

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

have attempted to phonemicize native terms and have added a useful glossary of "dramatis personae," which identifies and briefly discusses most of the spirit beings to which Nelson refers throughout his account.

Recognizing that some of the material in Nelson's manuscript may be "rather inaccessible and obscure to non-specialists and non-Algonquians," Brown and Brightman supply the reader with a comparative summary of northern Algonquian myth and religion in Part III. This excellent and useful contribution emphasizes religious and mythic themes and personages that are mentioned in Nelson's account, thereby placing the latter in a much broader comparative context. It includes discussion of the cosmogonic myths that explain how the world acquired its present shape, the importance of dream guardians and the vision fast, communication with the spirit world by means of the shaking lodge, the cannibalistic windigo monster and religious aspects of native medicine.

In Part IV, two native scholars express their own views on the text of George Nelson. Stan Cuthand is able to compare Nelson's "voice out of the past" with knowledge acquired during his own Plains Cree childhood and his later experience as an Anglican priest at the very place where Nelson wrote, Lac la Ronge. While suggesting that Nelson may not have fully comprehended the spirit world he sought to describe, Cuthand acknowledges that, by committing these stories to paper, Nelson has saved them "for another generation."

Another native perspective is provided by Emma LaRocque, who discusses the ethics of publishing historical documents. This essay draws attention to some of the limitations of early sources on Indians, including such issues as inaccurate ethnography and entrenched ethnocentrism. While pointing to a few such problems in the Nelson manuscript, LaRocque nevertheless concedes that it "may be praised for its attempts at fairness and its ethnographic detail" and that, given his era, George Nelson "is remarkably open-minded and seems to have been genuinely interested in presenting correct information."

For anyone who has wondered about the title "Orders of the Dreamed," it may be of interest to know that this quotation appears in Nelson's discussion (p. 34) of the Algonquian vision fast. Here and elsewhere throughout his letter-journal Nelson used the word "dreamed" to translate *pawākan*, the spirit guardian that was sought by Cree and Ojibwa youths during their vision fast. As pointed out by Brown and Brightman, "The concept of the *pawākan* and the associated ideas about dream communication and interpretation are the most central yet most abstruse aspects of Northern Algonquian religious thought" (p. 138). Seen in this light, Nelson's expression "Orders of the Dreamed" makes an appropriate title for his account of Cree and Ojibwa religion.

This carefully edited book will be of great value for anyone who would try to understand the rich spiritual life of subarctic Algonquians.

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THE ESKIMOS. Text by ERNEST S. BURCH, JR. Photographs by WERNER FORMAN. Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1988. 128 p., 120 colour illus., bib. Hardbound. US\$22.50.

This truly is an amazing book. It is as good in some ways as it is bad in others. The good includes the very knowledgeable text by Ernest S. Burch, Jr., a cultural anthropologist and an outstanding scholar, as well as the very beautiful photographs by Werner Forman. Unfortunately the two only seldom support each other.

There exists yet another contradiction. While the photographs are magnificently reproduced and the book is sumptuously printed and published, the editing of the total book — i.e., the integration of text with illustrations — is deplorably inadequate. The above statements obviously need clarification and substantiation.

First, about the author, who probably is the most widely respected and accepted authority in his field: This esteem is shared by me who considers "Tiger" (as Burch is widely known) a good friend. I nevertheless have to say what I shall, yet I have only very few arguments with his text as such, which I consider convincing in its own context.

In fact, if the book had a less authoritative title (perhaps just "Eskimo" or "Eskimos of the 19th Century" or even "Eskimos of Yesterday") and the illustrations (with the exception of perhaps a dozen or so) were detached from the text, the publication would be more than passable. The text itself is beautifully written, especially the chapter called "Worldview," which, without sacrificing excellent information, is presented clearly yet poetically. Here Burch combines his knowledge, his insights, and his feelings. Where I cannot quite agree — and here William R. Morrison in a recent *Arctic* review should be quoted: "... reviewers are often accused of criticizing an author for not writing the book that the reviewer would wish to see..." — well, the title does not quite agree with the content. What in fact Burch describes are Eskimo life-styles of the past, i.e., of the Eskimos of the early and middle 19th century (mentioned in one paragraph only and not always adhered to). He, as much as I, likes and admires them and wishes therefore to strip them of sentimentalities. He succeeds to do that and glorifies but does not romanticize them.

There are, however, a few other points that more exacting reviewers would observe: (1) the frequent generalizations. (2) The overemphasis on Aleuts and Alaskan Eskimos and their being typical of all Eskimos. This applies specifically to points such as the otherwise excellent descriptions of the movements of the Lower Noatak People, something that certainly could not apply to, say, the Caribou or the Central Eskimos. (3) Statements such as "... artifacts used by Eskimos almost always exhibited an elegance and style far in excess of that demanded by the uses to which they were put..." are certainly wrong for most of the Canadian Arctic for almost a thousand years.

I may be accused for looking too closely at individual trees instead of the forest. But isn't the forest made up of individual trees? And it is precisely here where the great error of the illustrations comes into play. While most often good as photographs and beautifully presented as such, they (generally speaking) are often unrelated in size of reproduction. Some objects are actually enlarged (such as on pages 18, 26, 35, 101, 108, 120), others are much too small (p. 123) or are badly juxtaposed in relation to their actual sizes (such as, at least, on pages 32/33, 44/45, 60/61, 66/67, 82/83 and 86). Much worse, however, is that not a single caption contains the kind of information essential to identify artifacts, that is to say, dimensions, dates, provenances and current repositories, although the latter can be found, rather gingerly listed, in the "Acknowledgements." And speaking of the acknowledgements, there are at least three errors: Meldgaard is not director of the Danish National Museum, Van Stone is not chairman of the Field Museum, and the curator of the Eskimo Museum in Churchill is called Brandon, not Brondson.

With regard to the above, the bibliography must also be mentioned. While, in general, I am always in favour of short bibliographies, this particular one is a bit too short and some of the omissions are embarrassingly noticeable. To name just a few: Bogoras, Bruemmer, Burch himself, Collins, Dall, Harrington, Hawkes, Hoffman, Hrdlička, Jessup, de Laguna, Lantis, John Murdoch, at least two more works by Rasmussen, and Taylor. And what about one of the superb AINA "Translations from Russian Sources" edited by Henry Michael? I realize that some of these publications