

REVIEWS

'Isill Héqwas Wáxish: A Dried Coyote's Tail

Katherine Siva Sauvel and Eric Elliott. 2 vols.
Banning: Malki Museum Press, 2004, xliii + 1385 pp.,
photographs, bibliography, index, hardback \$90.00,
paperback \$70.00.

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When the Cahuilla Indians of Southern California wanted to tease one another, with the accusation of telling a tall tale, they would say: *'Isill héqwas wáxish 'ehé'anpu'* 'A dried coyote tail might believe you.' In the title of this work, Katherine Sauvel (sometimes spelled Saubel), one of the most respected elders of the tribe, is perhaps making a little joke: the tales (not tails) that she presents here in bilingual format, with the help of linguist Eric Elliott, in fact represent her lifelong knowledge and experience as an enthusiastic advocate of Cahuilla language and culture.

Sauvel has collaborated with the German linguist Hansjakob Seiler and the Japanese linguist Kojiro Hioki on a Cahuilla grammar and dictionary (Seiler 1977; Seiler and Hioki 1979). As not only a teacher of her people's language and culture, but also as an activist for Native American rights, she has lectured in Germany, Japan, and across the U.S.; she has received many honors, including a Chancellor's Medal from the University of California, Riverside, and an honorary doctorate from La Sierra University. Now in her eighties, she is unsurpassed as a Native American scholar, teacher, and spokesperson for the Indians of Southern California.

Let me begin with a full disclosure: I have been friends with Kathy Sauvel since 1960, when I first began to study the Cahuilla language under her expert guidance. I had been introduced to her by my student Lowell Bean, who was then a graduate student in anthropology at UCLA; at that time, Kathy and Lowell were already cooperating on the research that produced Lowell's dissertation (published as Bean 1972), as well as an

outstanding Cahuilla ethnobotany (Bean and Saubel 1972). Later on, I was proud to support the Malki Museum at Banning, which was co-founded in 1964 by Kathy and Jane Penn (Kathy has served as President of the Board of Directors since that time), to serve with her on the Museum's Editorial Board, which was responsible for launching the Journal of California (and Great Basin) Anthropology; and to offer input to a practical textbook on the Cahuilla language, co-authored by Kathy with my UCLA colleague Pam Munro (1981).

The co-author of *A Dried Coyote's Tail*, the linguist Eric Elliott, is a young scholar whose contributions to our knowledge of the Takic language family are already outstanding. While a student at the University of California, San Diego, he collaborated with the Luiseño elder Villiana Hyde in publishing a 1400-page volume of Luiseño texts (Hyde and Elliott 1994); for his dissertation, he then compiled a three-volume, 1800-page dictionary of Luiseño (Elliott 1999). More recently, with Serrano elder Dorothy Ramon, he has published a volume of Serrano texts (2000). His collaboration with Kathy Sauvel for the present volume involved taping 960 texts as spoken by Kathy, then working closely with her to transcribe and translate them. The results are published here in a Cahuilla-English interlinear format.

These volumes constitute not so much Kathy's autobiography, but rather her memoirs — her recollections of her own life, of what she learned from her elders, of Cahuilla sacred literature, of traditional religion and social structure, of native ethnobotany and ethnozoology, and of the troubled relations between Indians and whites. The reader may at first be bothered by a feature that Elliott acknowledges in an introductory note (p. xxxvi): "I have kept the texts in the same order in which they were originally recorded on tape...because Mrs. Sauvel often made references to the previous text she had just dictated..." So the first few texts are "The lazy dove" (a traditional tale), followed by "How the Serrano came to Cahuilla territory," "Understanding the Cupeño language," "Seeking permission to get married" (a personal memoir), and "Experiencing prejudice." For the scholarly reader, however, the problem is resolved by the excellent index (pp. 1365–84), in which one can find,

for instance, six different references to “prejudice.” More general readers, if they have some background in the culture and history of Southern California Indians, will be able to enjoy these volumes either by reading from the beginning, or by browsing at random. The “unwavering bluntness” (p. xxxiii) for which Kathy is famous, her wit, and her skills as a raconteur bring us enlightenment and pleasure from beginning to end. Here are a few brief samples.

On food provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (p. 110): “My deceased mother would also tell about how they used to send things to them, things like bacon. The Indians did not know what it was. They did not know about it. People had never eaten it.... And [the Indians] would use it for fuel. They would throw it in the fire. And it would burn well. It would keep them warm And she also said that [Whites] would send that fruit, figs, they would give figs to them so that they could eat them. But they would not eat them. They would open them up to eat them. ‘They just looked like worms,’ she said. They would just throw them away. ‘They didn’t eat them,’ she said. ‘It was just dreadful.’”

About the word ‘squaw’ (pp. 326–28): “Recently I was dining in a restaurant in town. Near me two men were sitting. One of the two spoke to the waitress. He said to her, ‘You are a squaw,’ he said.... And I got upset when I heard this. It hurt my feelings. We do not say ‘squaw’ here.... It is disrespectful to a woman.... That is why I spoke to the man. ‘It is not proper for you to say that,’ I said. ‘We Native American women do not appreciate this,’ I said. ‘This is an insult to us,’ I said. It seemed that the man was embarrassed. His face got all red. He said, ‘I will never say that again.’”

About the first non-Indians in California (pp. 426–27): “Long ago I asked my father, God rest his soul, about this.... I said to him, ‘These white people say that the first one to arrive here was Columbus, that he was the one who discovered us.’ ‘No,’ he said. ‘He was not the first one,’ he said. ‘Long ago our ancestors handed this story to us,’ he said, ‘about how the Chinese, as they are called, were the first foreigners to arrive here,’ he said. They came down from way up north. They came on the ocean. ‘And they came in some kind of vessel,’ he said. ‘They resembled huge carrying baskets,’ he said.... ‘They kept on going towards the south,’ he said.... ‘Our ancestors saw them going by long ago,’ he said.”

On the hygiene of white people (pp. 494–95): “I don’t know what my father, God rest his soul, and I were talking about once.... And I said, ‘They always say that white people are so clean. And yet they always have body odor,’ I said. ‘It is simply not true,’ he said. ‘Long ago they would never bathe. They always had body odor. The white man is just light-skinned,’ he said, ‘but that doesn’t mean he’s clean. His body smells a lot worse than our bodies do. You can smell him,’ he told me.”

On carbon-14 dating (pp. 699–702): “To me it seems that white people are excavating Indian skeletons all the time now, the bones of those who died long ago.... For some unknown reason they are obsessed with Indian remains. And so I told them, I gave permission to those other archaeologists: ‘You may look at them. You may find out how it used to be. But do not keep them forever. Bury them quickly.’ That is what I always tell them.... The carbon remnants, I believe, can be used to find out how old the remains are. ‘That,’ I said, ‘is fine; go ahead and do that. You can figure that out,’ I said.... ‘But once you have finished with them, you should always rebury them. You should not put them in storage somewhere,’ I said.”

Perhaps only a few readers of this work will attempt to follow the Cahuilla originals of these stories. Nevertheless, linguists — especially those who already have some familiarity with Takic languages — will find that the material is not too difficult to parse, with the help of the works by Sauvel and Munro (1981), Seiler (1977), and Seiler and Hioki (1979), and that it has its own attractions as oral literature. Ethnopoetic analysis in the manner of Dell Hymes is often clearly possible:

*Pemtéwalawwe’ Támi’ti. / Kill pemnáqma’
Méni’lli/ man hemhíchiwe’*

‘They looked at the Sun. / They did not heed
the Moon / and they kept on going’ (p.267)

Reading these volumes takes me back to the days when Kathy and I, often with Lowell Bean and other friends, would spend a whole day driving through Southern California’s deserts and mountains. Every place we passed reminded Kathy of a story; the whole experience was like a rolling seminar on Cahuilla culture and history. Looking back on those days now, in the twenty-first century, “it seems almost beyond belief,” as Elliott says (p. xxxi–ii), “that these texts speak of a California which existed well into the twentieth century.... For the elders among

the Cahuilla Indians, ...the memories are still fresh of a Palm Springs thick with mesquite groves, yet completely devoid of putting greens.... [But] the stark reality is that the Cahuilla elders... are becoming fewer and fewer with each passing year." We must be grateful to Sauvel and Elliott for preserving these memories. The poet Gary Snyder once said that in twenty-first-century California, Kroeber's *Handbook of the Indians of California* might become an essential survival manual. The prophecy is chilling; but in such dire straits, *A Dried Coyote's Tail* might also be on the best-seller list.

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Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources.

M. Kat Anderson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. xxix + 526 pp. \$39.95.

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This major volume presents a comprehensive study of Native American plant management in one of America's most plant-rich environments. Most readers of this journal know Kat Anderson's main conclusion: California's native nations were nothing like the classic "hunters and gatherers" of old textbooks, who wandered about the landscape affecting it hardly at all. California had a relatively dense population, averaging perhaps one person per square mile, and that population managed the landscape quite intensively.

Kat Anderson (who is not related to this reviewer) is a botanist who became fascinated with Native Californian plant management, and has spent a good deal of the last 20 years in the field, collecting traditional knowledge. More unusual for an ethnobotanist, she also performs experiments to test its effectiveness. Not much of the experimentation appears in this book—it has been well published in specialized journals—but readers should remember that her claims about particular plant management are usually backed up by thorough and meticulous botanical research.

Differing—again—from other ethnobotanies, the book is arranged by management topics, not by plant or by "tribe." This gives the data a certain homogenized quality—one always wonders how many groups performed a given manipulation on how many species. It also leads to repetition, since the same facts and sometimes the same quotes are repeated when they are relevant to two or more chapter topics. On the other hand, it makes the book more user-friendly to restoration biologists and others directly interested in managing plants. One can always find the relevant information thoroughly recounted under a given heading.