shouldn’t just go around telling any child about all that... you’re not just going to go up to any old child and say, ‘you know what? I have a gourd rattle,’... or I have... it’s very personal. Why? Because you want to be a singer, or you want to be that person, or you want to learn... it’s not based on games... it’s based on respect and discipline” (Alonso Pesado, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

Similarly, Delfina Albañez, from the Paipai community of Santa Catarina, discusses the relevance of the gourd rattle:

It was a red one, my grandfather made it for me because he made the gourd rattles... and for me and another cousin, Juana, he made a small one for us... we were about eight... and the first song we learned in Mikuinayo... because when someone dies, we lay them to rest with their rattle, their gourd rattle, the one traditional singers used all their lives...; because my grandfather said that through these little holes in the gourd rattles came cures for the soul. Many of us believe the gourd rattle also has a soul, so there are people who are not in the company of a good spirit, a good heart, and they can do you harm (Delfina Albañez, personal communication, October 7, 2015).

However, the gourd rattle as such did not exist; Javier Ceceña, a Kumeyaay native from San José de la Zorra, mentions that they would shake matchboxes:

As a child I remember we’d shake matchboxes, which make a very similar sound to that of a dried-out turtle shell with some coconut seeds from wild palm trees, the blue palm from the desert. But no, the gourd rattles are new, they didn’t exist until... when was it? Nineteen eighty-something, when they went on a journey to Mexico City... they visited Mexico City and performed songs and dances. That was when I first discovered a gourd rattle, which my granny brought back, and it was the instrument we used; but when I was very small, we made music with some matchboxes, which make a sound similar to that of a turtle shell (Javier Ceceña, personal communication, October 6, 2015).

In Yuman collections in museums, like the Museum of Man in San Diego, California, the turtle shell rattle is a major part of ritual paraphernalia, so it can be said that the tortoise has simply been replaced by the gourd. Harrington (1908), on the other hand, explains that one of the key characteristics of Yuman music is the fact it fits within a context of religious practices in which dance, music, songs and instruments performed a function, while Kwiatkowska (1990) describes the Kumeyaay in greater detail, explaining that songs used six different tones and included repeated verses. The rolling melodic outline is dominated by the repetition of an important tone. The various rhythms are characterized by triplets with beats and syncopation. The singing is accompanied by regular beats of the rattle, which become a tremolo, suggesting an upward movement. An analysis of Yuman music

warrants a comprehensive study, particularly regarding stylistic changes over time. However, as a very brief description, it is worth revisiting Owen, Walstrom, and Michelsen, who reported that the basic characteristics of songs are their relaxed vocal style, mellow melodic line, binary structure, and rattle accompaniment, the grouping of songs in stylistically differentiable cycles, and rising pitch (1969, p. 108).

### *Singers: Ritual Specialists*

Singers were ritual specialists. This means that healers or ritualists used songs as tools, and by tools, we mean music and songs as part of the ritual context and associated paraphernalia. Singers do not necessarily have to be related to someone else who has been a singer. For example, according to Alonso Pesado, being a singer is a matter “of the heart”:

Among the Cocopah, there isn't really a guide to tell you “you do this” or “you're going to do that...”; it's about what you think, following your heart, whatever it is you want to do. Here there are no rules; just because you're the child of a singer doesn't mean you're going to follow, or whatever the reason may be... there's none of that here, here if the son of the greatest singer, the most famous, doesn't want to sing, it's just because he doesn't want to, really it's your heart that guides you (Alonso Pesado, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

Delfina agrees:

You don't need to be naturally gifted, because my grandfather used to say, “Many will sing, but not all will sing from the heart”; they'll sing and they'll repeat what's said, but you need to sing from the heart, it comes from within, and you can feel when you're singing, you feel the vibe, you feel good, you feel different, I mean, you're not just going to sing because “Oh, I'm Paipai, I'm from an indigenous community and I'm going to sing”; you need to have something else, and over time you learn more (Delfina Albañez, personal communication, October 7, 2015).

According to Davis, music is one element that defines Yuman culture and is the heritage of all communities. In ancient times, the role played by music was part of religious ceremonial, “such is the case of ‘Chalí’, or the ‘Song of the Images’, which was performed by the Kumeyaay at the image ceremony all night until first light, at 4:15 a.m.” (1919, pp. 22-23). Javier, from the Kumeyaay community at San José de la Zorra, remarks that part of the tradition is precisely the fact that older singers might sing at daybreak, and may even go so far as to sing over several nights:

Once the sun starts to set, there are songs that talk about when... to hide the sun. And there are songs that are sung after midnight through to dawn. It was part of an activity that, from the outset, ran from sunset to sunrise. I can tell you

about Juan Carranza, who has a repertoire of over 120 songs, without repeating a single one, and he can't get through them all in one night... These were not just one-day events, but they lasted three days and included a bonfire around which people gathered and spent time together... they were get-togethers rather than celebrations. Just as the sun is about to set, sunset songs; when it's getting dark, night-time songs; and dawn songs... and these give rise to songs for dancing, funerals, healing, or various ceremonies (Javier Ceceña, personal communication, October 6, 2015).

Harrington also indicates that there was singing in female coming-of-age or adolescent male initiation rituals (Forde, 1931, p. 152). There were also rituals known as the feather dance, the eagle dance, or the wailing song, as well as the clothes burning ceremony. So it is that music has to do with summoning the dead (Davis, 1919, p. 8), as mentioned by Meigs with respect to the ñiwey ceremony performed by the Kiliwa people (Meigs, 1939, p. 52), and, in general, the role played by singers was of the utmost importance in the death rites of the Mojave, Quechan, Kumeyaay, Paipai, Kiliwa, and Cocopah peoples, as observed by authors like Álvarez de Williams (2004), Forde (1931), Davis (1919), Hohental, Blackburn, Langdon, Kronenfeld and Thomas (2001), Meigs (1939), Waterman (1910), and Dubois (1901).

In Kumeyaay initiation rites, singers narrated the journeys and adventures of their nomadic lifestyle (Davis, 1919, p. 14). The songs served to make it rain (Meigs, 1939, p. 45), but there were also specific songs to bring good luck in the peon game, chants to prepare for war, or melodies to prepare people to drink toloache (Álvarez de Williams, 2004, p. 76), given that the Mojave, Cocopah, and Quechan consumed the drug and performed initiation ceremonies (Harrington, 1908, p. 331). One such ceremony continues to hold a significant place in the collective memory of bygone times. Other rites involving music, for the missionary Indians of southern California, were those of the rain doctors, the rattlesnake doctors, and bear doctors (Kroeber, 1925).

One activity that is a clear illustration of singers' classification as ritual specialists is their therapeutic function: "during healing activities the *kusiyai* would sing and shake a rattle. The shamans might hold crystals in their hands while they conducted the ceremony, with the aim of increasing their power and ritual effectiveness" (Winkelman & Finelli, 2006, p. 123).

Similarly, in an interview, Javier Ceceña stated that it was the *kusiyai* who cured health problems: "my granny used to tell me there were special people who were healers. So the healers were called *kusiyai*, and healing meant healing people's health problems –they know, because they would also heal with songs."

Forde mentions that for the Quechan, singing, dancing, and tobacco smoke –sometimes involving trance– were the usual ways to diagnose sicknesses. The tribes of the Colorado River would draw out ailments from sick bodies by manipulating the body or rubbing or blowing tobacco smoke, breath or saliva (1931, p. 185).



According to several authors, the processes by which healing powers are acquired are varied. However, and in keeping with Waterman (1910), they are connected to a series of beliefs associated with guardian spirits, deities, monsters, celestial phenomena, or animals. Moreover, the defining features of shamanism in the tribes of southern California –and by extension those of northern Baja California– and the processes by which powers are acquired bear greater similarity to the tribes of the Colorado River: borrowings that are consistent with these tribes’ high status and how distant their shamanic ideas seem compared to those of the tribes of central, northern, and western Alta California.

According to Olmos (2008), the Indians of Baja California have now stopped using healing songs. What remains today of Yuman tradition in general will be explored later.

#### FORMS OF TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE OF YUMAN SONGS. RITUAL INITIATION THROUGH DREAMS

In Yuman cultures –the Havasupai, Mojave, Kumeyaay, Kiliwa, and Paipai– knowledge about songs is acquired in dreams. Waterman (1910) remarks that the tribes of the Colorado River do not believe in a guardian spirit, but shamans derive their power from dreaming of the creator, an ancient divinity or some divine creature from the time of creation. Dreams, therefore, always feature a line-up of mythological characters, whereas rites consist of long series of songs, the narrative for which comes to singers through dreams.

This is the case for Delfina. Things come to her in dreams, and her grandfather told her that one day she’d dream of the pebble amulet (*pedra de canto*). In that regard, she says, “you see that with us, the Paipai –I don’t know if the same is true for the Kumeyaay– we pick up things through dreams. So yes, I have dreamed a lot of things, as I have more things that are different from your beliefs, because sometimes I dream things and then they happen...” (Delfina Albañez, personal communication, October 7, 2015).

For others, like Iñaki Anselmo, songs do not just reveal themselves in dreams, as it can happen when you least expect it:

When I can’t memorize a song, I sleep. I sleep and during the night the song comes to me, the tone comes to me, everything comes. Or at some point during the day the song will come; I mean, it’s not me dreaming, but by magic, or something, when I least expect it, when I’m working – bam! – I’ll remember the song and my memory retrieves that part and says, “it’s come now”. And I’ve heard it in several people who learn songs – try as you might, you can memorize it, but you can’t internalize it to sing it (Iñaki Anselmo, personal communication, October 8, 2015).

Alonso Pesado claims that the importance lies in understanding the meaning of the dream, because to his mind, dreaming doesn’t make you a singer: “It’s never happened to me, but that’s what they say, isn’t it? I don’t want to dream and I want to sing, right? But that itself will reveal, tell you things; if you don’t know what that dream’s trying to tell you,

you'll be none the wiser. So over the years you'll realize, not because you dreamt it, but because you *are* it..." (Alonso Pesado, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

Meigs remarks that, for the Kiliwa people, there were songs of power learned during dreams by witch doctors (1939, p. 45). Among the Havasupai, healers also draw their power from dreams, but in this case there are guardian spirits living in their chests, which come out to travel and discover things, and on returning, make noises and sing what they saw. This is similar to the behavior of the ritual specialists during the Kiliwa ñiwey ceremony, when the dead speak through their mouths.

Among the Cahuilla people, recurring dreams –especially in childhood– produce shamans rather than trances or visions, like the tribes of the Colorado River. Kroeber conducted fieldwork among the Mojave, and explained that initiation processes are indeed individual relationships that healers establish with the supernatural. Unlike in the southwest, for the Pueblo Indians, the destiny of ritual specialists was defined at the tribal or fraternal ceremonies (Kroeber, 1925, p. 279). The pursuit of dreams or revelations does not use fasting, isolation, supplication, or any other kind of practice. Knowledge, transmitted through dreams, is acquired before birth or while dreaming, and individuals receive power directly from Mastamho, the guardian deity, who teaches them songs and ceremonial practices.

Other beings or objects are also the source of supernatural powers when they appear in dreams. Songs themselves –as discussed further on– describe how the supernatural power being used was acquired –in other words, Kroeber says, the instructions given by Mastamho in dreams. All ceremonies, and not just the activities of healers, are performed because they were dreamt and, therefore, because they were received supernaturally by one of the participants of the ritual. All myths and historical legends are known by the ritualists, not because they heard them and learned them, but because they witnessed them themselves in dreams. This is why, often, the narrator of a myth will go from an impersonal to a first-person narration.

Densmore (1932), who made recordings of series of songs, writes about the initiation process for a singer, Wilson, during the singer's youth. Wilson went to the heavens while asleep and saw an area leveled out in a circle. There was a group of people there in old-fashioned dress. Each wore a feather from a white eagle on their heads, and sang and danced in a circle, twisting and turning without ever touching one another. In the middle there was a naked boy, with a bow and arrow, who led the song by singing about a journey two boys made down on earth; the boy could see everything on earth and described each mountain and animal the wanderers saw. When they arrived at an important place, the boy made the dancers dance. At one point he sang the death of Kukumat and the singers sang for that. Wilson's songs are the repetition of everything he heard in his dreams, including the descriptions of the journey that the boy sang. This boy, who is a bolt of lightning, is always up there in his circle. When he lies down, he zigzags in the sky because he has no feathers to stick on the earth. Wilson says that his songs will bring rain, and his singing makes the spirits in the clouds dance in a circle like they did in his dream.

Descriptions of initiation processes also mention consuming *datura*, a type of toloache from which visions are obtained, providing knowledge. Shamans acquired their skills from many sources of power. Even when considered innate, these skills had to be revealed to the individual through spontaneous communication with the supernatural in dreams, and then developed in rituals involving *datura* (Meyer, 1978; Owen, 1962). Other sources of power included songs, crystals, and special relationships with animals. All of this was acquired through experiences in dreams (Winkelman & Finelli, 2006, p. 118).

Winkelman and Finelli's contribution is interesting in that those who dreamed of animals were destined to take up the highest levels of shamanism and accompany the shamanic leaders considered the "captains of animals" (2006, p. 118). These animals functioned as guardian spirits and healers could invoke their protection and assistance in hunting and finding directions. The authors note that the songs learned in dreams were unique to each shaman, and so could not be learned by others – only from the spirits and through dreams.

We have observed how singing plays a key role in different aspects of Yuman cultures. Myths serve to establish the power bestowed upon the singer and, through possession of this knowledge, provide fulfillment for the holder. Dreams, myths, and songs blur the boundaries between them to confer a new identity. We will now explore how this works today.

#### SINGERS AND TRADITION TODAY

Delfina Albañez, a Paipai Indian from Santa Catarina, is a singer. She learned from her grandfather by, in her own words, listening from her mother's womb. In turn, her grandfather Juan Albañez learned from Eugenio Albañez, one of the community's great traditional singers and a traditional chief for 40 years (Owen, Walstrom & Michelsen, 1969), laying the initial foundation for the context in which Delfina would be handed down the role of singer. Her grandfather was keen for his descendants to learn this skill, so Delfina began singing during community celebrations. She told us that at the beginning, she would do it for the applause, but then over time, she made connections with the knowledge her grandfather had passed on to her through the traditional tales he told when they slept outside on summer nights. Her grandfather would take the opportunity to teach her: "The daughters of the owl are over there, and there goes the bighorn sheep, and there go the hunters" (Delfina Albañez, personal communication, October 7, 2015). Later, the grandfather passed on the songs spiritually and told her that one day she'd find the pebble amulet (*pedra de canto*). So it was that Delfina began to dream and discover his voice in her dreams.

Another highly distinguished singer is Alonso Pesado, a Cocopah native from Pozas de Arvizu. It would seem that he started singing spontaneously, as he believes it is something he was born with and, like a magnet, singing gradually drew him toward other singers from whom he was able to learn – particularly Nicolás Wilson, a traditional authority in his

village. Learning, says Pesado, has no rules, and neither does legacy –it is directed by the heart, but above all, in order to learn, you need to establish a close link to a singer you can learn from by imitation, which must occur in traditional contexts, which are based –among other things– on the length of one night, which determines the full song sequence.

Juan Carranza Cuero, a Kumeyaay singer, whom we interviewed before his death, was the moral authority on Yuman singing until his dying day. He also learned by imitation, through listening to his relatives sing. Having lost his mother, he lived alongside many tribes, accompanying his father, and learned from them from the age of eight. Part of his story is told below:

There'll be music to dance to, the Indians are coming to sing, the Indians from Yuma, he said. They were from Yuma; they're going to sing here. The Indians arrived, there were about three or four, huge they were... the people, including me, danced with them... I listened to their singing, I loved hearing them. Well, they sang for three or four days... with everybody drinking, dancing, eating. We came from back over there, La Huerta, we crossed the hills and arrived at a place called Agua Caliente – he took a bath there – and then we arrived at Cañada de Encino... So they arrived here and there were seven or eight of us singers, the youngsters, and me among them. At that time, the elders would rest for a while so the younger ones, like us, the kids, the young'uns, would start singing so the women could keep on dancing. They were going off to drink their wine over there, weren't they? So while they drank here and there, here we'd keep on singing, repeating what they sang. When they sang, we'd join them. You'd join them, at their side, stood upright, and that's what we'd do... There were people who'd even dance to matchboxes, I'd sing and the people would dance; that's how they had fun in those days, there was nothing of the vice of alcohol or marijuana, or anything like that. At the time it was... that was how the people had fun, well... the people would sing and dance (Juan Carranza, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

The life stories of these three figures reveal similarities in the ways they became singers. Using phrases like “you’re born with it,” “it’s something you’re born with,” “it comes from within,” and “you have it within you,” they make reference to the natural gift you need to become a singer, as only special people have this power to sing, interpreted as a gift from age-old spirits or their ancestors. Being born with this gift or receiving it as a legacy are two ways to become a singer, but learning by imitation appears to be the basic condition in both cases, as the power received needs to be practiced through the very act of singing. Indeed, what defines a good singer is the singer’s ability to bring people together and make them dance –a charismatic power that must be exercised.

### *The Songs*

Songs are shared by all the tribes and their origin has been traced to different areas. Some believe the Mojave were the first to pass on this knowledge; others believe it was the Cocopah or Kumeyaay, as various members of the Yuman communities told us. The exact origin is not known for certain, yet within these hazy beginnings, it is possible to acknowledge that they are long-established, providing legitimacy with regard to their relevance and a certain degree of veracity.

Delfina says that “they are thousands of years old, all the songs are passed on from generation to generation, my grandfather was taught by his grandparents... and their grandparents, and so on.” Javier explains that it was his grandmother, “she taught us the songs, and from a very young age, we’d stay with her and sleep with her, which gave us the memories of the songs.”

In this sense, Juan Carranza, a 70-year-old singer, said that it was the parents of his family members who passed down the songs. Recognized as original by groups on both sides of the border, the songs seem to have obscure lyrics, that not everybody is able to decipher.

Each song is a story. Songs come from the country, and from the country they come here, until they reach San José [de] la Zorra... So my dad said, “Each song has its own name, each song says... you know, when you’re older, when you’re an adult... you’ll know where the songs are, so you’ll sing them... you know what, son? Each song you hear is from the place where you hear the song. It’ll include the name, it’ll say Ensenada, or Tijuana, or Nejí... and all the others... like it says, up here... here the song tells you...” So then you know where the song’s from, where it belongs... you hear the song and you say it’s from San Diego, and then the people know that that’s where it’s from. And each song is made up of three songs, one, two, three, every song, even if there are 120 songs, no matter how many there are. In other words, they say the song has like three brothers or sisters, the song itself says the same thing: what people were like, how people lived, that kind of thing. The beat is the same, but the words change... and that’s where the song says, “They’re coming over here, right up to Tecate,” with the songs, they come to Tecate, and from here head off to Jamul, and when they get to Jamul, and then San Diego, then they head upwards... and the song says it, the song tells you, see (Juan Carranza, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

And although the precise origin of these songs is not known, for several of today’s singers, it is not a matter of invention because songs are sacred, as confirmed by Delfina. “Well, for me, songs are very sacred, just think about it. My grandfather would say, ‘Well, to perform a *kuri kuri* song, you have to feel it... you don’t sing like that just because it occurs to you, don’t be like ‘it’s a long road,’ and just say it in Paipai and sing it, well, no... there has to be a reason.’” (Delfina Albañez, personal communication, October 7, 2015).

If the idea is that the lyrics of songs make reference to places and the paths between marked places across the region, which Ingold calls people's taskscape in a landscape, turning it into a cultural landscape (Gabayet & González, 2012), it could be that songs are associated with clans, and often with names of animals associated with these clans:

In the Tanamá Indian language, how do you say it? In Spanish it says they went around with her and she was the chief of Tanamá. I can't tell you any more because it's hard... and it's nice, the Tanamá song, you know. That's why they called it Tanamá, after the chief. And who was this chief? Not a clue... or at least I don't know. I've asked, but nobody knows, nobody knows. It's Tanamá. As I say, each place has its name, Nejí has its name, La Huerta has its name, everywhere has its name, and they all have songs, you see. San José de la Zorra has a song, yes... Often you start singing from here, for example, if I start singing, I leave here, or I come in from the fields, I go along singing my songs until I reach Ensenada. I come back, or I go all the way to Tecate, and then I turn back (Juan Carranza, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

Another key feature of Yuman songs is the way they are arranged in sequences, establishing a precise morphology that we could call a mnemonic structure. This arrangement determines the end of a song, which contains a clue to the following song. This a response to the fact that parts of the full sequence are associated with times of the night that go by, hence the intrinsic need with respect to times and the ways songs are named, after names of stars or animals that sing at certain times of night: "When I'm singing and when I finish, when I'm about to finish, I say 'Which one is next, this one'... and they spring to mind. Do you remember one time, we were coming from Mexicali, and we were singing away, one song after another, but, you know, when you finish a song, the next one comes to you, and then the others come..." (Juan Carranza, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

The aspects of night-time include the following, as mentioned by Delfina Albañez: "Birds, the coyote, the owl, the partridge, the stars, the bright light of Venus, daybreak, the rooster's song, the sun lighting up the earth, and things like that."

The *kuri kuri* songs are of thankfulness, "To the hills for everything they have given us, and continue to give us. To the rabbit, the quail, to different... the acorns, the pine nuts, the *islaya* cactus; the water that has always been there, from which we have always drunk... the water to sow seeds, water them, for everything; the water is there" (Delfina Albañez personal communication, October 7, 2015).

For Alonso Pesado, songs are a coded language, as he explains: "Nobody knows what the songs mean... they are ancient... you don't even know what some of them are, you know? Some of them are from different languages..." And while this is partly true, secrecy is considered one of the most important aspects in the traditional context of Yuman singing.

Because really, many singers do know what it means... and many won't tell you why. Because as a young singer, you'll want to tell the community, you'll go on a video and publish it, you'll do something, you'll misuse it, and that's what they want to avoid, isn't it? That's why they protect themselves, so they seek out just the right person, and that person is the same, the same as the one who was there before: he or she says nothing, nothing (Alonso Pesado, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

Thus, in this context of secrecy, ways to preserve Yuman ethnicity are contemplated ahead of time, particularly with respect to songs and the role played by the singers of former times. It is known that there are songs for funerals, festive songs, and songs of war that have now fallen into disuse. For these two singers, Pesado and Carranza, the invention of new songs should be kept entirely separate from the traditional corpus of songs: "Because these are very old songs that you shouldn't even compose. If you're a composer, that's fair enough, but use another beat so as not to include it within the others, because really that's disappearing now. That's why nobody knows where these songs come from, and these are the songs..." (Interview with Alonso Pesado.) Owen, Walstrom, and Michelsen (1969) note that there were long sequences of songs: that of the Small Little Bird (*Pájaro Chiquito* or *shra kass*), which the Mojave, Maricopa, Cocopah, Quechan, and Kumeyaay named Bird (*Pájaro*); and another, the Wild Cat (*Gato Salvaje* or *kunnih mih*), possibly sung in *kuri kuri* contexts.

Although her repertoire includes age-old songs, Delfina Albañez, on the other hand, allows the composition of new songs or the use of the guitar to accompany the unique timbre of her voice, as her grandfather did with *ranchera* songs (Owen, Walstrom, & Michelsen, 1969), but for boleros, and even in traditional contexts, like at funerals. Aware of the heritage passed on by her occupation, Delfina works tirelessly to preserve Paipai culture, while her innovative singing serves not to dishonor but enrich these northern cultures.

### *The Rattle*

Defying tradition, or stretching the assumptions that govern certain ritualistic contexts, results in bold proposals for continuity. This is the case for Delfina and her relationship with the instrument her grandfather sang with: the rattle. In the tradition of Yuman singing, when singers pass away, they are buried with their rattle. This is what the Albañez family did; she recounted that:

[...] you go back to the place where the wake was held for the body, the house, and you clean everything and close it up for a year... when we entered, his rattle was hanging there, and I felt like... I was dumbstruck. I said "How? If I watched when he was laid to rest there, right?" So my aunt Anacleto told me, "He left it there, he didn't want to take it with him, there must be a reason he left it there..." Then I remembered that he always said we had to continue with

the traditions, the songs, and all our cultures... (Delfina Albañez, personal communication, October 7, 2015).

To understand the importance of the rattle in singing, Juan Carranza explains:

As I've said, it's not about today's rattles, rattles have been around for thousands of years, and they bring people together, because within the rattles there are many seeds, or the souls of past singers. When a rattle is shaken, people move about... What happened there? It's not him... it's the strength of the rattles due to the fact they're millions of years old, and all the singers are in there; and when people sing, they look to see... if you can't dance, your body starts moving all on its own. Why? Because of the force of the rattle... So when you go and sing there, in public, all the ancestors, all the spirits, are all together beside you. And in the rattle – there are two or three rattles – there's a bunch of spirits from the singers of old, and it's they who bring people together. So the rattle is still very powerful, singers are still very powerful, they have great power because they've been around for many thousands and thousands, millions of years, that's why they bring people together, see... (Juan Carranza, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

It is due to the ancestors' power within the rattle that songs were also used for healing: "Well, yes, they used to sing their songs... But I've barely seen any healers recently; there used to be many. I come from a family of healers, my grandmother is a healer, my father was a *sobador*<sup>4</sup> and I'm a *sobador* too. They come together, because really singing and the gift of healing is the same thing, they go together." (Interview with Juan Carranza.)

So it is that the rattle contains the power of tradition and it is the ancestors who heal through the sound it makes, as described by Delfina: "Through these holes come cures for the soul..." As a musical instrument and a vessel for a tradition, Alonso Pesado believes the "rattle will never die," which is why singers teach what their elders passed on to them, and the children continue to learn.

Yuman tribes' way of life has changed considerably in recent decades. As clans have settled, languages have been displaced, and tribes have been dispossessed of their land, so has the figure of singer evolved. In the not-so-distant past, singers acted as leaders of groups and made up a slight hierarchy of chief healers. This was the case right up to the previous generation of singers, despite the drop in migration. Today they still fulfill one of their most important functions, as they remain the bearers of singers' specialized knowledge, while also remaining powerful enough –thanks to the gift they were granted in dreams– to protect thousands of years of tradition in the souls of their ancestors, contained in rattles.

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<sup>4</sup>TN: *sobador/sobadora*: a traditional folk healer who uses a mix of massage and faith to cure ailments.



## IN CONCLUSION

An analytical comparison of documentary information and the ethnographic evidence found has shown that Yuman singers have, broadly speaking, preserved the characteristics of the singing tradition among the cultures of the Californias. Although the songs are mythological in origin, it is worth looking at the matter from another perspective, as the mythology is contained within the songs, such that the songs proclaim that the world was created in that manner –by singing– within the context of the death of the gods. Within the narrative structure of the mythological corpus on creation, until now funerary contexts, as the focal point of social organization, have stood out as the most important setting for what is considered representative of the ethnic groups of Baja California and as a major occasion for transferring this aspect of culture.

We believe, therefore, that singers are holding up the banner of Yuman ethnicity due to the fact that they possess a wealth of traditional songs, whether acquired by way of inheritance or as an innate gift, offering them unique acknowledgment and prestige as the corpus of songs is obtained through initiation processes in dreams and is associated with the figures of mythical heroes that created the world in song. Healing songs may well have disappeared, but the ritual specialization in singing lives on, as beings from other worlds – like their singing ancestors– influence singers to such an extent that they sing through descendants' hands when the rattle sounds, and to this day remain a major figure in funerary contexts.

Thus, the context for the transfer of knowledge continues to be dictated by myths. Myths also teach about the tribes' distribution and entitlement to land, the distribution of languages, and, above all, the role played by singers as holders of knowledge of the world, and the slight rise in hierarchy dictated by prestige.

In this work, we have defended the idea that a proposition is true only if it is consistent with the facts, but not only that; we have also endeavored to ensure its coherence is in keeping with the wishes and aspirations of those who experience this culture. If the gods created the world by singing, this musical outburst through sound, men, and things manifests itself in this rolling melodic outline.

Translator: Joshua Parker

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