

#7
Louisville, Ky. Dec. 7, 1928
Deer Park Ave. 1970

Dear Campbell:

In answer to your recent letter concerning the Sioux for "white man" the following may be of interest:

"Wasićun" means primarily a Frenchman, and then any white man, probably because the first white men the Sioux met were Frenchmen. (Henepin in 1681)
(pronunciation of "wasicun" : vowels have the continental European values - as in German, Italian etc..
the w as in English. the s = to Eng. sh.
ć = Eng. ch as in chin. ŋ = French nasal final n as in bon.)

Approximate pronunciation in English writing: Wah-shee-chung, with the accent on the second syllable.

The original meaning of this word is: A familiar spirit, some mysterious force or being which is supposed to communicate with men. It is the being which the young Sioux sees in a vision during the puberty fast and which remains his "familiar spirit" ever after (often it is an animal, a bear, an eagle etc.)

This seems to be the impression the first white men made on all Indians at their first meeting.

The explorer Lederer reports that his party one day saw an Indian somewhere in the Virginia region (A.D.160?) in an hitherto unexplored region who called out to his Indian guide of a related tribe: "We know who you are, you are spirits of another world who have come to bring misfortune upon us and this land". I think the quotation is from J. Mooney's "Sioux of the East", a Bulletin of the B. A. Eth. *which gives an account of the migration of the Sioux from the Atlantic Coast westward.*

S. R. Riggs in his Dakota-English Dictionary says that this word is nearly synonymous with "wakan"-wonderfull, incomprehensible, sacred, mysterious, something that cannot be understood and therefore is dangerous to meddle with". "wakan" things are to be avoided or shunned because you dont know what they might do to you.

When I took a walk along the camping circle of the Ogalala the first evening of the great sun-dance camp in 1909 I heard the girls and women whispering in the tipis: "wanyaka wo, wasićun wicása! Pahá ska yúha!"

look! spirit man! hat white he has! (I had a white straw hat on)

"Saglása" is an Englishman (pron.: shahgláhshah).

Etymology: sa= red; glayá= to sound. literally: those whose language sounds "red" i. e. "incomprehensible."

Compare with this the German word "Rotwálsch". (lit.: "red-Welsh")

"Wálsch" (English: "Welsh") meant originally "incomprehensible", applied by the Germans to the French and Italians, by the Anglo-Saxons to the keltic Britons.

"Rotwálsch" is applied to the (for the Germans) utterly incomprehensible language spoken by Gypsies, thieves and other low-class foreigners.