



Osage Indian Customs and Myths (Alabama Fire Ant)

Louis F. Burns

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Siouan peoples who migrated from the Atlantic coastal region and settled in the central portion of the North American continent long before the arrival of Europeans are now known as Osage. Because the Osage did not possess a written language, their myths and cultural traditions were handed down orally through many generations. With time, only those elements deemed vital were preserved in the stories, and many of these became highly stylized. The resulting verbal recitations of the proper life of an Osage—from genesis myths to body decoration, from star songs to child-naming rituals, from war party strategies to medicinal herbs—constitute this comprehensive volume.

Osage myths differ greatly from the myths of Western Civilization, most obviously in the absence of individual names. Instead, "younger brother," "the messenger," "Little Old Men," or a clan name may serve as the allegorical embodiment of the central player. Individual heroic feats are also missing because group life took precedence over individual experience in Osage culture.

This volume supplements the work of noted ethnographer Francis La Flesche who devoted most of his professional life to recording detailed descriptions of Osage rituals. Louis Burns's unique position as a modern Osage—aware of the white culture's expectations but steeped in the traditions himself and able to write from an insider's perspective—makes this work valuable to scholar and layperson alike.

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