

## Culture



# Jordon PAPER, *Offering Smoke: The Sacred Pipe and Native American Religion*, Moscow, Idaho: The University of Idaho Press. 161 pages, U.S. \$29.95 (paper)

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authority. When this case ends and the package has been unwrapped, it will have to be our ownership and our jurisdiction under our law that is on the table "(p.9).

The court, in this case, is faced with questions of Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en sovereignty in their own territory. It is not simply another instance of establishing aboriginal use-rights or protesting infringements of treaty rights.

The case is also unique for the extent and breadth of the evidence from the people themselves. This slim volume is but the opening phrase of an ethnography and history of the tribal group which will have no equivalent in anthropology or any other discipline concerned with North American First Nations people. It contains a full record with unsurpassed detail of territory, history, and organization of all the houses (the primary political units), and it is given in the words and under direction of the people themselves. It is not a construction by outsiders.

This opening volume, even though it gives only sketch of things to come, does contain a useful introduction to the socio-political system of the tribal group. The existence of the two language communities living in adjoining territories and retaining differences of particular features of life, yet cooperating effectively as one political group and sharing a common system of government, also provides for all of Canada an example of profoundly enlightened political evolution.

This opening statement is in itself an eloquent appeal for recognition of the continuing reality of Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en law as it exists and is articulated in the potlatch or feast system. And an appeal is made to the non-Indian world — anthropologists in particular should hear this — to abandon the distinction between "traditional" and "non-traditional" society. This model tends to lock into the past that which is distinctly Indian in origin. It ignores the living, dynamic reality which is always the condition of culture. When the traditional Indian world is defied as the only real Indian world, the rights of Indians are tied to a frozen reality, as the statement puts it. Living Indians cease to count. They are defined as non-existent. And as the plaintiffs in this case clearly understand, this image, model, or theory has the consequence of demeaning and diminishing them as a people (pp.41-3).

Two realities have been presented to the court during the trial: - Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en history made in the words of white administrators, missionaries, and various experts, who sought and saw only what they were predisposed to see; and the reality in the minds and words of the people themselves. The trial is, in a sense, a culminating contest between

these sets of ideas. The decision will have profound consequences for all First Nations people and the future of Canada itself, for it clearly asks the courts to decide if First Nations will be fully recognized in the future.

It will be several years before the inevitable appeals are decided. But the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en will go on, gathering strength, continuing their struggle to maintain their visions of responsibility to themselves, their land, and laws, as best they can in the face of the wider system. There is no doubt that the effort they have made to bring the case to trial is strengthening their society.

Those who cherish ethnographic accounts can anticipate a long series of further invaluable publications as the tribal council sees fit, or finds reason for publication of the evidence.

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The fundamental premise of *Offering Smoke* is that a pervasive North American Indian sacred pipe ritual can be traced to a pre-European contact period of considerable antiquity. Further, analysis of the time depth and the diffusion of such usage indicates that this ritual was an essential feature of Native American religious practice throughout much of North America and among many diverse groups. The archaeological research reveals bone and stone pipes among the Plains and Woodland peoples dating back to about 4000 B.P. The author believes that the wide-spread diffusion of Monitor pipes throughout the Hopewell Interaction Sphere served as a direct link in the later development of a sacred pipe ritual.

By cataloguing the many pipes held in various North American and European museums and through additional reference to visual and written materials, the author categorizes the sacred pipes he studied in terms of four criteria: date, culture of use, origin of the collection and use in a ritual context. Of the many surveyed, 196 pipes are described in an appendix as most closely meeting the requisite criteria and of these, 157 provide "certain or probable ritual associations" from which the author derives his conclusions (p.120).

This type of study is both admirable and important. The artifactual study of physical objects as they

specifically relate to religious beliefs and practices, particularly in a context of shared use and belief that cuts across recognized tribal differences, is a significant step forward in validating the antiquity and pervasiveness of pre-contact Native American religion. Paper makes a strong argument for the pan-Indian religious character of a "sacred pipe ritual" as an important step in validating the political rights of Native Americans to practice their ancient and unique religious traditions (p.113).

He illustrates the pervasive distribution of the primary types of pipe bowl forms and identifies the highly sacred character of the archaic disc, straight bowl and keel forms. The separate stem pipe is dated to the early Mississippian period (c. 900-1300 A.D.) and its sacred character is associated with stylistic motifs in which bowl design and imagery face away from the smoker when in use and toward the smoker when making ritual gestures. Because no tribal group limited itself to a single shape in pipe bowls and all used various pipe designs in a ritual context, the significant factor is taken to be its separate long stem (p.88). The historical investigation culminates in the pervasive spread of the inverted T-shaped bowl that was mass produced during the 1860s in Minnesota for trade with native peoples.

However, the fact that separate stem and bowl pipes are strongly associated with sacred rituals does not mean that all separate stem and bowl pipes can be regarded as strictly made for ritual use, as the dissemination of mass produced pipes suggests, nor does it prove that pipes that lack this design are not also sacred, as among the Hopi. Nor should it be assumed that all separate stemmed pipes are necessarily sacred pipes (p.12). Many two-piece smoking pipes were used in the nineteenth century simply as everyday, unadorned pipes which may or may not have been used in a ritual context. The significant factor is their ceremonial use, not necessarily their form. The author's form-function argument, while interesting and not insignificant as most sacred pipes are indeed two-piece, might be augmented with additional work on the specific contexts of usage.

The actual sacred pipe ritual identified by the author appears to comprise the repertoire of gestures made toward the four directions as well as to the above and below powers and the ritual manner of carefully handling, assembling, and filling the pipe with tobacco. Lighting the pipe and passing it to each member of the circle is without doubt part of the traditional use of the pipe in ceremony and personal prayer. It seems clear that this sacred use of the pipe was and is a primary form of communica-

tion with the sacred powers through smoke offerings. However, many of the generalizations about the sacredness of the pipe, its complex and variable symbolism and its mythic origins need greater documentation and contextual interpretation to give a more substantive definition to its diverse religious significance. For example, the symbolism of the bowl and stem given by the author is not documented and seems to date from an entirely modern period, as ethnohistorical sources reveal a widely diverse symbolism even within a single group.

The problem of the indigenous classification of pipes, whereby a particular pipe or pipes are designated as *the* sacred pipe(s) of the group, is simply not addressed in this work. There are many examples of this type of classification: the Buffalo Calf Pipe among the Sioux, the Long-Time Thunder Pipe among the Blackfeet, the Feathered Pipe of the Gros Ventre, the Arapaho Flat Pipe, and so on. The particular reverence shown for these truly holy pipes is well-documented and needs to be incorporated into the general concept of what constitutes a "sacred" pipe. Many of these pipes are associated with origin narratives that bestow upon them a profound religious quality as the very first pipes received or they are grounded in foundational religious experiences.

Furthermore, these pipes were not only used to address the sacred powers but to produce specific results such as calling the buffalo, producing rain or good weather for dances, or healing various illnesses. These issues could be more fully articulated through the careful use of ethnohistorical sources. This is perhaps the next step in developing an appreciation of the importance and centrality of the pipe in its full religious context.

The excellent illustrations and the synthesizing of so many diverse collections into a reference appendix will certainly prove useful in future research. Unfortunately, text references to the illustrations are often incorrect. I note nine incorrect illustration references between pages 70-80. Nevertheless, this is a useful synthesis and a significant contribution to the documentation of the symbolic continuity between past and present religious use of the pipe in Native North America.