

Aaron Barnard

Hunters and Gatherers

Uto-Aztecan Language Project

The Opatas

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Society: The Opatas

Language: Opata

Language Family: Uto-Aztecan

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

639

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

29.707139,-110.302734 Google Earth

1.4 Brief history:

The Opatas were a group of people belonging to the Opateria a region that is now Sonora, Mexico. Not much is known about them because of a number of variables that affected them adversely. What we do know however is that they were a fairly advanced society for their time and that at one point in history they were the largest indigenous group in what is now Sonora, Mexico

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

The Opata essentially lost their way of life because of outside influences. Unlike some indigenous societies, the Opata weren't wiped off the face of the earth because of an extermination or genocidal war but because of a combination of radical happenings. After disease and deprivation had taken its weariful toll on the poor, unsuspecting society, their cultural identity began to fade as invading societies overwhelmed their already weakened culture. Their institutions were regarded as moot in comparison to other, more advanced societies while their women were taken as concubines or wives until slowly but surely their society was completely absorbed into larger societies one sentence at a time.

You could say that outside influences were the bane of the Opata as they are with many indigenous groups.

1.6 Ecology:

The Opatas lived in an arid to semiarid environment depending on whether they were in North Opateria or South. They often had access to minor rivers or streams that they would manipulate in order to decrease flow in certain areas and increase water flow in other areas. This manipulation helped the Opatas take advantage of the land and giving the greater crops as well as an overall benefit to the society. Hunting was popular among the Opatas. They hunted deer, turkey, and many types of smaller game. They were very proficient hunters, capable of firing volleys of arrows at their prey. Not only would they hunt their prey but they also learned how to maintain a suitable habitat for the game they hunted. Wildfires were a popular way to create a more, suitable hunting environment for the hunter creating open areas to have a better tactical advantage over prey. Medicinal usage of plants within the region also provided uses to the Opata.

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Beans and corn

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

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Turkey was primary whereas anything else such as deer and smaller game were secondary.

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Used Bows and poisoned arrowheads

Also used stones as throwing weapons

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Ranges from small to very large for males (Yetman 55)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

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4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Divorce didn't exist, if the male wanted to end the relationship he wouldn't hang around the partner (Yetman)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Polygamy was "usual" (Yetman)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Sodomy was common
Transvestites existed (Yetman 55)

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

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4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

To an extent, as in siblings are off limits but not cousins (Yetman 55)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

No "...they (The Opatas) failed to view marriage as a sealed, permanent institution." (Yetman 55)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

Within (Yetman 55)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

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Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

Yes, relations with neighboring societies did occur frequently (Yetman)

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

No (Yetman)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

Yes (Yetman 55)

5.4 Post marital residence:

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Yes (Yetman)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

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5.8 Village and house organization:

Congregated near rivers (Yetman)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Large towns of 1 to 2 story buildings (Yetman)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

Yes

“Judging from the remarks of Cabeza de Vaca, they engaged in vigorous trade with people far to the north.” (Yetman 55)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Yes (Yetman)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Yes (Yetman 56)

There were elders who practiced wizardry.

6.2 Stimulants:

Alcohol from Fruit (Yetman 283)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

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6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Music existed but was not persistent (Yetman)

A game similar to soccer where two teams ran around naked with headdresses on their heads kicking a ball towards a goal (Yetman 55)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

There appear to be no known gods or deities. (Yetman 59)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

“Adult males bore abundant tattoos and decorative scarring.” (Yetman 55)

7.2 Piercings:

Yes (Yetman 55)

7.3 Haircut:

Kept Their Hair Long (Yetman 55)

7.4 Scarification:

Yes (Yetman 55)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

Animal skins were worn as a sign of social status (Yetman 55)

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7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

Yes (Yetman 55)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Yes (Yetman 56)

7.8 Missionary effect:

Yes (Yetman)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

No (Yetman)

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

Sororate (Yetman 55)

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Opata is a creation by the Spanish meaning: “Vanished People”

Numbered references

1. Yetman, David, and David Leedom. Shaul. The Ópatas: In Search of a Sonoran People. Tucson: University of Arizona, 2010. Print.