

(Paper written for Southern Plains Indian Museum, January, 1972)

M-43

EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHEYENNE

THE CHEYENNE

by

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Early History and Pre-Plains Culture

The Cheyenne are notable for their prowess in Plains warfare and for the courage and tenacity with which they fought against their enemies, including, for a time, the United States. In the popular mind they epitomize the Plains Indian even as the Plains Indian has come to symbolize all American Indians. Yet the Cheyenne are relative late comers to the Plains, having come to the area from woodland regions at least as far east as Minnesota. Evidence from oral traditions, historical documents, and archaeology indicate that they engaged successively in two different types of subsistence patterns before adapting to the Plains buffalo hunting economy.

The Cheyenne speak an Algonkian language. This differed only in minor respects from that of the Suhtai, a tribe the Cheyenne eventually assimilated. The Cheyenne language is related to the languages of the Arapaho and Gros Ventre and the Blackfeet of historic Plains tribes. It is somewhat more remotely related to the languages of the central Algonkian tribes such as the Potawatomi and the Sauk and Fox. A French map made around 1673 indicates that the Cheyenne at that time were living on the east bank of the Mississippi River, just across the border of southwestern Minnesota.