4800  DORSEY, JAMES OWEN

DORSEY


Osage (3.2.3) Draft of an article published in JASW, v. III, 1885, [5]
p. 3-4, "An Osage Secret Society."

258
An Indian Secret Society.
By the Rev. J. Owen Dorsey.

When the writer visited the Indian Terr. in the winter of 1882-3, he learned of the existence of a secret society of seven degrees among the Osages. He obtained a partial account of it by questioning several of the Indians. A full study of the organization would have required at least a hundred days, a longer period than he was then able to devote to the Osages. He has received pressing invitations from members of the tribe to return and study the question in its details, but the opportunity for such a trip has not yet been found. Consequently the following account is fragmentary, though based on the testimony of members of the secret society.

Though the writer was never initiated, he gained the confidence of the members by telling them what he knew about their dialects and customs of cognate tribes, which he gave to the Osages in exchange for what they told him. He also paid them in cash for their services, though the latter alone would have been an insufficient inducement to members of such a wealthy tribe.

The writer was at first doubtful of the value of what he gained from his first Osage informant, who could read and write English, but laundry
undesigned coincidences have been discovered, and he is no longer sceptical. For instance, this society exists not only among the Osages, but also among the Kansas and Pon-Kas; and there are reasons for inferring that two or more of the Omaha dancing societies are now or have been, parts of it. For in each tribe there are secret observances for three days and night, followed on the fourth and last day by public exhibitions, which even some white men have been allowed to attend. In each tribe do we find that the female dancers or members are tattooed on the forehead and body. In each do we find the mystic names and the songs which the common people are not allowed to sing, to have explained to them. I had several of these coincidences in mind when I prepared Omaha Sociology and the student may obtain them by a careful examination of the cross-references in that paper. Reference should also be made to "Indian Personal Names" read at the Ann Arbor meeting of this Association, as well as to "Osage War Customs", published in the Amer. Naturalist for Feb., 1884.

There are seven degrees in the secret society. The 1st. is called "Ni ki' wa'ii", Songs of the giving of life. The others are as follows: Songs of the Bird or Dove, Songs of the Rushes, Songs of the Sacred bag, Songs of the Pack-strap, the sixth whose name is forgotten, and lastly, Songs of the Return from war.

When a woman was initiated, she was received by the of
ficiating man of her gens or family, who makes her take four sips of water, emblematic of the river flowing by the tree of life. Cedar twigs, symbolizing the tree of life, were then rubbed between his hands, after which he stroked the woman from head to foot twelve times, that is, in the direction of each of the four winds, pronouncing the sacred name of a higher power each time that he rubbed her with the cedar. When the woman belongs to a gens that carous on the right side of the Osage tribal circle, the officiating priest begins on the right side of her head, thence he goes to her forehead, her left side, and ends with the back. The reverse order was followed when the woman was a member of a gens on the left side of the tribal circle, the priest begins on the left side of her head, thence in reverse order to the back of her head.

Such a candidate was tattooed with two round spots on the forehead among the Osages, but one such spot among the Omahas and Poncas. These spots referred to the sun. The woman was also tattooed on her wrists, arms, chest, and back.

The Osages admitted only the middle-aged and aged men and women to the degrees, paying that the young people could not appreciate them. To join this society the applicant is obliged to pay as an initiation fee, a dozen horses, two copper kettles, several hogs, and a bountiful supply of beef for a feast, of which all the members partake. What food remains is divided among the members, who take it to their respective homes.
There are twenty-one gentes or families in the O-dage tribe. Each gens has a tradition of its mythic origin, which is chanted by the old man who acts as its priest or mysticorex man. It takes four days and nights to chant the entire tradition of any one gens, hence the traditions of all the gentes would require eighty-four days and nights, and the explanation of them all a much longer period.

Only parts of two of these traditions have been reduced to writing recorded by the writer. Of the first there are 107 lines, and 63 lines of the second, a bald-eagle sub-gens. These traditions are preserved in the secret society, but it was not stated whether three belong to each degree, or whether each of the twenty-one is divided among the seven degrees.

The fragmentary texts which will be published in their original language in the Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, with interlinear translations, critical notes, free English translations, and an introduction to the whole. A few lines of the first tradition are given as a specimen.

1. Cinka wakite: ahiatu Peika!
2. Ha, wisinika, cinka ciuka wapinke, eki ainka: ahiatu Peika!
3. Cinka ciuka anikutite tate:
4. Ha, wisiunika, utarepeage' tate:
5. Nise jasapie wintei etei hi ni acini;
6. Etaitye nikaci na kecl;
7. Same as 2.
8. Same as 3.
are the pipe and hatchet, symbols of peace and war. A bird is seen, hovering over an arch (perhaps intended for a rainbow), under which are the four upper worlds. These worlds are represented by parallel horizontal lines, each of which, except the lowest one, is supported by two pillars or ladders. The lowest world rests upon a red oak tree.

The journey of the people began at a point below the lowest upper world, on the left side of the chart. Then the people existed in some unknown manner, though without human bodies and souls. They ascended from the lowest upper world to the fourth. There, according to one authority, they obtained human souls in the bodies of birds.

Another Osage said that there they met a male red bird to which they applied for aid. He was distinct from the other red bird that gave them human bodies. They descended through the upper worlds, and after leaving the lowest they came to this world, alighting on a red oak tree on a beautiful day, when the ground was covered with grass and other kinds of vegetation. Then the people separated. Some of them marched on the left, being the peace-gentes that could not take life of any kind. They subsisted at first on roots, etc., while the war gentes on the right killed animals. By and by, the gentes exchanged commodities.

The small figures on the left (on the right when facing the chart) show the heavenly bodies or spirits to whom the Black bear went for help. Those on the right of the line of march (on the left when facing the top of the chart) show similar beings to whom the war gentes
If we disregard the refrain, apéten Peita, which may be translated, "he really said, O Grandfather," and is a sort of an address to the Wakanita or higher power, we may translate the rest thus:

1. The first of the race
2. Was saying, "Ho, younger brother! the children have no bodies."
3. We shall seek bodies for our children.
4. Ho, younger brother! you shall attend to it."
5. They stood for the first time on the first upper world.
6. There they were not human beings.
7. One was saying, "Ho, younger brother! the children have no bodies.
8. We must seek bodies for our children."

I found that several of the old men, members of this society, had parts of the accompanying symbolic chart tattooed on their throats and chests. This chart, or rather a portion of a chart, is a fac-simile of one drawn for me by Red Com of the Hawk sub- gens. At the top we see a tree near a river. This tree is a cedar, and is called the tree of life. It has six roots. Nothing is said about this tree till the speaker nearly reaches the end of the tradition. Then follows what is termed "the ceremony of the cedar." Next is given an account of the river and its branches. Just under the river, at the left, is a large star, the Red or Morning star, next to which are the six stars called the Three Deer. These are followed by the Evening Star, and the Small Star. Under these four are the Pleiades orseven geniuses of stars, between the Moon on the left, and the Sun on the right. Beneath these
or Wacace applied for assistance. These are un
known to members of the Piou or gentes on the left.

The Black bear was the servant or messenger of his
elder brothers, the Bird people. He applied for aid to
the Male star, then to the Female, the Sun, the Moon,
the Pleiades, the Three Deer, the Morning Star, and
the Small Star, without success. At last he
came to the Female Red bird who was brooding
on her nest. This grandmother or mysterious
being granted to the people human bodies which
were derived from her own body, saying at the
end of her speech, “You shall continue to exist
without any thing that can destroy your
race.” After this the Black bear found seven
skins of animals, which were used for tents.
Subsequently the people discovered four kinds of
rocks: the black, the blue or green, the red, and
the white. This differs from the Omaha list of the
sacred stones: black, red, yellow, and blue.

It was after finding the rocks, according to
Saucy Chief, that four buffalos approached
the people. When the first buffalo arose from
rolling on the ground, an ear of red corn, and a
red pumpkin fell from his left hind leg. The
leader of the Piou Wacace noticed it, and asked
his younger brother, the Chief of the Bald-eagle
gens to pick it up, and taste them. These were
pronounced good food for the children. From the left
hind leg of the second buffalo dropped an ear of
spotted corn and a spotted pumpkin. From the
leg of the third, an ear of dark corn and a
dark pumpkin, from the leg of the fourth, an ear
of white corn, and a white pumpkin. These were
all tasted, and declared good for the children,
and so, when a child is named in the Tšívë
gens, Saucey Chief says that he, as the head of
that gens, takes a grain of each species of com,
and a slice of each variety of pumpkin, chewing
them, he passes them between the lips of the in-
fant. Red Corn knew that the four kinds of rocks
were found, but he could not say in what part
of the tradition the account belonged. He stated
that subsequently the Wagáce and Tšívë gentes
came to the village of the Hañka utafantë, a
warlike people, who then dwelt in earth lodges.
The Hañka utafantë subsisted on animals, and
bodies of various kinds lay around their vil-
lage, rendering the air very offensive. Finally,
they made peace with the Tšívë and Wagáce.

Next comes part of Saucey Chief’s account. After the
conclave between the Tšívë, Wagáce and Hañka two
old men were sent forth to seek a land in which all
might dwell. One of these was a Tšívë wáxtakë or Tšívë
Peacemaker, the other belonged to the Pahnkã wáxtakë gens,
in the right side of the circle. Each received a pipe
and was told to go 7 days without food and drink. He
carried a staff to aid him in walking. Thrice a
day he went, at in the morning, at noon, and near
sunset. At the end of 7 days they returned to the
people, being considerably emaciated. The report of
the Peiku man was accepted, so that genus is prefered to all the gentes in the tribe, including the Paskko, which ranks next.

A Wagoce man was chosen, and told the people about their new home. All the old men decorated their faces with clay. The next morning, the two who had gone in search of the new home, led their respective sides of the nation, which marched in parallel roads. When they reached the land, the police men ran around in a circle, just as they did previous to starting for war; the Wagoce man ran from right to left, and the Peiku man from left to right. At different stations the two leaders addressed the people. Finally, the men took sharp-pointed sticks, which they stuck into the ground, each one saying, "I wish my lodge to be here."

The next day the messengers of the Peiku old man went to summon the crier of the Elk gens. The latter was told to proclaim as follows to the people: They say that you must remove to-day! Nakanta had made good weather! They say that you must remove to day to a good land! In those days, the Wagoce used dogs instead of beasts of burden, as it was before the introduction of horses. When the old Peiku man spoke, he went into details about every part of the lodge, the fire-place, building materials, utensils, etc.

In the fireplace were placed four sticks, the first pointing to the West. When this was laid down, the Peiku man spoke of the West wind, and also of a young buffalo bull, repeating the name Wancie &ca.
On laying down the stick at the W., he spoke of a Gray buffalo horns, i.e., a buffalo bull. He mentioned a large buffalo bull in laying down the stick at the E., and that at the S., was associated with a buffalo cow. At the same time, a similar ceremony was performed by the aged Pahkta leader on the right side of the tribal circle. It is probable that he began at the east, as he must use the right hand and foot first. Instead of laying down the stick towards the down-stream E. wind, he mentioned the Dark Horned Deer. The Deer with Gray Horns was named when the stick was laid down towards the Wind at the Pines or N. Wind. Other deer names were mentioned on laying down the sticks at the East & South.

No more of the tradition was obtained.

In the 2d tradition, that of the Bald-eagle subgenus, there are four revolutions, gyrations, or circles of upper worlds. In other accounts, on the right side of the tribe there are seven upper worlds. When the ancestors of the Bald-eagle people reached this earth, they alighted as birds on a piny- or more tree, and all of the surrounding country was under water. This water was dried up by the Elk people, according to the tradition of that gens, but the claim is disputed by the Kansa or Wind people, who say that their ancestors blew away the water, drying it, and causing the growth of vegetation. Fire was brought down by the Black bear people. As soon as the water had gone, the Bald-eagle people flew to the ground. Then they
met the Black bear, who offered to act as the servant of the Ñicewatake people, so he was sent to the different heavenly bodies, to obtain human bodies for the people. After becoming human beings the people continued their journey. First they met Young Nānt’a, the ancestor of agnes, then Real Nānt’a after whom another gens is named. On reaching the village of the Nānt’a, they made peace with the inhabitants, after several failures. Then the leader of the Nānt’a said, “Some people have come to us. Let us make them our chiefs.” So the two peace makers were made chiefs, and were sent to find a land in which all might dwell, as the village of the Nānt’a ut. was filthy and offensive. This council was the first one of the whole nation (consolidation). The two chiefs went out as mourners for seven days. The Nānt’a or Panka chiefs returned first, but the council decided to occupy the land found by the Ñicew chief. Four standards were made by members of the Wagage gens, two for each side of the tribe. These were the standards made of the skins of geese, and they were carried on the hunting road as well as on the war path. But the latter skin standards were always retained by the Wagage gens.

In this latter tradition, the appeals to the heavenly beings and the female red bird were made before the journey to the four revolutions of upper worlds. After the council respecting the new home, followed the account of the female beaver, who was the ancestor of the Orages according to an account published in
Long’s Exp. to the Rocky Mts. Unfortunately all that was obtained by me was a line and two words suggesting an abrupt ending for the Baldeagle tradition.

Remarks. 1. Could not have been taught them by the Jesuit missionaries.
2) Symbolic. Wauikekaiye
3) Love of the children.

Speech of the Haïka ut leader:

"No! some persons have come, Pêçu and Wateetoei have come." They thought of what was good for the children. They decided that two should continue as chiefs for the children. They decided that two should continue without any thing which might be fatal to the children. And they said, "there shall be an assembly of the children. You two shall seek a land in which the children may become men." The two arranged for the location of the land in which the children might become men.
Even the names of gentes, sub-gentes, and phratries, as well as their taboos, and personal names of men, women, and children, are objects of reverence as connected with the secret society. None of these names are ever mentioned in a profane manner, and Indians of several tribes were at first averse to communicating them to the author, who was obliged to proceed very cautiously in order to obtain them. On observing that he had an inkling of the matter, a Kansas man told him part of the tradition of his people explaining the origin of the names and taboos of several Kansas gentes. The ancestors of these gentes were said to be birds that came down from an upper world. The phratry, called "Wiyu" Mi:klin', or "Sing together," referring to sacred songs, points to this secret society among the Kansa. As one phratry is composed of the Hanga taulga and the Hanga jingha, who have the exclusive right to sing the war songs, further investigation may show that these songs, which, with their pictographs, are also used by the Osages, are equivalent to those of the seventh degree in the Osage society. See the author's papers in the American Naturalist of 1885, entitled "Kansa Mourning and War Customs," with which was published a part of the pictographic chart mentioned above.
The Smithsonian continues to research information on its collections. Contact Smithsonian for current status.

Please observe the following rules for file sharing, which are intended to help protect the integrity of the material and associated information.
- Do not incorporate material into a publicly accessible database or website without checking with the National Anthropological Archives (NAA).
- Do not post whole manuscripts to a social media site, such as a blog, Facebook page, Twitter feed, etc;
- Do not modify or obscure the source information or copyright notice included in the material;
- If you deposit the material in a tribal library or resource center, make sure that the library or resource center knows the source of the original material and is aware of these rules. Please let the NAA know where material is deposited so that we can guide community members to it.

Questions? naa@si.edu.