

**KINSHIP AND THE DRUM DANCE IN A NORTHERN DENE COMMUNITY.** By MICHAEL ASCH. The Circumpolar Research Series. Edmonton, Alberta: The Boreal Institute for Northern Studies and Academic Printing & Publishing, 1988. 113 p., maps, tables, photos, bib. Softbound. Cdn\$12.95.

Between August 1969 and July 1970, Michael Asch lived in the Dene community of Pe Tšéh Kí (Wrigley), located in the upper basin of the Mackenzie River Valley on the east bank of the Mackenzie River. In this book Asch focuses on the social organization of the community and its drum-dance music during the period immediately following the move, instigated by the federal government, from bush to town.

The first two chapters, dealing with geography, history and economics, provide a detailed account of the daily life in Pe Tšéh Kí.

With chapter 3, "Social Structure and Organization," the easy reading is over. This chapter recapitulates the data presented in Asch's doctoral dissertation (1972). It is full of sociological concepts on kinship systems, which is heavy going for those of us not conversant with the intricacies of kinship terminology. Asch discusses the changes that the move into town brought about:

First and foremost, households which would not have been part of the local band in the bush were now neighbours. This, plus the increase in the number of people with whom one resided (from approximately 30 to 120), caused friction that did not exist when people lived in the bush. Second, the grouping of people from which marriage partners were selected in the past now lived in the same community. This created a significant problem because it had not been considered appropriate for people who reside together to marry [p. 35-36].

It is not until halfway through the book (chapter 4, p. 59) that Asch begins to discuss the "Kinds of Music and Instruments in Pe Tšéh Kí." The frame drum (egheli) "is the only instrument used in traditional Dene music" (p. 59):

The face of the drum is made from caribou hide stretched around a birch frame with a diameter of roughly two feet. The birch is held together with glue. The caribou is sewn on the frame with sinew strands (babiche). Across the outside face of the drum are three strands of babiche which make a buzzing sound as the instrument is struck [p. 91,93].

At this point the chapters could have been organized differently in order to group chapters 4 and 6, which both deal specifically with the music. Chapter 6, "The Music of the Dene Drum Dance," lists the types of songs (i.e., Rabbit, Cree, Tea Dance, Starting, Practice), the melodic structure and the rhythmic pattern. Notes on the functions of the songs, derived from Asch's personal interviews, are very helpful. An enlargement of this chapter would have been appreciated by ethnomusicologists (Appendix A is a basic transcription of one song that gives an outline but does not account for deviations from concert pitch or fluctuations in rhythm; Appendix B is made up of melodic sketches of the 22 songs under study.) Without the scales and accompanying transcriptions, the table of melodic structures provided is not enough to get a feeling for the music itself, which is difficult at best without hearing the songs themselves.

Chapter 5, "The Social Organization of the Drum Dance," and chapter 7, "On the Meaning of the Drum Dance," deal with the social aspects of the Drum Dance:

The ideal drum dance requires desire, competence, and a willingness to lay aside personal disputes in order to create a special world out of the roles and behaviours available within the Drum Dance social context. . . . This special world is achieved through a process which moves the participants from the Opening Song phase, in which singers are the only ones engaged; through the Drum Dance phase, in which the other participants progressively become engaged by dancing; to the Tea Dance phase, in which leadership is overwhelmed as universal participation is achieved [p. 91,93].

In his postscript, "A Perspective from 1988," Asch reflects on how, in 1969, the community of Pe Tšéh Kí used the Drum Dance as a temporary means "to fend off the negative impacts of imposed change" (p. 97). In the early 1970s the Dene nation successfully re-opened treaty negotiations and voiced formal objections to development on their land prior to the settlement of their outstanding claims. In this way "the Dene communities were at last confronting the primary external agents of change: the Canadian state and the corporate developers" (p. 97).

This book is a useful introduction to the Dene's cultural heritage and fulfills its objectives of discussing the social organization of the community and its drum-dance music. The quality of reproduction, editing and printing is good and the photos, maps and tables are helpful. It is not too difficult to be read by a layperson but it is mainly of interest "to students and scholars in the fields of Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science and Native Studies," as the back cover suggests.

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**"THE ORDERS OF THE DREAMED": GEORGE NELSON ON CREE AND NORTHERN OJIBWA RELIGION AND MYTH, 1823.** By JENNIFER S.H. BROWN and ROBERT BRIGHTMAN. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1988. Manitoba Studies in Native History III. xii + 226 p., 2 maps, 7 illus., index, bib. Hardbound. Cdn\$30.00.

For those who seek to describe the culture of one group of people to another, religion and myth have always presented a major challenge. Yet these were the topics seized upon by veteran fur-trader George Nelson, when in 1823 he summarized his own knowledge of Cree and northern Ojibwa mental culture in a lengthy letter-journal addressed to his father. Nelson's remarkable account, published in this book for the first time, should earn him a high place among pioneer ethnographers of Canada's native peoples.

The book is divided into four parts. In Part I, Jennifer Brown and Robert Brightman provide important background by describing Nelson's early life and career in the fur trade. Born in 1786 at Sorel, Lower Canada (now Quebec), George Nelson was the eldest of at least nine children born to a Loyalist schoolteacher and his wife, both of whom had come north from New York to escape the American Revolution. After receiving a good basic education, the fifteen-year-old George entered the fur trade as an apprentice clerk with the XY Company in 1802. During the next two decades he served at various trading posts in what is now Wisconsin, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where he had extensive contact with both Ojibwa and Cree groups. At the time he prepared the letter-journal to his father he was in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Lac la Ronge, an outpost of Ile à la Crosse in north-eastern Saskatchewan.

Nelson's sixty-page manuscript, which is presented in Part II of the book, comprises a mixture of excellent first-hand observations, stories and events related by Cree and Metis informants and, of lesser ethnographic value, information filtered through unspecified secondary and tertiary sources (e.g., "a Canadian" [p. 63] or "other Indians" [p. 97]). In editing the manuscript for publication, Brown and Brightman have retained the spelling and capitalization of the original text. However, they have assisted the modern reader and achieved greater clarity by adding appropriate punctuation and paragraph indentations, as well as by devising titles, set off by square brackets, for Nelson's various stories and themes. In addition, they