

**John A. Grim. *The Shaman: Patterns of Siberian and Ojibway Healing*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983) xiv, 258 pp, \$19.95.**

John A. Grim utilizes the methodology of the fields of anthropology, mythology, psychology, and sociology to elucidate the religious meaning of shamanism as exemplified in Siberian and Ojibway societies. Although shamans have long been viewed as primordial religious personalities, a comprehensive interpretation of the shamanic religious experience has been lacking. This book provides important insights that will be of interest to scholars and general readers interested in the American Indian religious experience.

After a brief introduction which establishes the need for a religious interpretation of shamanism, Grim devotes a chapter to the Siberian experience on which there is extensive ethnographic literature. He identifies four religious patterns: tribal cosmology, sanction, ritual reenactment, and trance experience. In subsequent chapters, he applies these patterns to available data on the Ojibway of the Great Lakes region who as late as 1939 were considered by scholars to be one of "the least known" North American Indian tribes.

Like their counterparts in Siberia, Ojibway shamans were "centering personalities" who served as the vehicle by which members of isolated hunting groups could confront the rigors of their way of life with the confidence of supernatural aid. Although all Ojibway people were capable of contacting spirits in dreams and visions, the Ojibway ascribed shamanic powers to these individuals who underwent a unique spiritual experience and then received further training from spirits and elder shamans. Four major vocations were active among the early Ojibway. *Tcisaki* shamans revealed "hidden truths" while in communication with spirits during trances in shaking tents. *Nanandawi* shamans cured by evoking their patron spirits to locate the causes of illnesses and by performing appropriate healing rituals or using herbal prescriptions. The *Wabeno* manipulated fire in order to interpret dreams, guide novices through contact with spirits, and heal the sick, while *Meda* shamans "sounded the drum" to cure sick members of isolated hunting groups.

During the seventeenth century, Ojibway society was beset by numerous "despiritualizing crises." Migrations through the territory of hostile tribesmen, prolonged warfare with the Iroquois, the depletion of fur bearing animals by overtrapping, and the continual intrusions of the French colonial trade—all left their marks. Some time during this critical era *Meda*, or family shamans, revitalized the shamanic ethos. As the scope and depth of their visions and their shamanic talents became known and valued by different kinship villages, they established the *Mide* Society and the *Midewiwin* ceremony. *Midewiwin* provided "a transindividual, transclan vision focusing on the primordial ancestors" common to all Ojibway bands. It offered a healing ritual for combating

sickness and death, a record of archaic shamanistic practices, and an awareness of the Ojibway people's common ancestry. The shamans of the *Mide* Society and their ceremony helped the Ojibway people to deal with the awesome mysteries and often terrifying urgencies of life.

The shamanism that was an accepted mode of spiritual existence among the Ojibway people of the Great Lakes region before European contact has survived into the present. What distinguishes the Ojibway shaman as a religious type from the prophet, priest, yogi, or sage, according to Grim, is "the shaman's particular capacity to evoke resonance with the natural world," which he claims, "appears again as a need for our own time" (207).

*The Shaman* is a well-documented and written study of an important aspect of the North American Indian experience. Numerous illustrations help the reader gain a better understanding of shamanic practices. Grim's bibliography will be of interest to both the specialist and the general reader, but his index is rather meager. Perhaps the major weakness of the study is the author's failure to explore the legacy of shamanism among the contemporary Ojibway people.

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**Alex Harris and Margaret Sartor, eds. *Gertrude Blom—Bearing Witness*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984) ix, 150 pp., \$14.95 paper.**

"This jungle filled me with a sense of wonder that has never left me. It has cast a spell over me, and I always return to it . . . I have seen all this perish. It started almost imperceptibly." Gertrude Blom, a political activist and refugee from Europe, arrived in Mexico in the 1940s. In 1943 while working as a journalist she joined an expedition sent to observe the Lacandon Maya in the dense rainforests of Chiapas bordering Guatemala. She encountered these people at the pivotal point when they were still self-sufficient and worshipping Mayan gods but beginning to feel the impact of the "comesinos" settlements on the edge of their jungle. In the 1960s, government logging companies forged roads deep into the rainforests followed by thousands of homesteaders and "la milpa que camina" (slash-and-burn agriculture practiced on a vast scale). From 1943 to 1963 she worked with her husband, the late Frans Blom, an archeologist and cartographer. In the last forty years, Gertrude Blom has been attempting to save and document, a major portion through photo-documentation, the culture and land of the Lacandon Maya and neighboring groups. *Gertrude Blom—Bearing Witness* speaks to her