

Contradictions as a Source of Historical Perspective: Examples from the Symbolism of Camp Circles and Sacred Poles

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When using historical ethnography and the comparative method it can be gratifying to find close correspondences of ritual elements between the cultures being studied. Contradictions, on the other hand, can sometimes also be useful, although such contradictions may require broad interregional comparisons and deep-time perspectives for their resolution. Examples discussed or referenced include the Omaha and Osage camp circles, the Ponca Sun Dance, the Sacred Pole of the Omahas, the bear sacrifice of the Munsee-Mahicans, the crook lances of the Dog Soldiers of the Great Plains, and the North Star bundle of the Skiri Pawnee.

Contradictions and Camp Circles

In his book *Two Crows Denies It* Robert Barnes (1984:57) calls attention to a contradiction observed by Marcel Mauss in the directional symbolism of the Omaha tribe of the Central Plains. Mauss found it curious that in the south symbolism of their Shell Society the Omahas saw masculine associations because it was in that part of the sky “where the sun travels”—the south—while in the layout of the Omaha camp circle south was associated with the earth, a female metaphor, and with neither sun nor sky (Figure 1a). To my mind this apparent contradiction is a product of two streams of diffusion that converged among the Omahas.

The Omaha Shell Society is related to and presumably derives from the Algonquian Medicine Lodge societies of the Great Lakes area to the northeast, whose idea diffused as far west as the Omahas, the Santees or Eastern Dakotas, and other tribes on the prairie margins of the Great Plains. In all the northern latitudes above the Tropic of Cancer the sun can never be seen in the northern half of the sky at midday, so the association of the south with the path of the sun is especially evident in the United States, all of which lies north of the Tropic of Cancer. In contrast, the Omaha tribal half associated with the

sky was located on the north half of the camp circle, as it was also for the Osage (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:58, 61, 141). This association of north with “up” and south with “down” is Mesoamerican (Bricker 1983; Coggins 1980). In the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, for example, the sun could be seen in the northern half of the sky at midday for more than a month before and after the summer solstice.... [The] sky association of the northern half of the Omaha and Osage camp circles looks like an intrusion from the south into a cosmology otherwise more at home north of the Tropic of Cancer. [Hall 1997a:241]

The Tropic of Cancer lies at 23.5 degrees north latitude, Tenochtitlan at 19.4 degrees, and Omaha territory at about 42 degrees. The Tropic of Cancer is the farthest north that the sun can ever appear directly overhead, i.e. at zenith, there matching in degrees of latitude the tilt of the earth on its axis (Figure 2a).

An association of sky with north but of earth and water with south is found, for instance, on the Stone of the Sun, the so called Aztec calendar stone, when viewed as a cosmogram (Hall 1997b:194n8). This interpretation requires that the top side of the calendar stone be seen as representing the east (Figure 1b). The association of the top of the stone with the east is demonstrated

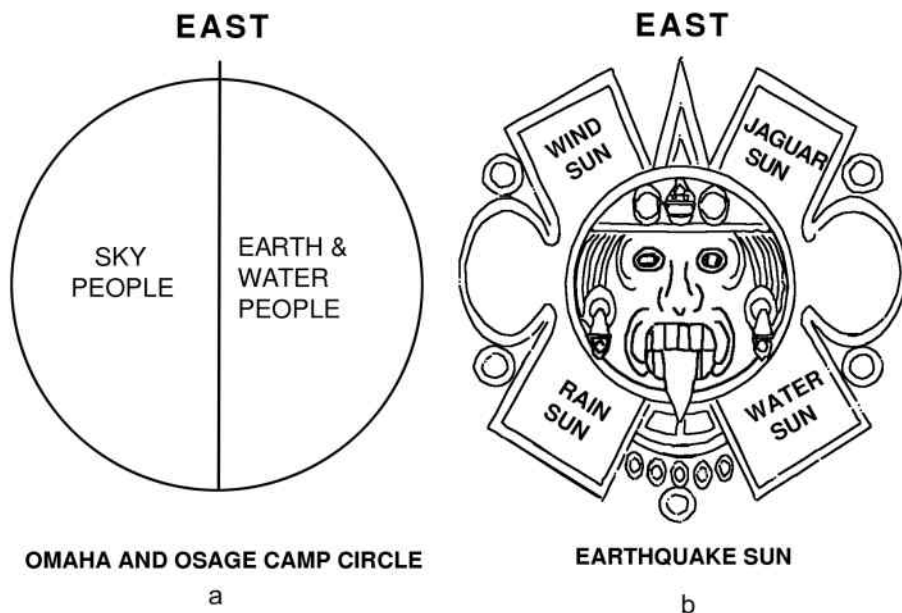


Figure 1. Mesoamerican directional symbolism as found in (a) Omaha and Osage camp circles (based on Fletcher and La Flesche [1972:Figures 9-11, 20]) and (b) central glyphs of the Aztec *Piedra del Sol* (from Hall [1998:Figure 4.1:b], with permission of the University Press of America).

by the presence there of a glyph for the day 13 Reed, which was the year-bearer for year 13 Reed. Thirteen Reed was the year during which the sun was born in Aztec cosmology (Bierhorst 1992:26). In the cosmology of the *Madrid Codex*, a Mayan text, 13 Reed was also associated with the birth of the sun (Kelley 1980). The Aztec glyph for the day Reed was an arrow or atlatl dart shaft. In Mexico the word for arrow served as the basis for the word for sun's rays (Alarcón 1984:239-240). In the symbolism of the Osage, war honors were counted using 13 sticks or rods representing the rays of the rising sun (Hall 1997b:112; La Flesche 1921:119-120; La Flesche 1939:90-91).

What the above illustrates is that an understanding of the directional symbolism of the Omaha, so puzzling to Marcel Mauss, cannot be had without a continental perspective ranging from the Great Lakes to Mesoamerica and that Mauss's seeming contradiction was actually a clue to streams of cultural influences converging on the Omaha. In another example related to Plains Indian camp circles James Howard (1995:87-90) observed but did not pursue a disagreement over the existence of moieties in the social organization of another

Plains tribe, the Ponca. James O. Dorsey (1891:331-332; 1897) had described the Ponca camp circle as divided into two tribal halves or moieties each in turn divided into two phratries of two clans each. Howard reported that the Poncas themselves "vehemently" denied that their tribe had ever been divided into either moieties or phratries. Howard attributed the discrepancy to an attempt by Dorsey to systematize Ponca social organization to bring it into uniformity with that of other Siouan speaking tribes of the area that did have moieties. Had he pursued further this contradiction of reporting Howard could have discovered that what J. O. Dorsey appears to have interpreted as the division of the Ponca camp circle into four phratries was actually the seeming quartering of the camp circle around four so-called tipis of preparation for the Ponca Sun Dance (Hall 1997b:92-93; Hall 1998:57-59).

As reported by a different Dorsey, George A. Dorsey (1905), the Ponca Sun Dance circle contained at its center a Sun Dance enclosure surrounded by four tipis of preparation each containing a circular altar five feet in diameter in the form of a sand painting. The enclosure and the four tipis

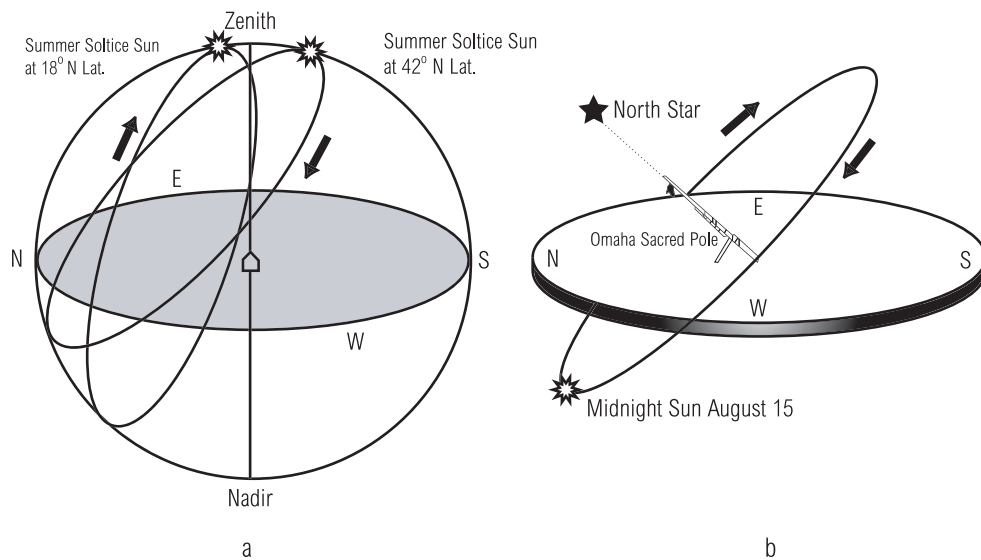


Figure 2. Celestial spheres showing (a) apparent orbits of the sun relative to an earth observer at different latitudes on June 21 and (b) orientation of the Omaha Sacred Pole relative to the North Star on August 15 at latitude 42° north (from Hall [1997b:Figures 16.1 and 13.2], with permission of the University of Illinois Press).

with their associated sand painting altars formed a quincunx pattern—four tipis with their small altars bracketing the enclosure with a sand painting altar ten feet in diameter. These altars were said by the Poncas to represent medicine worlds of the sun. Neither Dorsey recognized the relationship of this quincunx pattern to the pattern of glyphs of the five suns on the Aztec calendar stone—the glyphs of the first four suns or worlds bracketing the larger central image of the Fifth Sun (Figure 1b). Neither recognized that what J. O. Dorsey (1891, 1897) saw as Wind, Thunder, Earth, and Water phratries corresponded to the four worlds or suns of Aztec cosmology that preceded the world of the Fifth Sun current at the time of the Spanish entrada. These were the worlds whose suns were named 4 Wind, 4 Rain, 4 Jaguar, and 4 Water. G. A. Dorsey did not recognize that the destruction by water of the altar of the fourth tipi of preparation, witnessed by him, corresponded to the destruction by water of the creation represented by the Aztec Fourth Sun, 4 Water, a creation itself destroyed by water. The activities in the Ponca Sun Dance tipis of preparation in effect recapitulated the succession of worlds in the cosmology represented in the Aztec calendar stone.

The cosmological story in the Ponca Sun Dance closely parallels aspects of the Captive Maiden

sacrifice of the Skiri Pawnees of Nebraska. In this ceremony a Morning Star impersonator destroys four circles of feathers, this act representing his conquest of the four quarters of the earth. This is followed the next morning by the actual sacrifice by arrows of an Evening Star impersonator, usually but not always a young woman. For the purpose of this sacrifice the Skiri victim was secured to a scaffold with her arms and legs extended in the same pattern as the wings of the Ollin glyph representing the Fifth Sun at the center of the Aztec Stone of the Sun. Morning Star's conquest of the four world quarters corresponds to the destruction of the first four creations in Aztec cosmology (Hall 1997b:86-94). Few today would question the Mesoamerican origin of this Skiri sacrifice. Among Mesoamerican archaeologists David Kelley (1980:S40-S41) is on record as recognizing the correspondence between the four world ages and the four world quarters in Aztec cosmology.

North Pointing Poles

I find equally fascinating another seeming contradiction present among the Omahas. According to Francis La Flesche, among the Omaha, Osage, and other Dhegiha Siouan male

personal names were typically derived from incidents, characters, or aspects of rituals controlled by the clan or sub-clan to which the male belonged (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:39, 255). The rites of the Sacred Pole of the Omahas were in the charge of a subclan of the Honga clan. The Sacred Pole was closely associated with an almost equally sacred White Buffalo hide. Not too surprisingly, eight personal names available to males of the relevant subclan related to buffaloes, but three related to bears, including Monchuha or Grizzly Bear Skin (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:156-157).

In Omaha practice the White Buffalo hide was not attached to the pole as was the bear hide in the Munsee-Mahican sacrifice. The hide's place was originally in one of two Sacred Tents, the other tent being for the Sacred Pole (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:Figure 20). In the Sun Dance of the related Hidatsa tribe of North Dakota, the Naxpike ceremony, a buffalo hide and buffalo head were, in fact, attached to the pole of the Sun Dance lodge. These items represented a buffalo that substituted in performances for an intended sacrificial victim known as Spring Boy in the origin myth of the Sun Dance (Beckwith 1969:38-39, 42). If we posit that these associations of pole and sacrificed buffalo hide belong to some larger pattern, then it is possible to look farther afield for an explanation.

The variety of drum used in the Naxpike was a peculiar one of rawhide consisting simply of a dry buffalo hide laid out flat, hence the name Naxpike or Hide Beating ceremony (Bowers 1992:308, 424, Figures 2, 6d). This drum corresponds to a similar drum made of rolled rawhide used in the Okipa ceremony of the North Dakota Mandans, which was also a variant of the Plains Sun Dance (Hall 1989:271; Bowers 1950:126n4; 1992:308). It also recalls the dry folded deer hide drum used in the bear sacrifice of the Munsee-Mahican, now living in Ontario, as well as the rolled rawhide drum used by the Delawares in their Big House (Goddard 1978:Figure 14a; Speck and Moses 1945:44, Figure 3). What all three of these ceremonies also have in common is the centrality of a pole and for the Hidatsa and Munsee-Mahican, the element of sacrifice, real or symbolic.

In the winter bear sacrifice of the Algonkian Munsee-Mahican of the Eastern Woodlands the hide of the sacrificed bear was hung on a pole that represented a kind of World Axis. The bear hide represented the Sky Bear seen as the quadrangle of our Great Bear or Ursa Major constellation revolving around this axis. This provides a clear parallel to the Sacred Pole and Sacred White Buffalo hide of the Omahas in another way as well. The Omaha Sacred Pole leaned northward at an angle of 45 degrees. As Ed Krupp (1983:89-90) has called to our attention, this means that the Sacred Pole was oriented almost directly at Polaris, the North Star (Figure 2b).

The tree represented by the Sacred Pole was found while its discoverer was seeking the North Star (Ridington and Hastings 1997:103, 105). Therefore the Omaha Sacred Pole can also be considered to have represented a World Axis. The Sky Bear constellation wheels around Polaris. One implication of this could be that as the ancestors of the Omahas, the Hidatsas, and other Siouan peoples moved west out of the Woodlands and onto the Plains, the buffalo may have come to substitute for the bear as a power animal in a pole-related ceremony. There is consensus among linguists that Proto-Siouan speakers must have originally lived in the Ohio valley about 2,500 years ago. From there some moved eastward into the Appalachian piedmont to become the Tutelo and Saponi, some southward to become the Biloxi, Ofo, and Quapaw, and others westward and northward to become the Omaha, Hidatsa, Mandan, Dakota, Assiniboine, and others of the many Siouan-speaking nations familiar in Plains and northern Mississippi valley history (Springer and Witkowski 1983).

While the Sacred Pole was a charge of one subclan of the Omaha Honga clan, the White Buffalo hide was a responsibility of different subclan of the Hongas. The twin tents housing these sacred objects were located side-by-side on the southern side of the Omaha camp circle. The bear sacrificed in the Munsee-Mahican bear ceremony explicitly represented the quadrangle of our Ursa Major constellation, but there is no indication that the White Buffalo hide itself had any direct connection with that constellation.

There is no explicit identification on record for the Omaha or any other Dhegihan Sioux speakers that would allow us to see a buffalo hide, white or otherwise, as the equivalent of the Sky Bear constellation as the Munsee-Mahicans do for the hide of the bear in their sacrifice. Like the Skiri Pawnee, the Omaha and Osage see the quadrangle of Ursa Major as a litter, such as would be used as a stretchers for transporting the sick, as a bier for displaying the dead, or as a conveyance for persons in high leadership positions (Chamberlain 1982:205, 254; Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:110; La Flesche 1932:183; Hudson 1976:326; Milfort 1972 [1802]:99-102; Swanton 1946:598-601).

A litter identity for Ursa Major is compatible with bear associations because an underlying association of the Sky Bear in the Northeast and even more widely is continuity of life and immortality (e.g. Jones and Michelson 1911:873; Speck and Moses 1945:57). The bear's hibernation and later waking are obvious metaphors of death and rebirth. More than a dozen burials on litters were found in the so-called Great Mortuary in the Craig Mound at the Spiro archaeological site in Oklahoma (Brown 1975:Figures 2-3; Brown 1996:Figure 1.30). Half a dozen burials on preserved cedar litters were excavated in Mound 72 of the Cahokia site in southern Illinois (Fowler et al 1999:70-71, Figure 6.7).

Crook Lances and Dog Soldiers

The sacred White Buffalo hide of the Omahas does have one connection to the Ursa Major constellation that is less than evident. The same sub-clan that had charge of the White Buffalo hide also had the responsibility for making and decorating certain crook-shaped staffs of authority known by the name *washa'be* from *wa* "something" + *sha'be* "dark" (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:154-155, Figure 27). The Omaha and Osage words for bear was the circumlocution *watha'be* from *wa* "something" + *tha'be* "black." Among the related Winnebagoes of Wisconsin crooks were the property only of the Bear Clan (Radin 1970:154-155, 178).

More telling is the relationship between the shape of such crooks and the shape of the Ursa

Major and Ursa Minor constellations, for crooks were normally used in pairs. What we see as a dipper shape can also be seen as a crook shape (Hall 1991b:Figures a-b, d-e). Because of the phenomenon of precession, as late as the first millennium before our era the center of rotation of the night sky was not Polaris but a space between the two bear or dipper constellations (Hall 1989:Figures 4e-h). The two crook-shaped constellations bracketed a location that can be seen as the center of a whorl of stars and hence as a portal into the night sky and into the underworld that the night sky can represent (Figure 3b). The Navajos believe, for instance, that locations on the human body that contain whorls—fingertips and hair cowlicks—serve as portals for spirits (Reichard 1974:32, 36, 149). At times when Pawnee warrior societies were formally gathered in their earth lodges a crook lance was erected on either side of the entrance, the portal to this structure (Murie 1914).

By A.D. 1000, the center of rotation of the night sky had precessed far enough toward its present point location by Polaris that it appears that Ursa Major is revolving around Ursa Minor. This is reflected in the use of the crook lance by Dog Soldiers. When in his "no retreat" mode a northern Plains Dog Soldier tethered himself by a sash to a crook lance inserted into the ground (Figure 3a). He was free to circle the crook as far as his tether would allow in the same manner as Ursa Major circles the North Star, which is today the last star in the handle of the Little Dipper, Ursa Minor. This effectively makes a Dog Soldier the equivalent of Ursa Major. Is that a fair comparison? Apparently, because in the origin myth of the Dog Soldier societies of the Hidatsa of North Dakota the original Dog Soldiers became the stars that today do constitute Ursa Major (Bowers 1992:195-196; Hall 1997b:88, Figure 19.5). The Cheyennes have quite a different story for the origin of their Dog Soldiers, but it is a story that relates in another way to the North Star. In this Cheyenne narrative the Dog Soldiers of an early day sought out a tree that was leaning northward. On finding it they placed lodge poles against it and it became their Dog Soldier lodge (Grinnell 1972, II:66). Leaning to the north, the tree would have pointed at the North Star.

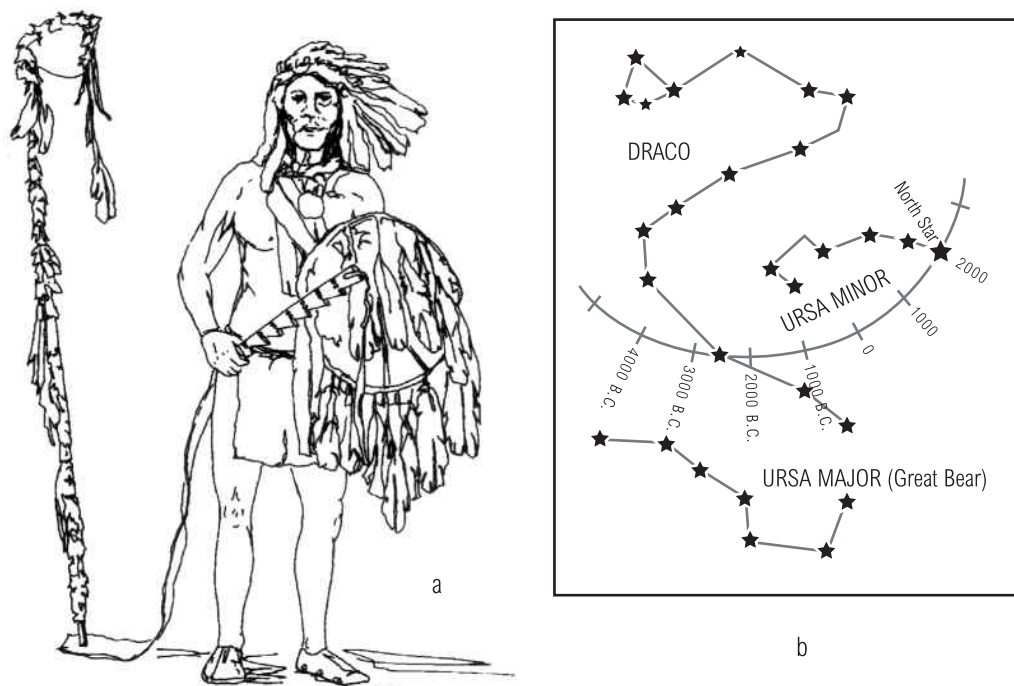


Figure 3. *Ursa Minor and Ursa Major constellations (a) as symbolized by the crook lance to which a Dog Soldier is tethered by his sash (from Hall [1997b: Figure 19.5a, after Mails 1973:48], with permission of the University of Illinois Press) and (b) shown relative to the path of precession of the centre of rotation of the northern stars from 5,000 B.C. to A.D. 3,000 (after King [1967:16]).*

Sacred Tree Imagery

There is on an engraved shell bowl from the Craig Mound an image that arguably represents the origin myth associated with the Omaha Sacred Pole (Brown 2004:Figure 9; Phillips and Brown 1978-1984:Plate 236; Hall 1997b:103-105, Figure 13.1). The Spiro image is that of a tree on one half of which birds are perched (Figure 4). The branches on this half are rendered with many spiny projections suggesting that these branches are radiating light. The other half of the tree lacks this imagery of light and lacks birds as well. This recalls a detail in the origin myth of the Omaha Sacred Pole. When first observed the tree was filled with birds and appeared to glow like it was on fire. When the birds flew away the glow stopped.

There is a contradiction, however, in the relative ages of the Spiro engraved shell and the Omaha Sacred Pole. This shell bowl and many others from the Craig Mound are believed to have been manufactured some time around the

thirteenth century of our era. Traditional history says, however, that the Omaha Sacred Pole originated at a time centuries later, with disagreement over whether this happened after or before the Ponca ceased to be merely a clan of the Omaha and separated from the Omaha to become an independent tribe. It is agreed, however, that the Sacred Pole dates to a time well after the Omaha themselves became independent of the Osage and other Dhegihas. The Poncas separated from the Omahas sometime not very long before or after A.D. 1700 (Buffalohead 2004:337). The 500 years between A.D. 1200 and 1700 is long measured by human lifetimes, but not long as traditions go. How can a seeming representation of the origin myth of the Omaha Sacred Pole predate the origin of the pole itself?

Other poles also figured in the ceremonies of the Omahas. The Hedewachi pole was believed to be older than the Sacred Pole. The Hedewachi was painted in alternate bands of red and black representing day and night, sky and earth (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:254). This alternation of colors

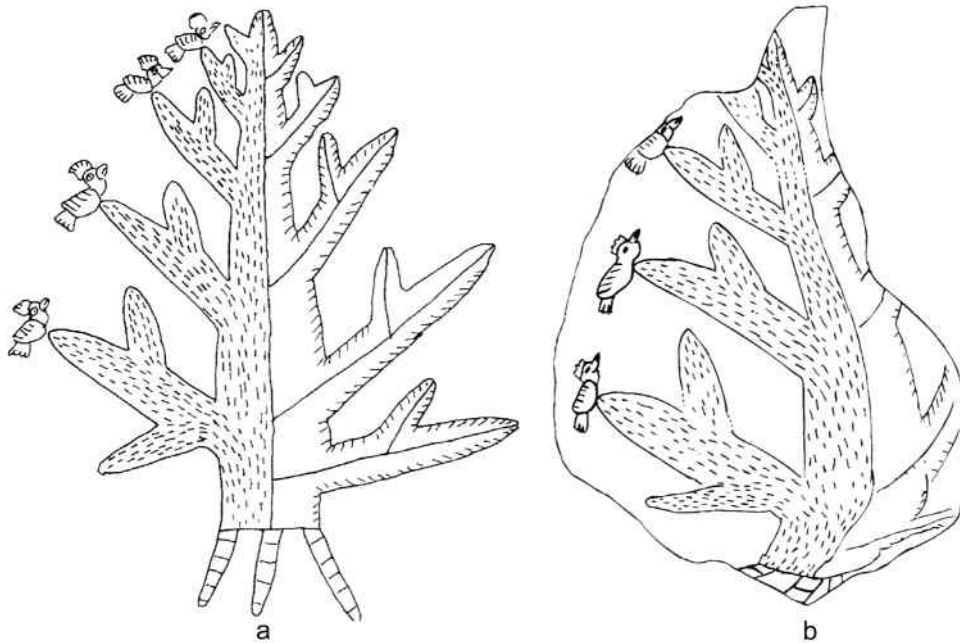


Figure 4. Sacred Tree motif in the Craig B iconographic style shown (a) drawn unrolled from (b) an engraved whelk shell bowl found in the Craig Mound, Spiro, Oklahoma (after Phillips and Brown [1989:Plate 236] and Brown [2004:Figure 9]).

recalls the glow of the Sacred Pole, present when the birds were present and absent when the birds were absent (Ridington and Hastings 1997:101-104). It recalls also the glow of the Iroquois Tree of Light whose blossoms illuminated the sky before the creation of the sun, glowing to provide day and darkening to provide night (Hall 1997b:107; Wallace 1972:86). It recalls the red- and black-banded coloration of mourning poles and Sun Dance poles (Hall 1997b:107). The basic idea behind the Omaha Sacred Pole apparently has a great antiquity, even though the physical pole that still exists among the Omahas obviously has a more finite origin in historic time (Ridington and Hastings 1997).

Cahokia and the Dhegihas

I am one of a growing number of archaeologists who have not hesitated to express their opinion that the northern Dhegihas—the Osage, Kansa, Omaha, and Ponca—had ancestors whose archaeological culture was Cahokia Mississippian (Brown 2004:118; Hall 2004:102; Hall 2006;

Diaz-Granados 2004). We exclude the Quapaw from this archaeological identity. Native traditions indicate an ancient initial separation of the Quapaw from the Omaha with the Quapaw moving down and the Omaha up the Mississippi from somewhere around its junction with the Ohio River. The etymology of the names Quapaw and Omaha relate, literally to “downstream” and “upstream.” The Osage-Kansa separated from the Omaha-Ponca first, then later the Kansa from the Osage and the Ponca from the Omaha. Even before the period of Cahokia’s climax as a cultural influence, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of our era, Cahokia was clearly in contact with cultures of the Caddoan area, in particular the Spiro area of Oklahoma. Mound 72 at Cahokia dates to the eleventh century and contained quantities of arrowheads of Caddoan area manufacture. Many shell bowls found at Spiro are believed to have been manufactured at Cahokia (Brown 2004:120; Fowler et al 1999:101-115).

The Cahokia Mississippian polity in the immediate vicinity of Cahokia was fairly dispersed. Aside from Cahokia proper there was the

Saint Louis mound center in Saint Louis proper, the East Saint Louis mound group across the Mississippi between Saint Louis and Cahokia, and just to the north of Cahokia, the Mitchell site, another large temple town. These sites neighboring Cahokia were not mere suburbs. The Saint Louis site by itself contained twenty-six platform mounds. Cahokia had five times as many, but what these outlying sites could represent is the foreshadowing of ethnic fracture lines within the Cahokia polity that could eventually have led to separation, say, of the Osage-Kansa from the Omaha-Ponca, each of which group would then subsequently have come to lose its Mississippian archaeological identity in exchange, I would argue, for an identity with the Late Prehistoric culture called Oneota.

Oneota was an archaeological culture found nearly everywhere that the Cahokia cultural hegemony had extended during the several centuries just preceding Oneota's lightning expansion in the fourteenth century (Hall 1991a:Figures 1.4, 1.5). Cahokia's heyday was the span of years between A.D. 1050 and 1350. The transition between Cahokia Mississippian culture and Oneota was one between communities planned around monumental temple mounds and residential mounds for an elite civic and religious leadership and a later plan with the more egalitarian social organization of tribes known to history in the same area. One might consider that the post-contact appearance of the Sacred Pole among the Omahas represents the recruitment of a long pre-existing but remembered Sacred Pole tradition to serve a post-Cahokia-diasporic social and political need. Fletcher and La Flesche (1972:236) tell us the pole "represented the unity of the tribe; the unity of the Council of Seven Chiefs...; the authority of the Thunder" and (Fletcher and La Flesche (1972:154) "symbolized the authority of the chiefs..." The Sacred Pole was and remains a symbol of Omaha tribal unity (Ridington and Hastings 1997:98).

The Skiri Pawnee North Star Bundle

The symbolic relationship of the Sacred Pole to the authority of the chiefs is not difficult to assay. The Sacred Pole was oriented northward at an angle that directed it almost exactly toward the

North Star, Polaris, the Star-that-does-not-move (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:110 and above). This is the etymology of the name for Polaris used by the Ponca and Osages as well (La Flesche 1932:91; Howard 1995:75). For the Skiri Pawnees of the Caddoan stock Polaris bore the similar name of Star-that-does-not-walk-around (Chamberlain 1982:106). For the Skiris, Polaris was also the chief of all the stars and was regarded as the chief of the council of stars represented by the Corona Borealis. For the Skiris, the authority of the North Star was materialized in the North Star Bundle. Tied to the outside of this sacred bundle was a "billet of wood about three feet high, entirely covered with feathers..." It was described by one Skiri Pawnee priest as "covered with all kinds of birds" (Chamberlain 1982:106). It is elsewhere described as "a kind of staff highly decorated with birdskins" (Murie 1989:100). The nature of this Skiri Pawnee staff, associated as it is with the North Star, compares easily with the Omaha Sacred Pole, associated as it is with the story of a tree covered with birds.

The ceremony of the North Star bundle differed from that of other Pawnee bundle ceremonies in the nature of the associated sacrifice. Where in other bundle ceremonies there were burnt offerings of the heart and tongue of a buffalo, the sacrifice to the North Star bundle involved the burning of an entire buffalo (Murie 1989:101). Not too surprisingly this sacrifice took place at a location to the north of the village.

Discussion and Conclusions

Societal division into tribal halves or moieties is common worldwide. What many scholars may be unprepared to accept is the idea that the sky/earth associations of the Omaha and Osage moieties in the central Great Plains reflect a directional symbolism diffused from Mesoamerica, especially since moieties do not characterize Mesoamerican social organization. Osage and Omaha camp circles represent a conflation of the vertical opposition of sky and earth—up and down—with the horizontal opposition of north and south. In Mesoamerica the Euro-American idea of "north" is represented by the concept of "up" and the converse for

“south” and “down” because of the location of the sun’s passage relative to the zenith during the summer in latitudes below the Tropic of Cancer. All of the United States is north of the Tropic of Cancer.

The idea of world quarters as distinct worlds is found in the iconography of the Aztec Stone of the Sun and in the symbolism of the Ponca Sun Dance, and it is found also in the American Southwest among the Zuñi (Cushing 1981:185, 187, 188). The Zuñi also associate the directions north, west, south, and east with wind, water, fire, and earth. This makes less remarkable the parallels between the world age symbolism of the Aztec Stone of the Sun and that of the Ponca Sun Dance. The Zuñi and the Ponca both dwell in that northern border country of Mesoamerica called *La Gran Chichimeca* by the Spanish conquistadors, as redefined and vastly extended in the thought and writings of the archaeologist Charles Di Peso.

Having recognized the likely kinship of the bird skin-covered staff of the Skiri North Star bundle to the North Star-directed pole of the Omahas, bird-covered in its origin narrative, we may well ponder the kinship of each to the bird-covered tree in the imagery of the engraved Craig mound shell bowl (above). The Skidi Pawnees are Caddoan in their linguistic affiliation, as the builders of the Craig mound are also believed to have been. The style of the engraving on the Craig mound shell bowl is one called Craig B (Figure 4). Craig B is a style of Caddoan origin, probably locally rendered on products at the Spiro site by the builders of the Craig mound, but derived ultimately from an art style called Classic Braden that originated at the Cahokia site and that flourished at Cahokia during the 1100s and 1200s (Brown 2004:107-109, Figures 7, 9). Did the bird-covered tree motif on the Craig mound bowl travel to Oklahoma from Cahokia as well? The theme could have traveled onto the Plains from Cahokia but it could as easily have pre-existed within Central Plains cosmology. In either case, the evidence does suggest that the Omaha or the Omaha-Ponca, as the case may be, could have recruited a pre-existing tradition of a north-pointing tree to serve a post-contact social and political need. It is not hard to imagine a ritual drama in

which a myth of the finding of the tree is brought to life and the existing Sacred Pole created as contemporary Omahas know it. What is different is that in many other pole-related dramas the pole is not preserved as a relic but created anew with each performance, as in the case of the Plains Sun Dance. The combined associations of the sacred White Buffalo hide and Sacred Pole of the Omahas is strongly with the Plains. The Omaha sub-clan responsible for the sacred White Buffalo hide also owned the feathered crooks that were symbols of authority. Such feathered crooks tie into the Dipper/Bear constellations and into the north-leaning tree symbol through the Plains Dog Soldier societies.

The buffalo was probably known to the Proto-Siouans of twenty centuries ago while still in the Ohio valley, but the buffalo was not an economic staple or even present in any numbers east of the Mississippi until just before European contact. No corn could be served during the feasting of the Sacred Bear in the Munsee-Mahican ceremony, suggesting an antiquity for this sacrifice that predated maize as an economic staple in eastern North America (Speck and Moses 1945:69). By contrast, the Omaha sub-clan in charge of preserving the sacred corn was also that which possessed the sacred White Buffalo hide (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:155). The shared background of the discussed Omaha and Munsee-Mahican ceremonialism likely goes back to a period well before maize became a staple in the economy in the Cahokia area or in the Eastern Woodlands area generally, i.e. well before A.D. 800-900.

The role of the buffalo sacrifice in the Skiri Pawnee North Star bundle ceremony is closer to the role of the bear in the Munsee-Mahican bear sacrifice than anything in Siouan ritual performance except for the role of the buffalo as sacrificial victim in the Hidatsa Sun Dance origin myth and the relationship of the White Buffalo hide to the Sacred Pole in Omaha religion. There is no dearth of reports and evidence of bear ceremonialism in Eastern North America, both archaeological and ethnological (Berres et al 2004; Hallowell 1926). Bear clans and bear societies abound. Bear myths abound. What is scarce is evidence of bear ceremonialism related directly

to pole ceremonialism and the North Star. Bears most commonly relate to medicine.

The unique rolled and flat rawhide drums used in the Mandan and Hidatsa Sun Dances compare to the folded rawhide drums of the pole-related Munsee-Mahican Bear Sacrifice and to those of the pole-related Delaware Big House ceremonialism with no reported intermediate occurrences. This supports the idea of a survival among the Mandans and Hidatsas in the Northern Plains of a drum-type whose background dates to a time before the ancestors of the Mandans and Hidatsa became distinguished from and separated from the ancestors of other Proto-Siouans, a time perhaps in the range of 500-100 B.C. and well before the Proto-Western Siouans (ancestral Mandan, Hidatsa, Crow) found their way up the Missouri from the Ohio valley (Springer and Witkowski 1983). It supports the idea of pole-related bear sacrifice in the deep background of Central Siouans like the Ponca and Omaha.

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Contradictions comme source de perspective historique : exemples à partir du symbolisme des cercles de camps et des mâts sacrés

Quand on utilise une ethnographie historique et la méthode comparative, il est agréable de découvrir une correspondance proche d'éléments rituels entre deux cultures. D'autre part, une contradiction peut aussi être utile, même si la résolution de certaines contradictions exige des comparaisons interrégionales génériques et des perspectives à temps profond. Cet article examine ou mentionne certains exemples, y compris les cercles de camps des Omahas et des Osages, la danse du soleil des Poncas, le mât sacré des Omahas, le sacrifice de l'ours des Munsee-Mahicans, les lances des soldats chiens des Grandes Plaines, et le ballot sacré de l'étoile polaire des Skiri Pawnee.

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