

# Klamath

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

*\* Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

*\* Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Native American (North American) Religions, Religious Group

The Klamath are a Native American group located in what is now southwestern Oregon. Extensive contact with Europeans and Americans of European descent began through trade in 1826. In 1864 the Klamath entered into a treaty with the American government, and the Klamath reservation was formed. The Federal government soon gained control over their administration. This entry focuses on ethnographic evidence that reconstructs Klamath life and beliefs prior to the reservation era. During this time, the Klamath lived in autonomous settlements. Shamans in a village had considerable power and influence, even surpassing that of the chief. The Klamath's traditional religious beliefs included vision quests, mythology, and a variety of supernatural beings. This entry considers the Klamath religious group to be coterminous with the society at large.



Date Range: 1855 CE - 1900 CE

Region: Klamath region

Region tags: North America, United States of America

Klamath territory, Oregon, United States ca 1860

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Tuden, A. & Marshall, C. (Oct., 1972). Political organization: Cross-cultural codes 4. *Ethnology*, 11(4), 436-464.
- Source 2: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nr10-000>
- Source 1 Description: Skoggard, I. A. (1998). Culture Summary: Klamath. New Haven, Conn.: HRAF.
- Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nr10-001>
- Source 1 Description: Spier, L. (1930). *Klamath Ethnography*. Publications In American Archaeology And Ethnology. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nr10-007>

- Source 2 Description: Gatschet, A. S. (1890). Klamath Indians Of Southwestern Oregon. Contributions To North American Ethnology. Washington: Government Printing Office.
- Source 3 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nr10-003>
- Source 3 Description: Stern, T. (1965). Klamath Tribe: A People And Their Reservation. American Ethnological Society. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

— No

Notes: Prior to the reservation era, the Klamath were not in contact with outside religious groups.

— Yes

Notes: "President U. S. Grant's peace policy in regard to the Indians was inaugurated by act of Congress dated April 10, 1869. The supervision of the Indian agencies was placed in the hands of the authorities of religious denominations, a board of commissioners appointed, and the spiritual interests of that reservation turned over to the Methodist Church" (Gatschet, 1890:IXVI). "The traditional American separation of church and state did not obtain in the early history of the reservation, which, during the Grant administration, was entrusted to the Methodist Church. Several Agents, beginning with Dyar, and more than one employee, were ordained ministers. Although for some years the church did not send a missionary upon the reservation, religious services were held and the Word preached" (Stern, 1965:111).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 1864 CE - 1900 CE



Is the cultural contact competitive:

— Yes

Notes: Shamanistic activities were prohibited in the late 19th century (see Stern, 1965:114).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

— Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that "internal warfare seems to occur every year, but usually only during a particular season" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

— Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that external warfare seems to occur between every year (but usually only during a particular season) and almost constantly and at any time of the year (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

— No

Notes: Because the religious groups is considered to be coterminous with the society at large, there is no concept of assigning religious affiliation other than being born into the group.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

— No

Notes: Because the religious group is considered to be coterminous with the society at large, there is no practice of recruiting new members.

Does the religion have official political support

— Yes

Notes: For the Klamath, the religious and political spheres were not clearly distinguished from one another. In fact, shamans held more power and influence than chiefs. "Chieftainship was weakly developed, with some villages having chiefs and others having none. Chiefs were men who had acquired prestige through warfare or wealth, were able public speakers, or had some experiences with the supernatural" (Skoggard, 1998).

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

— No

Notes: Because the religious groups is considered to be coterminous with the society at large, there is no concept of apostasy.

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

— Estimated population, numeric: 676

Notes: According to the 1881 Indian census made for the United States Census Bureau, there were 676 Klamaths (Gatschet, 1890:IXXVI).

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: "The shaman himself is, or was, the outstanding figure of Klamath society. He had no rival in the chiefs, the rich man, until the coming of the whites brought a redistribution of emphasis in Klamath life. Chiefs had previously been persons of little influence" (Spier, 1930:94).



Is there a hierarchy among these leaders:

— No

Notes: "Shamanism is completely individualistic among the Klamath; there are no shamanistic organizations" (Spier, 1930:107).

↳ Are leaders believed to possess supernatural powers or qualities:

— Yes

Notes: "The shaman ([unknown]kiu'ks) is one who has acquired more than usual spirit power" (Spier, 1930:107).

## Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

— No

Notes: Mythology plays an important role in the Klamath religious beliefs, but there is no ethnographic evidence for the presence of scriptures.

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of monumental religious architecture.

# Beliefs

## Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

— Yes

Notes: "Souls are personal and after death go to the land of the dead..." (Spier, 1930:100).

Belief in afterlife:

— Yes

Notes: "The belief in a land of the dead, too, stands apart from the spirits and their functions. It has solely a folkloristic existence, for it little concerns the actions of the living" (Spier, 1930:93).

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

— Yes

1

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined horizontal space:

– Yes

Notes: "The land of the dead, No'l[unknown]is[unknown]k[unknown]an, lies in the west, the sunset" (Spier, 1930:102).

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of reincarnation.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: "Cremation is the universal practice, even for suicides, the newborn, and the stillborn. Only the bodies of secretly aborted infants are buried in the bush. The body of a man killed in war is brought home for cremation" (Spier, 1930:71).

↳ Cremation:

– Yes

Notes: "Cremation is the universal practice, even for suicides, the newborn, and the stillborn. Only the bodies of secretly aborted infants are buried in the bush. The body of a man killed in war is brought home for cremation" (Spier, 1930:71).

↳ Mummification:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of mummification.

↳ Interment:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of internment.

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cannibalism.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of exposing corpses to the elements.

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of feeding corpses to animals.



Secondary burial:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of secondary burial.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of co-sacrifices.

Are grave goods present:

— Yes

Notes: Grave goods are placed on the pyre and burned with the body during cremation. See questions below for more details on these goods.



Personal effects:

— Yes

Notes: "Property of the dead, such as his beads, arms, and skins, is piled on the body as it lies on the pyre" (Spier, 1930:72).



Valuable items:

— Yes

Notes: "Other valuables are contributed by relatives and others who wish to honor the dead" (Spier, 1930:72).



Significant wealth (e.g. gold, jade, intensely worked objects):

— Yes

Notes: Items include beads, weapons (such as guns and obsidian blades), skins, and iron rings (Spier, 1930:72).

Are formal burials present:

— No

Notes: Bodies are cremated, not buried. For a description of the cremation process, see Spier, 1930:71-73.

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

— Yes

Notes: "The religion is only weakly developed. Power is sought from a host of spirits whose characteristics are not sharply defined. These are predominantly birds and animals, winds, lightning and the like, and a handful of anthropomorphic beings" (Spier, 1930:93).

↳ A supreme high god is present:

— No

Notes: "Spirits form a uniform class; no one of them can be said to be especially more important than any other" (Spier, 1930:100).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

— Yes

Notes: "Ghosts (skuks) wander from the land of the dead where souls have gone" (Spier, 1930:100). Because the characteristics of spirits/ghosts are not clearly defined, little information is available.

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

— I don't know

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The religion is only weakly developed. Power is sought from a host of spirits whose characteristics are not sharply defined. These are predominantly birds and animals, winds, lightning and the like, and a handful of anthropomorphic beings" (Spier, 1930:93). Because the characteristics of spirits/ghosts are not clearly defined, little information is available.

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:

– I don't know

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– I don't know



↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: "There is a wide variety of spirits from whom power is sought, animals, birds, reptiles, fish, natural phenomena, and a handful of anthropomorphic and purely mythical beings" (Spier, 1930:103).

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– No

Notes: "But there has been no attempt to marshal the spirits into an ordered pantheon" (Spier, 1930:93).

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– No

Notes: "There is little specialization of spirits and their powers: curing, gambling, hunting, love-making, and shamanistic trickery are fields in which any spirit may operate" (Spier, 1930:93).

### Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– No

Notes: "Relations to the spirits have no ethical implication" (Spier, 1930:93).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient information.

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient information.

### Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Is an eschatology present:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of an eschatology.

## Practices

---

### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence or requirement of celibacy.

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence or requirement of castration.

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for required fasting.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

## Society and Institutions

---

## Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

— A band

Notes: The Klamath have no levels of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community, which is indicative of autonomous bands (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, food is stored in individual houses (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, food is stored in individual houses (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

— No

Notes: Tuden and Marshall (1972) column 10, Police (note, equivalent to SCCS variable 90, Police) indicates that "police functions are not specialized or institutionalized at any level of political integration, the maintenance of law and order being left exclusively to informal mechanisms of social control, to private retaliation, or to sorcery."

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

— No

Notes: "A chief is not looked to to preserve peace. Old men may interfere in quarrels, but these are no especial concern of a chief. Nevertheless the word of an influential chief might end a feud" (Spier, 1930:39).

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of a formal legal code.

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: The Klamath rely primarily on fishing for subsistence, with gathering as a secondary source of food. Hunting makes an additional contribution to the diet. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Gathering

– Hunting (including marine animals)

– Fishing

Notes: The Klamath rely primarily on fishing for subsistence, with gathering as a secondary source of food. Hunting makes an additional contribution to the diet. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.