

## *The Northern Maidu (Excerpt)*

by Roland B. Dixon (1875-1934)

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### III.—THE NORTHERN MAIDU.

BY ROLAND B. DIXON.

PLATES XXXVIII-XLIX.

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE present paper embodies a portion of the results of the work of the Huntington Expedition during the summers of 1899, 1900, 1902, and 1903. The whole of the first season, and considerable parts of the following seasons, were spent with the various fragments of the Northern Maidu, and the general ethnological results of that work are here presented. The linguistic material, of which a considerable mass has been obtained, is being prepared for publication as rapidly as possible.

In the work among the Maidu of the foot-hill and lower Sierra region in the vicinity of Mooretown, Butte County, the writer was greatly aided by Mr. D. L. Spencer of Enterprise. Owing to his long residence in the region, and his sympathetic study of the Indians of the vicinity, Mr. Spencer was able to render valuable service in many ways; and for the description of the "burning," and many of the details of the ceremonial and daily life of this portion of the Maidu, the writer has relied largely on him. A number, also, of the specimens illustrated, in particular the images used at the "burnings," were obtained only through Mr. Spencer's diligent and persistent endeavors. Further notes on the "burning" in 1904, containing additional important details, were made by Mr. S. A. Barrett of Ukiah. Much aid in the work among the Maidu was given by Dr. A. M. Tozzer during the summer of 1900, chiefly in connection with the southern portion of the stock. The work of the expedition during the first and part of the second seasons was also greatly facilitated by the many courtesies extended by Mr. H. F. Liston, superintendent of the Round Valley Reservation. The identification of the food and other plants mentioned in the course of the paper was kindly undertaken by Mr. M. L. Fernald of the Gray Herbarium, Harvard University. In many instances, however, the specimens were so imperfect (having been largely collected by Indians) that identification was impossible.

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MUSIC.—The musical instruments of the Maidu are few. They are the flute, whistle, drum, rattle, and musical bow.

The flute (Fig. 57, *a*) is a simple elder-wood tube, about forty centimetres in length. It has four holes; and in playing, the end of the flute is placed in the mouth, and blown partly across and partly into. There were many songs played on these flutes; but all were, so far as is known, love-songs, or songs played purely for the amusement of the player, and the flute was not in use ceremonially at all.

The whistle (Fig. 57, *b*) was usually made of bird-bones, eagle or goose being preferred. It was generally double, two being tied together, one longer than the other. The ends were closed with pitch. The whistle, as contrasted with the flute, was a ceremonial instrument, and was used by the doctor or shaman, and by dancers on certain occasions.

Drums were simple, and consisted either of a pit dug in the ground and covered with a sheet of bark, or of a section of a log hollowed out by fire. Both sorts were beaten with the bare feet of the performers, who stood on the drum and stamped.

Rattles were of three sorts,—the split or clapper rattle, the deer-hoof rattle, and the cocoon rattle. The first-named (Fig. 58, *a*) was from thirty to fifty centimetres in length, and usually of willow or other flexible wood. Split for three-quarters of its length, the separate halves were slightly hollowed, and then on shaking, or, as was more common, beating the stick against the palm of the hand, a loud clapping-sound was produced. This type of clapper was most in use in the Sacramento Valley and foot-hill area, and was used

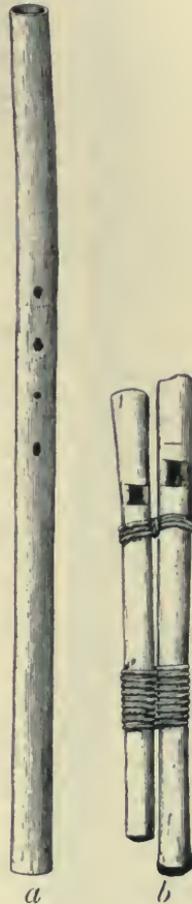


Fig. 57, *a* (18813), Flute;  
*b* Bird-bone Whistle.  
Length of flute, 45.5 cm.

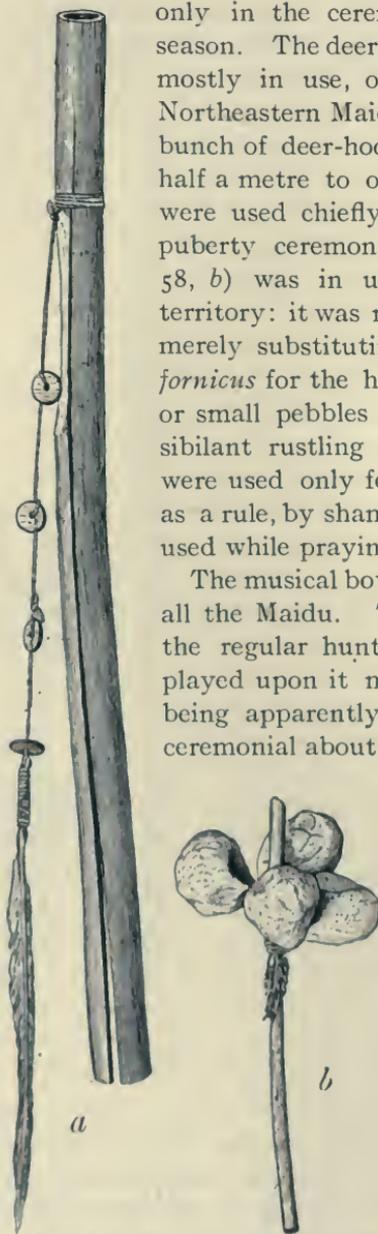


Fig. 58. *a* (1874 n), Clapper-rattle; *b* (1874), Cocoon-rattle. Length, 50.5 cm., 21 cm.

only in the ceremonial dances of the winter season. The deer-hoof rattle seems to have been mostly in use, on the other hand, among the Northeastern Maidu. It was made by tying a bunch of deer-hoofs to the end of a stick of half a metre to one metre long. These rattles were used chiefly by young girls during their puberty ceremonies. The cocoon-rattle (Fig. 58, *b*) was in use in all parts of the Maidu territory: it was made like the deer-hoof rattles, merely substituting the cocoons of *attacus californicus* for the hoofs. The cocoons had gravel or small pebbles in them, and produced a soft, sibilant rustling when shaken. These rattles were used only for ceremonial purposes, and, as a rule, by shamans alone. They were always used while praying to the kŭ'kini or spirits.

The musical bow seems to have been known to all the Maidu. The Northeastern Maidu used the regular hunting-bow for the purpose, and played upon it merely as an amusement, there being apparently nothing that was sacred or ceremonial about it. The Northwestern Maidu, however, at least in the foot-hills, seem to have considered the faint sounds produced as specially suitable for individual converse with the spirits; and in this region, therefore, the use of the musical bow is restricted to shamans. The bow here, moreover, appears to have been specially made for the purpose, the regular hunting-bow not being used. The bow is about a metre and a third long, thus ex-

ceeding the regular bow somewhat in its dimensions. When made, the bow was rubbed, it is claimed, with human blood. In playing the bow, it is held in the left hand, one end of the bow being placed in the mouth, the other end extending horizontally towards the left. The string of the bow is then tapped gently with a small twig held in the right hand, and the notes varied by opening or closing the mouth to a greater or less degree, thus increasing or lessening the size of the resonance-chamber.

The vocal music of the Maidu is abundant; and there are many types of songs in use, such as love-songs, puberty-songs, dance-songs, shaman-songs, the so-called "basket-songs," etc.

#### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, LAW, AND FESTIVALS.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION.—The social organization of the Maidu was very simple. No trace has been found of any gentile or totemic grouping. The people lived in village communities, often of some size; and, except for these, there was no definite organization. It seems that the communities were, on the whole, fairly fixed, and that there was little permanent shifting from one to the other. A stay of a year or two was sometimes made in another village, but these absences were more in the nature of visits than anything else.

Each village—or, in the case of small villages close together, each little group of villages—had a head man or chief. The position was in no case hereditary among the Northern Maidu, but seems to have been so among the more southern villages. The chief was chosen largely through the aid of the shaman, who was supposed to reveal to the old men the choice of the spirits. Generally some person of mature years was selected; and wealth, ability, and generosity were strong arguments in favor of a given man's choice. Once chosen, he held his place only so long as he gave satisfaction. Should his conduct be displeasing to the people, he could be deposed, and a new chief put in his place. This was also brought about through the exertions of the shaman, who was supposed to declare the spirits' will in the matter. The