

MURIE, JIM

INTERVIEW
PAWNEE DANCES

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INTERVIEW WITH JIM LURIE
PAWNEE INDIAN
Pawnee, Oklahoma
Goldie Turner, Field Worker

THE IRUSKA

There was a very powerful medicine society among the Chaui known as the Pitararis Iruska. However, the Pitahaurata division was also represented in this society, they having the south side and the Chaui the north. The Skidi had the same ceremony except that they used dog meat in the kettle instead of buffalo. Also the Skidi did not have the two forms of painting, only one, painted black at the joints. The purpose of the dance was to show the power of the members to extinguish the life in the fire, hence the name. Among the Skidi at least, the term Iruska has a symbolic or double meaning. The idea is literally "The fire is in me" and the symbolic meaning is that "I can extinguish the life in the fire," or can overcome the powers of other medicines. The members of the society were doctors, for they treated burns.

Originally, the society consisted of leaders of various animal medicine societies. Among the members was

one who was not a medicine man until he had a curious experience.

The Skidi Iruska

In 1887 three Pawnee Skidi men went to visit the Ogallala Indians. Arriving there, they were entertained by Young-man-afraid-of-his-horses and were feasted throughout the village for several days. On the last day an Iruska dance was held for their benefit. The Sioux gathered in a large round house built for dancing. The drum was carried in and the dancers filed in. The Sioux began to sing and the Pawnees noted that the songs were different from their own. However, they danced with the Sioux and received many presents, moccasins, pipes, and beaded objects. The Sioux singers asked the Pawnees to sing some of their songs, and the Pawnees complied. The Sioux were pleased with the Pawnee singing and gave them more presents.

When the three Pawnee men returned to their homes they began to teach other young men the Sioux songs they had learned. One day some Skidi young men came together and Knife-chief told them about the Sioux dance. The

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old Pawnee Trusta dancers had never used sleigh bells upon their bodies, but did use them around the drum. The Sioux dancers also wore ornamental clothes while the Pawnee did not. All the Pawnee dancers wore was the headgear and the bustles. The Sioux bustle was also different.

Knife-chief had a bass drum brought in and began to teach the Sioux songs. Those who were not singing danced, but they did not know how to keep time. After the singing the dance society was organized. Knife-chief was the drum keeper and leader of the singers. The two chiefs were selected to be leaders on the south side and two for the north side. On each side of these two men the dancers were to be seated. At each end of the row of dancers was to sit a whip man. The rules adopted for the dance were those of the Sioux.

This dance became popular, for every time they had it men and women gave presents to one another. It was kept up until Knife-chief died, when his widow took charge of the drum. When her son was old enough, he took over the drum and for several years was its keeper. On one occasion a dance was promised on New Years Day, but

the boy refused to let the people have the drum. They borrowed another drum and had the dance anyhow. After the dance they discovered that the boy had given the drum to a man who belonged to another village.

In the spring of 1911 Eagle-chief called some young men together and told them he wanted organize a new Iruska dance. This was agreed to by all. Money was collected to buy a new bass drum and sleigh bells. Four chiefs were selected as leaders in the dance; Coming-Sun and Sun-chief for the north side, and Struck-enemy and Lone-chief for the south side. Coming-sun now became the leader in the ceremony preceding the dance. He selected six singers; Yellow-horse, Dog-chief, Only-a-chief, Yeung-cedar-tree, Little-sun and Young-good-chief. Next he selected the two whip men who were to have charge of all things. Then he selected two chiefs for the officers on each side: the south side to wear a bonnet, the north side to carry the tomhawk. He next selected a man to carry the whistle and then four women to assist in singing: Food-giver, Woman-young-chief, Woman-yellow-corn, and Woman-cedar-tree.

Coming-sun asked the south side whip man to take some live coals and place them east of the fireplace. Then the whip man was told to go to Coming-sun who gave him a handful of dried cedar leaves. He was then told to place the

cedar upon the live coals. Coming-sun then gave the whip man the pipes and passed them through the smoke four times and then handed them back to Coming-sun. Then the whip man was told to take the drum and pass it through the smoke four times and return it to its place.

Next the chiefs one by one went to the smoke and passed through it, then the dancers, first one from the north side, then the south and so on. Then the women went to the smoke. When all had gone through the smoke, Coming-sun told the south whip man to return the coals to the fireplace.

When this was done, Coming-sun spoke as follows:
"Singers, chiefs, old man, and Iruska, notice my speech and actions for hereafter we shall say and do as I am about to do. Above all things, Irawahat gave the pipe to our people that he might receive smoke from them. We have the pipes here at the altar. They are filled with native tobacco. It is now time for Irawahat to receive our smoke. He will now rise and take the pipe."

Sun-chief arose and took the pipe from Coming-Sun. Then he went around the fireplace and stood to the west. He took a pinch of tobacco from the pipe, raised up his

hand and gradually lowered it to the rim of the fireplace where he placed the tobacco. Next he went north-east by the south and east of the fireplace, and squatted down. The south side whip man went to the fireplace, took a live coal and placed it upon the bowl of the pipe. When the pipe was lit, Sun-chief arose and went west of the fireplace; here he stood facing east and gave four whiffs to the skies, then four whiffs to mother earth. Then he dumped the ashes from the bowl of the pipe and passed his hands over the pipestem toward the skies, twice with his right hand and twice with his left hand. He passed his hands upon the pipestem to the rim of the fireplace, twice with his right and twice with his left hand. Then he turned towards the west and walked to ^{and} Coming-sun handed him the pipe. Coming-sun said, "Rawa" and all repeated "Rawa". The second pipe was given to Lone-chief of the south side and the same ceremony gone through.

When the smoke ceremony was over the outside man came in and permitted those outside to enter. Coming-sun said, "Singers, chiefs, old men, and Iruska, we are about to dance. You dancers must be careful with the

things you are wearing for if you drop anything, one of those old men will have to take it up and tell of his deeds. Then you must pay. Each man who has a song must dance when his song is sung and must give a small present to some old man or woman. We will have five sets of songs, ten in each set. Everyone must dance. Anyone receiving a present must say 'rawa iruska! After each ten songs we will smoke and rest.' So the singers accordingly began their songs. Every time the whip man rose everyone had to dance.

After the dance, Coming-sun said, "Singers, chiefs, old men, am iruska, this is now our iruska dance. Visiting parties, if they wish, may tie tobacco upon the drum; then the keeper of the drum must notify the leaders, who will plan a dance to give presents to visitors." This is how a popular dance among the Pawnees for at these dances people give presents to one another and there is a general good time for all.

The Peyote

about 1890, two Pawnee youths visited the Quappaws where they learned something of the peyote cult. They brought back with them some of the buttons, but a very

meager knowledge of the ritual. Nevertheless they practiced eating it and made a few converts. Later on, a visiting Arapaho taught them the ritual. New converts were added and the cult continued a few years until a member under the influence of the drug had revealed ^{to him} a new ritual and songs. At once this member became leader and gradually elaborated the ritual into which he introduced many Christian conceptions, because in the induced visions he frequently saw and talked with Christ. Under this new leadership the membership increased. The Otoes carried the ceremony to the Omaha. Among the Pawnees the cult is found chiefly among the Aitchawirata, where this new form originated. Later, it found a following among the Cheyenne and then among the Milkah-zhi with a few scattered adherents among the Skidi.

Naturally, this new leader introduced some original features. A special form of paint, ^{ed} ~~was~~ was used, somewhat like that for the ghost dance. Certain changes were made in the rattle and the form of the drum. There is also an elaborate altar and the circle is divided into the usual north and south sides.

Among the special ceremonies is one for the water bearer. At midnight one is sent to get water from the

stream. As he is under the influence of the drug he may fall into the water and drown so special songs are sung during his absence to ward him. When he enters with the pail, it is purified in a cedar smudge, an offering made, and then passed for drinking.

At dawn as the sun appears, the ritual is interrupted long enough to sing a special set of songs. While this is going on the door curtain is raised so that the first rays of the sun may strike the altar. At the close of this special ceremony the ritual is resumed where left off. The last songs of the ritual refer to Christ. The final song is repeated five times, after which each member in turn prays to God.

A woman then enters with water, parched corn, and candy. She and the food are purified in a cedar smudge, then she retires. First the water is passed, then the corn, and finally the candy, circulating in this order until all is consumed.

The members now sit in their places and talk over experiences. The objects used in the ceremony are gathered up and put away. The leader closes the meeting at noon with a lecture, or sermon, on ethical matters, speaking especially against the use of alcohol. Some Pawnee leaders

refuse membership to all using alcoholic drinks.

At noon the members are invited out to dine by some leading man. When seated the leader takes up a pitcher of water and prays to God. Then he fills a glass and taking a sip passes it around the circle in true church fashion. Then they eat without ceremony.

After the meal the members again assemble in the peyote tipi but this is an informal gathering where they discuss freely their faith and practice singing such songs as desired.

In the evening they depart. As each one leaves, he stands by the fireplace, holds aloft his hand, prays aloud. Then he shakes hands around the circle, pauses at the door to hold up his hand and perform certain other symbolic gestures, then passes out. So with all in turn, the leader being the last to go. The peyote tepee is dismantled the next day and the camp broken.

The One Horn Dance

Among the Skidi there is a modernized form of the one horn dance organized about 1893. It took its form from the dreams of a woman. The man who spoke to her in the dream ran away as a buffalo. She went out at

sunrise and saw a ring come down from the sun. Little by little she dreamed the songs and taught her husband. Finally, an eagle came to her in a dream and she was ordered to get an eagle. This she did. Again she dreamed of a crooked crow-feathered stick and this was made. Then a drum was made.

The whole ceremony was finally given. At the west side of the lodge upon a robe was the eagle and the pipe, in front of it the crooked stick. A smoke ceremony was made. The woman had a buffalo lariat or rope, with eagle feathers strung upon it so she could wear it over her shoulder. Her face was painted yellow. She selected a bearer of the crooked staff who was a descendant of the staff bearer in the old one horn dance. In part of the dance dancers imitated various animals. The ceremony was weird and exciting. A food offering of meat and corn was made.