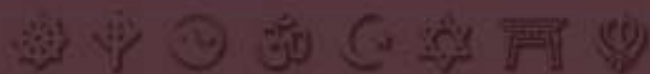


RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

ANN MARIE B. BAHR

SERIES FOREWORD BY MARTIN E. MARTY
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO DIVINITY SCHOOL



RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

BUDDHISM

CHRISTIANITY

CONFUCIANISM

HINDUISM

INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

ISLAM

JUDAISM

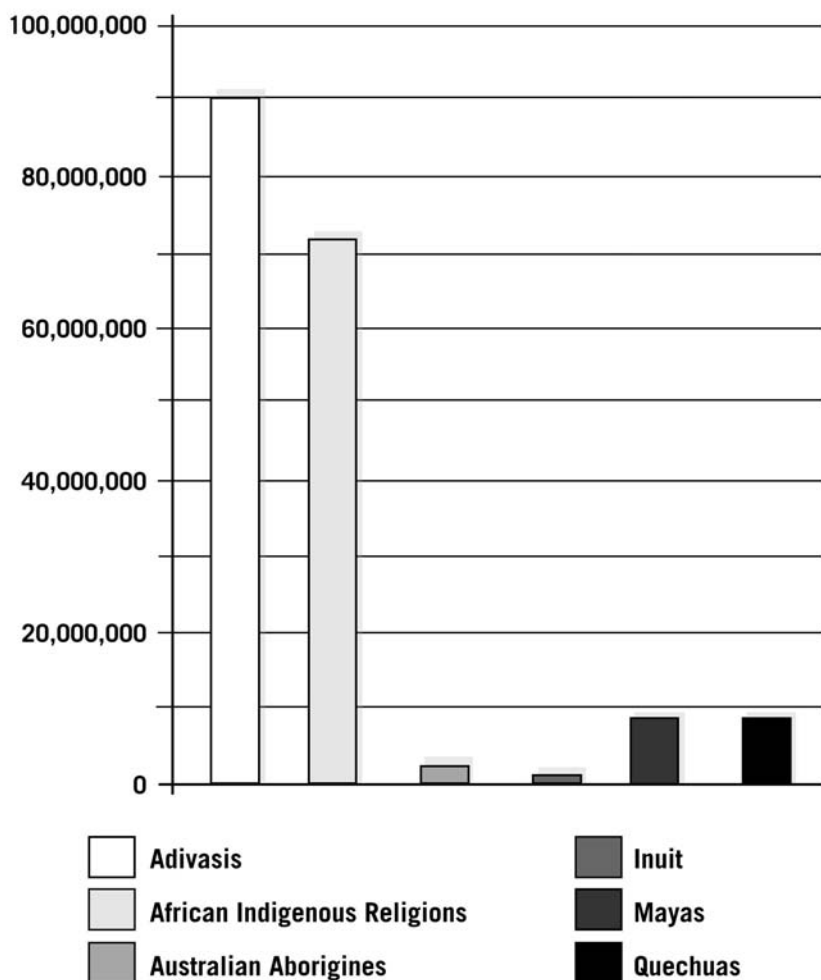
NEW RELIGIONS

SHINTO

SIKHISM

TAOISM

Estimates of Indigenous Populations Covered in This Book:



RELIGIONS
OF THE
WORLD

INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

Ann Marie B. Bahr

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FRONTIS: Approximately 300 million people throughout the world are defined as indigenous, or those who lived on their lands prior to the arrival of foreign settlers. This graph displays the breakdown of the six groups of indigenous people covered in this book.

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Foreword

Martin E. Marty

On this very day, like all other days, hundreds of millions of people around the world will turn to religion for various purposes.

On the one hand, there are purposes that believers in any or all faiths, as well as unbelievers, might regard as positive and benign. People turn to religion or, better, to their own particular faith, for the experience of healing and to inspire acts of peacemaking. They want to make sense of a world that can all too easily overwhelm them because it so often seems to be meaningless and even absurd. Religion then provides them with beauty, inspires their souls, and impels them to engage in acts of justice and mercy.

To be informed citizens of our world, readers have good reason to learn about these features of religions that mean so much to so many. Those who study the faiths do not have to agree with any of them and could not agree with all of them, different as they are. But they need basic knowledge of religions to understand other people and to work out strategies for living with them.

On the other hand—and religions always have an “other hand”—believers in any of the faiths, and even unbelievers who are against all of them, will find their fellow humans turning to their religions for purposes that seem to contradict all those positive features. Just as religious people can heal and be healed, they can also kill or be killed in the name of faith. So it has been through history.

This killing can be literal: Most armed conflicts and much terrorism today are inspired by the stories, commands, and promises that come along with various faiths. People can and do read and act upon scriptures that can breed prejudice and that lead them to reject other beliefs and believers. Or the killing can be figurative, which means that faiths can be deadening to the spirit. In the name of faith, many people are repressed, oppressed, sometimes victimized and abused.

If religion can be dangerous and if it may then come with “Handle with Care” labels, people who care for their own security, who want to lessen tensions and inspire concord, have to equip themselves by learning something about the scriptures and stories of their own and other faiths. And if they simply want to take delight in human varieties and imaginings, they will find plenty to please them in lively and reliable accounts of faiths.

A glance at television or at newspapers and magazines on almost any day will reveal stories that display one or both sides of religion. However, these stories usually have to share space with so many competing accounts, for example, of sports and entertainment or business and science, that writers and broadcasters can rarely provide background while writing headlines. Without such background, it is hard to make informed judgments.

The series *RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD* is designed to provide not only background but also rich illustrative material about the foreground, presenting the many features of faiths that are close at hand. Whoever reads all the volumes in the series will find that these religions have some elements in common. Overall, one can deduce that their followers take certain things with ultimate seriousness: human dignity, devotion to the sacred, the impulse to live a moral life. Yet few people are inspired by religions in general. They draw strength from what they hold particularly. These particulars of each faith are not always contradictory to those of others, but they are different in important ways. It is simply a fact that believers are informed and inspired by stories told in separate and special ways.

A picture might make all this vivid: Reading about a religion, visiting a place of worship, or coming into the company of those who believe in and belong to a particular faith, is like entering a room. Religions are, in a sense, spiritual “furnished apartments.” Their adherents have placed certain pictures on the wall and moved in with their own kind of furnishings, having developed their special ways of receiving or blocking out light from such places. Some of their figurative apartments are airy, and some stress strength and security.

Philosopher George Santayana once wrote that, just as we do not speak language, we speak particular languages, so we have religion not as a whole but as religions “in particular.” The power of each living and healthy religion, he added, consists in “its special and surprising message and in the bias which that revelation gives to life.” Each creates “another world to live in.”

The volumes in this series are introductions to several spiritual furnished apartments, guides to the special and surprising messages of these large and complex communities of faith, or religions. These are not presented as a set of items in a cafeteria line down which samplers walk, tasting this, rejecting that, and moving on. They are not bids for window-shoppers or shoppers of any sort, though it may be that a person without faith might be drawn to one or another expression of the religions here described. The real intention of the series is to educate.

Education could be dull and drab. Picture a boring professor standing in front of a class and droning on about distant realities. The authors in this series, however, were chosen because they can bring readers up close to faiths and, sometimes better, to people of faith; not to religion but to people who are religious in particular ways.

As one walks the streets of a great metropolis, it is not easy and may not even be possible to deduce the faith-commitments of those one passes unless they wear a particular costume—some garb or symbol prescribed by their faith. Therefore, while passing them by, it is not likely that one

can learn much about the dreams and hopes, the fears and intentions, of those around them.

These books, in effect, stop the procession of passersby and bid visitors to enter those sanctuaries where communities worship. Each book could serve as a guide to worship. Several years ago, a book called *How to Be a Perfect Stranger* offered brief counsel on how to feel and to be at home among worshipers from other traditions. This series recognizes that we are not strangers to each other only in sanctuaries. We carry over our attachments to conflicting faiths where we go to work or vote or serve in the military or have fun. These “carryovers” tend to come from the basic stories and messages of the several faiths.

The publishers have taken great pains to assign their work to authors of a particular sort. Had these been anti-religious or anti—the religion about which they write, they would have done a disservice. They would, in effect, have been blocking the figurative doors to the faiths or smashing the furniture in the sanctuaries. On the other hand, it would be wearying and distorting had the assignment gone to public relations agents, advertisers who felt called to claim “We’re Number One!” concerning the faith about which they write.

Fair-mindedness and accuracy are the two main marks of these authors. In rather short compass, they reach a wide range of subjects, focusing on everything one needs to advance basic understanding. Their books are like mini-encyclopedias, full of information. They introduce the holidays that draw some neighbors to be absent from work or school for a day or a season. They include galleries of notable figures in each faith-community.

Since most religions in the course of history develop different ways in the many diverse places where they thrive, or because they attract intelligent, strong-willed leaders and writers, they come up with different emphases. They divide and split off into numberless smaller groups: Protestant and Catholic and Orthodox Christians, Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Orthodox and Reform Jews, and many kinds of Buddhists and Hindus. The writers in this series do

justice to these variations, providing a kind of map without which one will get lost in the effort to understand.

Some years ago, a rabbi friend, Samuel Sandmel, wrote a book about his faith called *The Enjoyment of Scripture*. What an astonishing concept, some might think: After all, religious scriptures deal with desperately urgent, life-and-death-and-eternity issues. They have to be grim and those who read them likewise. Not so. Sandmel knew what the authors of this series also know and impart: The journeys of faith and the encounter with the religions of others include pleasing and challenging surprises. I picture many a reader coming across something on these pages that at first looks obscure or forbidding, but then, after a slightly longer look, makes sense and inspires an “aha!” There are many occasions for “aha-ing!” in these books. One can also wager that many a reader will come away from the encounters thinking, “I never knew that!” or “I never thought of that before.” And they will be more ready than they had been to meet strangers of other faiths in a world that so many faiths *have* to share, or that they *get* to share.

Martin E. Marty
The University of Chicago

Preface

Ann Marie B. Bahr

The majority of people, both in the United States and around the world, consider religion to be an important part of their lives. Beyond its significance in individual lives, religion also plays an important role in war and peace, politics, social policy, ethics, and cultural expression. Yet few people feel well-prepared to carry on a conversation about religion with friends, colleagues, or their congressional delegation. The amount of knowledge people have about their own faith varies, but very few can lay claim to a solid understanding of a religion other than their own. As the world is drawn closer together by modern communications, and the religions of the world jostle each other in religiously plural societies, the lack of our ability to dialogue about this aspect of our lives results in intercultural conflict rather than cooperation. It means that individuals of different religious persuasions will either fight about their faiths or avoid the topic of religion altogether. Neither of these responses aids in the building of healthy, religiously plural societies. This gap in our knowledge is therefore significant, and grows increasingly more significant as religion plays a larger role in national and international politics.

The authors and editors of this series are dedicated to the task of helping to prepare present and future decision-makers to deal with religious pluralism in a healthy way. The objective scholarship found in these volumes will blunt the persuasive power of popular misinformation. The time is short, however. Even now, nations are dividing along religious lines, and “neutral” states as well as partisan religious organizations are precariously, if not

always intentionally, tipping delicate balances of power in favor of one religious group or another with doles of aid and support for certain policies or political leaders. Intervention in the affairs of other nations is always a risky business, but doing it without understanding of the religious sensitivities of the populace dramatically increases the chances that even well-intentioned intervention will be perceived as political coercion or cultural invasion. With such signs of ignorance already manifest, the day of reckoning for educational policies that ignore the study of the world's religions cannot be far off.

This series is designed to bring religious studies scholarship to the leaders of today and tomorrow. It aims to answer the questions that students, educators, policymakers, parents, and citizens might have about the new religious milieu in which we find ourselves. For example, a person hearing about a religion that is foreign to him or her might want answers to questions like these:

- How many people believe in this religion? What is its geographic distribution? When, where, and how did it originate?
- What are its beliefs and teachings? How do believers worship or otherwise practice their faith?
- What are the primary means of social reinforcement? How do believers educate their youth? What are their most important communal celebrations?
- What are the cultural expressions of this religion? Has it inspired certain styles of art, architecture, literature, or music? Conversely, does it avoid art, literature, or music for religious reasons? Is it associated with elements of popular culture?
- How do the people who belong to this religion remember the past? What have been the most significant moments in their history?
- What are the most salient features of this religion today? What is likely to be its future?

We have attempted to provide as broad coverage as possible of the various religious forces currently shaping the planet. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sikhism, and Shinto have each been allocated an entire volume. In recognition of the fact that many smaller ancient and new traditions also exercise global influence, we present coverage of some of these in two additional volumes titled “Indigenous Religions” and “New Religions.” Each volume in the series discusses demographics and geography, founder or foundational period, scriptures, worldview, worship or practice, growing up in the religion, cultural expressions, calendar and holidays, history, and the religion in the world today.

The books in this series are written by scholars. Their approach to their subject matter is neutral and objective. They are not trying to convert readers to the religion they are describing. Most scholars, however, value the religion they have chosen to study, so you can expect the general tone of these books to be appreciative rather than critical.

Religious studies scholars are experts in their field, but they are not critics in the same sense in which one might be an art, film, or literary critic. Religious studies scholars feel obligated to describe a tradition faithfully and accurately, and to interpret it in a way that will allow nonbelievers as well as believers to grasp its essential structure, but they do not feel compelled to pass judgment on it. Their goal is to increase knowledge and understanding.

Academic writing has a reputation for being dry and uninspiring. If so, religious studies scholarship is an exception. Scholars of religion have the happy task of describing the words and deeds of some of the world’s most amazing people: founders, prophets, sages, saints, martyrs, and bodhisattvas.

The power of religion moves us. Today, as in centuries past, people thrill to the ethical vision of Confucianism, or the dancing beauty of Hinduism’s images of the divine. They are challenged by the one, holy God of the Jews, and comforted by the saving promise of Christianity. They are inspired by the stark purity of

Islam, by the resilience of tribal religions, by the energy and innovation of the new religions. The religions have retained such a strong hold on so many people's lives over such a long period of time largely because they are unforgettable.

Religious ideas, institutions, and professions are among the oldest in humanity's history. They have outlasted the world's great empires. Their authority and influence have endured far beyond that of Earth's greatest philosophers, military leaders, social engineers, or politicians. It is this that makes them so attractive to those who seek power and influence, whether such people intend to use their power and influence for good or evil. Unfortunately, in the hands of the wrong person, religious ideas might as easily be responsible for the destruction of the world as for its salvation. All that stands between us and that outcome is the knowledge of the general populace. In this as in any other field, people must be able to critically assess what they are being told.

The authors and editors of this series hope that all who seek to wield the tremendous powers of religion will do so with unselfish and noble intent. Knowing how unlikely it is that that will always be the case, we seek to provide the basic knowledge necessary to critically assess the degree to which contemporary religious claims are congruent with the history, scriptures, and genius of the traditions they are supposed to represent.

Ann Marie B. Bahr
South Dakota State University

1

Introduction

*The land doesn't belong to any individual:
it belongs to the dead, the living, and those not yet born.
You have the land only for a short time,
to use it and to leave it. The land belongs to all of us.*

—Ole Simel, Maasai

DEFINITION AND SELECTION

Of the approximately 6 billion people in the world, about 300 million, or 3.3 percent, are indigenous people. These people live in more than seventy countries, on all the continents. They inhabit every climatic zone from the Arctic to the South Pacific. They speak more than five thousand different languages. The United Nations (UN) uses the term *indigenous* to describe these people, but some individual governments use other designations, such as *aboriginal* or *tribal*.

According to one definition used by the UN, indigenous peoples are persons who lived on their lands before settlers came from elsewhere. According to another, more complex definition, they are the descendants of those who inhabited a geographical region at the time when people of different ethnicity and cultural origin arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through means that may have included conquest, occupation, and settlement.¹

The world's indigenous people include the American Indians (the native peoples of North, Central, and South America); the Inuit of Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and northwestern Russia; the Saami of Finland, Norway, and Sweden; the *Adivasi* of India; the Australian *Aborigines*; the native peoples of Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian countries; and the Maori of New Zealand. Some of Africa's native ethnic groups constitute a ruling majority within their countries in the postcolonial period; they therefore do not have the usual indigenous trait of being a minority culture circumscribed by a majority culture. In the specific subject area of this work (religion), however, they show sufficient similarity to other indigenous groups to merit inclusion.

The preceding paragraph lists only a few of the world's many indigenous groups. With the federal governments of the United States and India officially recognizing more than five hundred groups each, it is safe to say that there are literally thousands more—about five thousand—by many estimates. There are no criteria by which one can argue that one group is “more important”

than another. Should the largest groups be included because they represent the most people or the small groups because they are most in danger of extinction? Should those who already have worldwide recognition through the sale of indigenous artwork be included or should one attempt to raise the visibility of groups that currently go unnoticed in the realm of cultural tourism? There seemed no apparent answer to such questions, so only a sampling is included here; the only criterion for inclusion was the ability to represent a group adequately.

WHAT CONSTITUTES AN INDIGENOUS RELIGION?

Beyond the question of which indigenous peoples to include lies the question of what constitutes indigenous *religion*. Typically, only a small percentage of indigenous populations practice the religion of their *preconquest ancestors* exclusively. At the same time, only a few practice postconquest religions such as Christianity or Hinduism exclusively, with no admixture of indigenous practices. The majority of indigenous people blend elements of native religion with aspects of one of the large world religions. Often, the native elements are referred to as spirituality rather than religion. Religion has come to mean a circumscribed activity set apart from the numerous mundane activities that constitute daily life, whereas spirituality refers to a set of attitudes and practices that pervade every aspect of life. The term religion thus can be reserved for a set of beliefs and practices that the dominant culture recognizes as a religion. This distinction may represent a sound solution to a practical problem, but no serious religious studies scholar would accept the notion that religion can be isolated from economic, political, social, and other daily activities. The term indigenous religion as used in this book means the entire set of religious beliefs and practices that belong in some distinctive way to an indigenous group, independent of whether those beliefs and practices are distinct modifications of the beliefs and practices of one of the large-scale world religions or contemporary modifications of a preconquest indigenous religion. The book nonetheless

focuses on elements derived from the preconquest indigenous religions—the world religions are covered in other volumes in this series.

OVERVIEW

India's Adivasis are a large but relatively unknown group of indigenous people. They number approximately 90 million and constitute about 30 percent of the world's indigenous population.² In chapter 3, on African indigenous religions, there is an overview of the traditional beliefs and practices that span the length and breadth of sub-Saharan Africa. About 72 million persons practice an indigenous African religion; they represent about 24 percent of the total indigenous population of the world. Australia's Aborigines, who for a century and a half were subjected to ruthless attempts at assimilation, now number between 400,000 and 450,000. They began to see some beneficial changes in public policy in the closing decades of the twentieth century, but there are signs that a backlash is developing. Approximately 180,000 Inuit live in the Arctic areas of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. They account for more than 10 percent of the population of Alaska and about 98 percent of the population of Greenland. Recent redrawing of provincial and territorial boundaries in Canada has enhanced the Inuit's political control over their traditional homelands, but that may not be enough to save their territory in the face of increased pressure to drill for oil in the Arctic areas. Both the *Mayas* and the *Quechuas* are descendants of complex preconquest empires, and both are among the largest indigenous groups in the Americas. The Mayas, who live in Central America, number about 8 million. The Quechuas have approximately the same number of people and live in the high Andes regions around Lake Titicaca, primarily in Peru and Bolivia.

COMMON THEMES

Every group of indigenous people is unique, but there are some similarities in worldview and history. The majority of indigenous

peoples find the sacred within the landscape and the cycles of nature. They view themselves as being entrusted by the Creator with the care of the earth.

All indigenous peoples who still exist as distinct cultures have resisted assimilation and struggled to keep preconquest cultures alive. All of them lost political *autonomy* and sovereignty as European colonial powers spread across the world, although some have regained some power. Even those who have regained autonomy still suffer the effects of the colonial period, and this makes it more difficult for them to become equal political and economic players in the global arena.

By the early twentieth century, so many indigenous people had been converted to nonindigenous religions that many scholars predicted the imminent extinction of indigenous religions and with them a large part of that which made indigenous groups culturally unique. Many groups have suffered repeated displacements as their land, water, minerals, and other natural resources have been appropriated for national development.³ Those who were allowed to remain in their original homelands saw those lands, along with their plant and animal populations, threatened by deforestation in the tropical rainforests, farming and cattle and sheep ranching on the grasslands, oil drilling in the Arctic, and mining in Australia and other areas. Some indigenous groups, especially those who live by hunting and gathering, are themselves threatened with extinction.

Finally, all indigenous peoples find it difficult to extricate themselves from the tangle of prejudicial opinions that have been woven around them: They have been labeled stupid, lazy, lawless, and immoral on one hand and have been romanticized as noble and innocent victims on the other. Either of these attitudes strips indigenous peoples of the many contributions to civilization that they can rightfully claim.

INDIGENOUS CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVILIZATION

Not too many years ago, Western societies told the history of the encounter between indigenous peoples and colonial powers as

if the colonial powers were either the bestowers of civilization's blessings or the exploiters of childlike primitives. Either of these analyses turns indigenous peoples into passive recipients of civilization and fails to acknowledge their many contributions to it. Many of the words we use are derived from indigenous languages—*llama*, *canoe*, and *squash*, for example. Many of the foods we eat, such as potatoes, lentils, garlic, tomatoes, and peppers, were first grown by indigenous peoples. The government of the Iroquois Confederacy was a basis for the Constitution of the United States of America. Much indigenous knowledge remains underutilized by the rest of the world; for example, the knowledge of how to sustain biologically rich environments and the knowledge of physical and cultural survival skills.

A robust 75 percent of all plant-based pharmaceuticals are estimated to have been derived from medicinal plants used by indigenous healers. Aspirin, digitalis, and quinine are just a few examples of indigenous contributions to modern medicine. Despite the significant role played by indigenous botanical knowledge in the development of modern pharmaceuticals, indigenous peoples are seldom given credit for their contributions to our health.⁴ Histories of modern pharmaceuticals generally credit the discovery of the drug solely to European or American inventors. While this may be true if one considers only the chemical derivative of the plant, which becomes our modern pill or injection, one has clearly failed to tell the entire truth about the discovery of many modern pharmaceuticals if one fails to mention indigenous sources of knowledge. The annual market value of drugs derived from medicinal plants used by indigenous peoples has been estimated at more than \$43 billion. Indigenous people have begun to question whether they should not receive some share of that profit.

INCREASING ATTENTION TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' CONCERNS

It is only within the last half century that the attention of the world has been directed toward the concerns of indigenous

peoples. The International Labor Organization (ILO) laid the cornerstone for collective rights for tribal peoples with the passage of ILO Convention 107 in 1957. Indigenous peoples were forming their own international networks by the 1950s, although much of that work did not attract outside attention until the 1970s or later. The UN's Working Group on Indigenous Populations met for the first time in 1982. The UN General Assembly proclaimed 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. That same body proclaimed the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, which began on December 10, 1994, and ended on December 10, 2004. This international attention has helped end policies of assimilation and integration, and replace them with policies that support multiculturalism and cultural rights. The importance of specific lands to specific indigenous groups is slowly being recognized, and some countries have returned large tracts of land to their original owners. Also, some countries now recognize collective rights and land ownership in addition to individual rights and private property. This is an important step: Each time a federal government has taken the initiative of dividing collective lands into plots that could then be sold individually, indigenous peoples have lost more and more of their land to nonindigenous buyers. Despite these signs of progress, indigenous peoples continue to suffer high levels of social injustice. Overall, they endure worse health, higher mortality rates, and higher rates of unemployment, addiction, and incarceration than the dominant culture in the same area.

Today, indigenous peoples struggle to preserve some of the world's most fragile cultures in their symbiotic relationship with some of the world's most fragile ecosystems. Those who are part of the dominant cultures need to learn what these nonconforming cultures teach about resistance to the expectation of cultural uniformity that seems to inevitably accompany the process of globalization. Members of dominant cultures also need to learn how to better respect and nurture the cycle of life in our local environments, as well as in the global environment.

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF BRAZIL*

Prior to European contact, the area now known as Brazil was home to between 5 and 13 million people who belonged to more than 1,000 different indigenous groups. Today 350,000 survivors belong to more than 200 groups. The rest were eliminated by disease, dispossession, and violence. The remaining groups range in size from tens of thousands of people (the Guaranis and Yanomamis) to a few dozen (the Akuntsus and Kanoês).

Brazil's indigenous peoples live in a variety of environments: tropical forests, grasslands, scrub forests, and semidesert areas. Those in the dry south have been in contact with Europeans for five centuries. Of all the countries in the world, however, Brazil has the largest number of indigenous groups who have never had contact with persons of European descent: Survival International estimates that there are more than fifty such groups in this country. (Papua New Guinea has the second-largest number of such groups.)

In the past five centuries, Brazil's indigenous peoples have experienced genocide and massive losses of land. Even today, land is wrestled away from them by industrial projects, ranchers, settlers, and miners. The indigenous peoples are still being killed, by starvation—as they are pushed out of the areas in which they survived by hunting and growing their food—and by hired assassins in the employ of ranchers and “landowners.”

Brazil's legal system has not afforded Indians adequate protection against violent crimes; many suspect that this is related to the prevalence of racist attitudes. Under Brazilian law, Indians are still treated as minors. Furthermore, Brazil is one of only two South American nations that does not recognize collective land ownership. If Brazil's indigenous peoples legally owned their lands, they would have the power to stop the encroachment of nonindigenous individuals and businesses. A 2003 study carried out by the Center for the Support of Native Lands in Arlington, Virginia, and the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., showed “a strong correlation between indigenous presence and the survival of natural ecosystems.”** This suggests that the indigenous peoples and their lands could mutually enable survival.

* The information in this sidebar is derived from the Survival International Website (<http://survival-international.org/brazil.htm>).

** Stefan Lovgren, “Map Links Healthier Ecosystems, Indigenous Peoples,” *National Geographic News*, 27 February 2003. Available online at http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/02/0227_030227_indigenoumap.html.

2

The Adivasis of India

*If India has a timeless tradition, it is ours.
The cultures running back for tens of
thousands of years are the cultures of the
many Adivasi communities in the subcontinent.*

—Gail Omvedt, “Call Us Adivasis, Please”

INTRODUCTION

Size and Location of India's Tribal Population

India has more tribal people than any other country in the world. In fact, there are more tribal people in India than the total population of France or Great Britain. The government of India refers to them as “scheduled tribes.” Approximately 90 million tribal persons live within India’s borders, representing 8.6 percent of the nation’s population. In some states, tribal people account for less than 1 percent of the total population, but in others they make up one-third of the population or more. The northeastern states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland are each about 90 percent tribal.

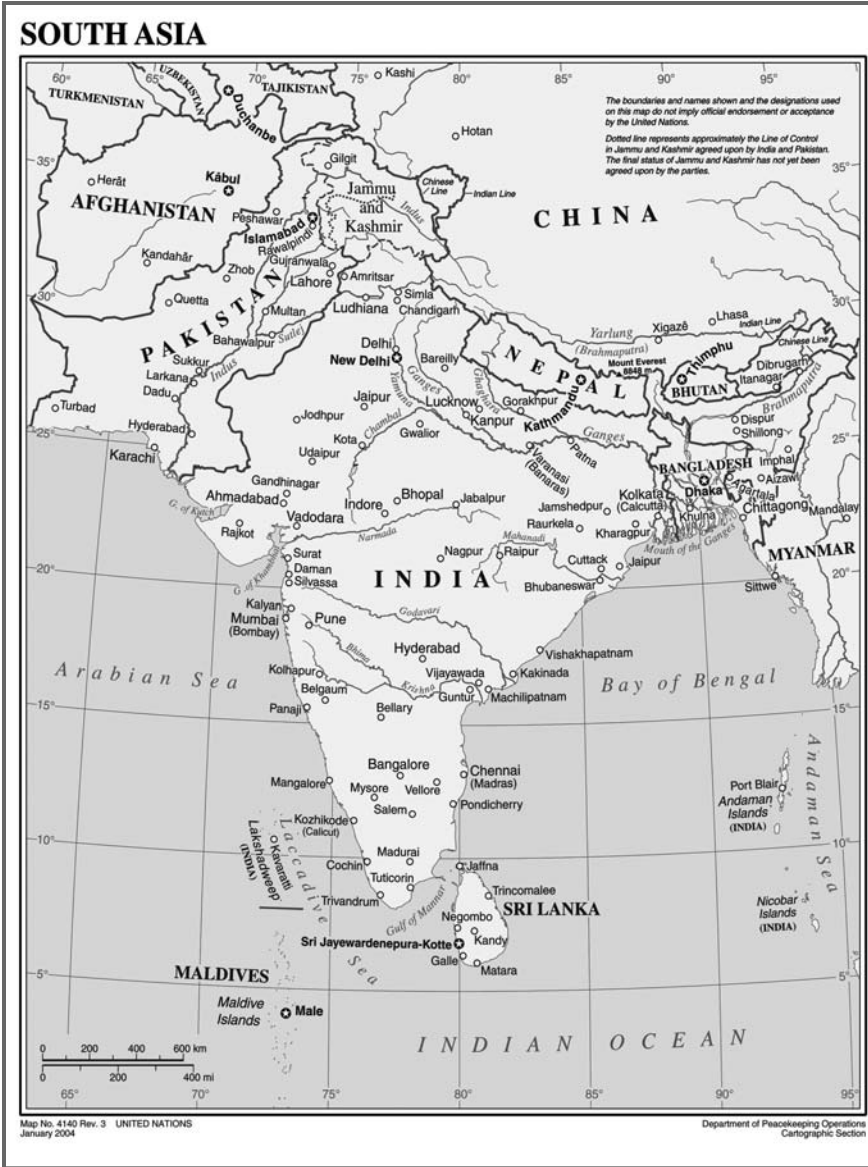
In general, tribal peoples live in the hilly and forested regions. They are concentrated in two areas: a band that stretches along the southern edge of the Himalaya Mountains from Jammu and Kashmir in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east, and the central Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa.

The Adivasis

India’s native people prefer to be called “Adivasis,” which means “original inhabitants.” They do not like the word *tribals* because the British first used that term.

The largest tribes in India are the Gonds (7.5 million) of central India and the Bhils (7.4 million) of western India. The Santals have more than 4 million members. The government of India recognizes 573 scheduled tribes, including the Mundas, Hos, and Oraons.

Traditional Adivasi culture was characterized by an economy that relied almost exclusively on ancestral forestlands for sustenance, by an egalitarian society that acknowledged its kinship with surrounding plant and animal life, and by a community-oriented culture that had no need for private property, banks, or money. Adivasis lived by hunting and gathering or by *shifting cultivation*, a form of agriculture in which an entire village used a plot of land for several years and



The Adivasis are found throughout India, but the highest concentrations are located in two bands: the first skirts the southern edge of the Himalayas from Jammu and Kashmir to east of the country of Bhutan, and the second stretches through central India from west of Bhopal to Bhubaneswar.

then moved to a new location. The religion of each tribe was unique, but reverence for the sacred character of the forest was a common trait.

Adivasi Contributions to India

Although largely ignored by historians and social scientists, Adivasi traditions have contributed to Indian culture throughout history. Virtually all modern Indian languages are indebted to Adivasi languages. Adivasi knowledge of plants and their medicinal uses played an important role in the development of native Indian medicine (*ayurveda*). Local systems of government incorporated elements of tribal political ideas, and Adivasi music, stories, dances, and celebrations found their way into the mainstream.

Adivasis were the first in India to use certain agricultural practices such as rotational cropping and letting land lie fallow or putting it into pasture in alternate years in order to maintain soil fertility. In central India, the Adivasis developed their own kingdoms. The Gond kingdom lasted from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries. Adivasis contributed so heavily to Indian resistance to British rule that the British government lashed out against them in the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, labeling them “congenital criminals” because of their perceived hostility to British interests. Even after their many contributions to the Indian freedom movement, Adivasis were among those who benefited least from India’s independence.

Adivasis in Independent India

Despite the protection offered to the tribal population by the Constitution of India (1950), Adivasis rank even lower than Dalits (“untouchables”) in important indicators of development such as health, education, and income. It is ironic that these poorest people of India live in the areas of the richest natural resources. The tragedy is that the wealth of the Adivasis’ ancestral lands is being exploited by development projects that are displacing the Adivasis from their villages.

Wherever the government has chosen to exploit the forests, tribes have lost their ancestral homelands and ways of life. Outsiders were brought into Adivasi territory to cut large areas of trees, while at the same time the original inhabitants were forbidden to gather and use the produce of the forest. Mixed forests capable of sustaining tribal life are being replaced with single-crop plantations.

Adivasis are losing their sacred environment and way of life, and they struggle to maintain the native spirituality that hallowed the forest and the lives of those who dwelled there. Adivasi leaders today stress the differences between Hinduism and tribal religions, hoping to prevent further assimilation into mainstream Indian culture by rooting the youngest generation in ancient traditions. If the teachings and values of Adivasi religions can be kept alive even while the people are being alienated from their land, perhaps someday the Adivasi way of life will return.

FOUNDATIONS

Historical Origins

Most of India's populace is Caucasian,⁵ but Adivasis belong to many different non-Caucasian races. Scholars speculate that, thousands of years ago, the ancestors of today's Caucasian populace entered the subcontinent and pushed the ancestors of today's Adivasis from the plains into the hill regions. The invading Caucasians were Indo-Europeans.

The Adivasis believe that they were the earliest human presence in what is now India. The Minas of Rajasthan, for example, claim descent from the prehistoric *Indus Valley civilization*, which most likely developed before 2000 B.C.E. Western scholars do not endorse this view in its entirety. The tribal peoples of India encompass a great variety of linguistic and racial groups, suggesting that some, at least, may have migrated to the subcontinent from elsewhere, displacing even earlier groups. If the descendants of the earliest inhabitants did still exist as a separate group, they would most likely be found among today's Adivasis.

Because some tribes have much more recent origins, not all Adivasis would be descended from the earliest inhabitants. The Gaduliya Lohars and the Garasias (both Rajasthan tribes), for example, are the descendants of Rajput clans that were defeated in battle and fled to the hills.⁶ There, they adopted the lifestyle of tribal peoples and eventually came to be classified as tribal peoples themselves.

The Forest as Foundation

Unlike Western religions, which trace their worldviews back to critical historical events, tribal religions rest on environmental bedrock. Livelihood, social structure, medicine, and religion are all based on the forest and its gifts. Traditional tribal economies were oriented toward subsistence. They depended on hunting, fishing, and gathering, sometimes in combination with shifting cultivation.

Today, some tribes live in temporary huts and hunt, fish, and gather for their livelihood. Others are skilled in a craft such as metalworking or basket weaving. Some tribal peoples have become wage laborers in industry or mining, and several large tribes practice settled agriculture. The most common means of procuring food, however, remains shifting cultivation, supplemented by gathering and hunting.

In shifting cultivation, selected patches of ground, usually in forests or on hillsides, are temporarily cultivated. The patch is cleared of trees and shrubs, which are piled up and burned. The ashes are spread across the land at the beginning of the monsoon rains, and the sowing of seeds follows. Crops are weeded, watched, protected, harvested, threshed, and stored. The final step is a celebration.

Shifting cultivation is not practical once land is divided into privately owned plots. Only tribal peoples practice this form of agriculture, because the entire group has a sense of being bonded to an extended territory from which they jointly find sustenance.

MYTH

Each native group has its own mythology, and that mythology

continually recreates a specific culture. Three Santal *myths* serve as examples of Adivasi mythology. The first two are creation stories, and the third has to do with a musical instrument called a *dhodro banam*.

The Creation of Earth

In the beginning, there was only water. God pondered how he could form land. God created all the animals that can function both in water and on land: crab, crocodile, alligator, eel, prawn, earthworm, and tortoise. God then asked the kings of these seven species to help him figure out how to make land.

The kings appeared before God one by one, but none of them knew what to do. Finally, earthworm came. For seven days and seven nights, earthworm ate at the bottom of the water and excreted on the back of tortoise. Tortoise brought up the earth when he swam to the top of the water, and thus Earth was formed. Even today, when tortoise moves or shakes, there is an earthquake, for Earth is on the back of tortoise.

In this story, the animals are created in order to help God. It is the lowly earthworm that helps God create the land. This is true even from a scientific viewpoint, because earthworms do aid in the formation of soil; thus, the story captures some empirical truths. The proposed cause of earthquakes is obviously not scientific, however. Rather, it provides psychological reassurance: Even though there are earthquakes, the land will not become dislodged or fall back into the watery deep because it is traveling on the broad and secure back of tortoise. The psychological reassurance is both valid and healing. It does not lead to an escape from reality but rather reconnects the hearer to reality: An earthquake, although frightening, is *not* the end of the world.

The Creation of Human Beings

This story describes the kinship between human beings and animals and the structure of Santal society. According to this myth, God created two birds when all of Earth was covered with water, before the dry land appeared. The birds, who flew below

the sun and above Earth, were able to connect Heaven to Earth because they could operate in both domains. The birds built a nest and laid their eggs, out of which hatched a male and a female, the first human beings.

After the creation of Earth, the male and female human beings gave birth to seven sons and seven daughters. The children later married among themselves, and each couple became the ancestors of a Santal clan. Later, five more groups formed, for a total of twelve clans. Each of these clans has a *totem*, a plant or animal with which the members of the clan share a sacred link.

The Hansdak' clan (from *Has*, meaning goose in Santali, and *dak'*, meaning water) has the highest social status because its name derives from elements in the creation myths. This clan is linked to the primeval waters and the first ancestors. It is significant that the bird is a goose, because geese walk on Earth and build their nests there, but they fly in the sky. Like men, they are Earth creatures who are not earthbound. Members of the Hansdak' clan serve society as advisors, because they have the broad perspective and keen vision of birds.

Second in social status are the Murmus, whose totem is the antelope. The ancestors of this clan hunted the antelope. The antelope was the first animal to be *sacrificed* by the Santals. The Murmus serve society as priests.

The remaining clan totems are the kingfisher (kings, royalty), betel nut, grass (traders), a star constellation (soldiers), owl (musicians), stale rice (cooks), sheep, pigeon, and lizard. Humans do not hunt or eat the animal of their totem, because totem animals are considered members of their clan. In the event that a clan member finds a dead totem animal, he or she performs the death *rituals*.

The Origin of the Dhodro Banam

The *banam* is a stringed musical instrument. Its name derives from *am* ("self" or "you") plus *bana* ("draw towards"). It is used to accompany love songs.

The myth of the banam begins with an elderly couple who had seven sons and one daughter. The sons went hunting and the daughter cooked the meals. After the elderly couple died, the brothers and sister continued in these roles. One day, the brothers were out hunting and the sister was cutting a leafy vegetable. She cut one of her fingers, and the blood mixed with the vegetable. The vegetable was cooked and served to the brothers when they returned. Amazed at the exceptional flavor of the vegetable, the brothers asked their sister how she had prepared the meal. When they discovered that it must have been her blood that enhanced the flavor, the eldest brother developed a strong desire to taste her flesh, thinking that it must be delicious.

One day, while his sister was climbing a tree, the eldest brother shot her with an arrow. The other brothers followed his lead, except for the youngest, who truly loved his sister. Noticing his reluctance, the eldest brother threatened to kill the youngest if he did not join in. At last, the youngest was forced to participate and the sister fell dead. Her body was cut into seven pieces, and each brother ate it except for the youngest one, who walked to a pond bearing his share. There, he sat and wailed disconsolately. Hearing his sound, the fish and crabs and all the creatures in the pond came over and asked the reason for his pain. He told them what had happened. They suggested that he bury his sister's flesh inside a mound of white ants.

After a while, a beautiful guloic tree grew from the mound. It made a lovely sound as the wind blew through its branches. A traveler who heard the sound cut a branch from the tree and made a musical instrument from it. That was the first banam. Since that time, the Santals have made banams from the guloic tree.

This myth shows the kinship of the people and the trees from which the instrument is "born." To emphasize this kinship, the banam is carved in the shape of a human body, and the Santals consider it an extension of their physical self.

The Santals also believe that the banam acts as an *intermediary* between themselves and the sacred, drawing its blessings toward

them. It is a “praying” instrument, used to communicate with the divine; thus the whole man-Earth-God relationship is encompassed in the myth of the dhodro banam.

WORLDVIEW

A World Filled with Sacred Persons

Famed Jewish scholar Martin Buber (1878–1965) defined the difference between an “I-Thou” relation and an “I-it” relationship. According to Buber, the normal everyday interaction of a human being with the things and persons around him is an I-it relation. When one person enters into a real dialogue with another person, they have engaged in a radically different kind of relation, one which Buber calls an “I-Thou” relation. In an I-Thou relation, each person addresses the other with their inner being and their entire being.

For Buber, I-Thou meetings between human beings are a reflection of the human relationship to God. As Buber saw it, the heart of biblical religion consists of the fact that God stands in an authentic I-Thou dialogue with human beings, in spite of the infinitely greater power and being of God. Therefore, by saying that we can meet another person as a “Thou” rather than an “it,” Buber was commenting on the sacred quality of persons.

An Adivasi is expected to treat not only human beings, but also plants and animals, as others, not objects. Personhood is associated with everything that exists. A spiritual person (a deity or an ancestor) is associated with each of the many species of animals and plants. The spiritual persons associated with animals and plants must be given due respect and honor, just as one extends respect and honor to human persons. They must be asked for their gifts to humanity and thanked for them.

Nothing in the Adivasi world is viewed as solely utilitarian. The Adivasis *do* understand the utility of things—they use trees for lumber and for medicine, for example—but the produce of plants is viewed as the gift of the plants, and meat and lumber are seen as the sacrifice of animals and trees respectively. Adivasis do not *take* anything. Everything they need is *offered* to them by

the others who make up their world and each needs to be thanked for his or her gifts.

What is freely given should be freely passed on, so sharing is an important value to Adivasis. Food and other goods are shared with everyone in the group. Adivasis do not divide their land into private plots. Because all the necessities of an Adivasi's life are given to him or her as gifts, having or possessing things is not nearly as important as living in harmony with others. It is more important to be on good terms with the supernatural and natural beings who can bestow what one needs than to stockpile possessions or amass wealth, whether individual or collective. Adivasi children grow up learning to tend to non-human as well as to human relationships and to find security in those relationships rather than in possessions. Persons cannot be owned or possessed. Because the Adivasi world is filled with persons, relatively few things can be owned. On the other hand, Adivasis believe that it is possible to communicate with just about anything, hence the importance of prayer, ritual, and divination.

Adivasis try to maintain harmony among themselves, with their deities, and with the natural world. They do not try to control, dominate, or change the underlying rhythms of life but rather attempt to sustain them by living in harmony with them.

Multiple and Multilevel Causality

If you suggested to an Adivasi that illness is caused by both supernatural beings and natural causes, the response would likely be "Of course! Everybody knows that!" Illness may be caused by an angry spirit, by an envious human being, or by a physical disorder in the body. The basic idea is that illness can arise as the result of an imbalance, whether between human beings, between humans and their natural environment, or between humanity and the supernatural world. A natural or a supernatural force can disrupt the equilibrium. The disharmony can occur at the physical, social, or spiritual level, and it can

be caused by agents at any of those levels. The Adivasi notion of causality is both multiple and multilevel. Various causes on multiple levels can operate at once (an angry deity and a physical imbalance, for example). Illness thus can be caused by both demons and a nutritional deficiency or by both disharmony and environmental toxins.

Adivasis have many methods of healing, many of which have been added over the years. When the government of India sponsored public health centers that featured modern Western medicine, tribal peoples assumed that indigenous methods of healing would gradually die out. That did not happen. Instead, indigenous healing began to coexist with modern Western medicine. Today's Adivasis have an amazing array of healing techniques to choose from: doctors trained in Western medicine, ayurvedic physicians, ritual care specialists (*bhopas*), herbalists, bonesetters, priests, and midwives. Specialists diagnose an illness by checking the pulse or by using grains for divination. Adivasis also believe that healing can happen as a result of a pilgrimage to a sacred site or by consulting a medium possessed by a deity.

WORSHIP

Deities, Priests, and Rites

Each of the 537 tribes of India has its own deities and worship practices. A few general characteristics are described here.

Most tribes believe in a supreme creator god, but that god is not generally believed to be involved in the everyday affairs of the world. Consequently, the creator is seldom the recipient of prayers or offerings. The local spirits are thought to have the most impact on the lives of the people. Most offerings and prayers are directed toward them.

Many of the local spirits are associated with elements of nature, such as trees or rivers. Others are ancestors (departed members of one's family, lineage, or clan). If any of these spiritual entities are offended, they may cause harm to humans. It is very important to be on good terms with the

spirit world. Most tribes have priests who lead rituals and are involved in the identification of the spirits causing illness or other problems.

The tribal peoples of India are surrounded by the magnificent temples of Hinduism. Some Adivasis visit the temples to worship Hindu deities, but Adivasis do not build large temples for their own deities. Much worship takes place outdoors, often in the sacred groves, described in the next section. There are also small shrines, either outdoors or in the home, which enshrine the household gods.

For the many tribes that practice agriculture, sowing, planting, and harvesting are sacred activities, and the seasons during which they are performed are sacred as well. There are a variety of purposes for rites of protection, such as to reverse declining fertility of soil, to protect crops from damage, to ensure the safety of humans and livestock, and to ensure a good harvest. For those who practice shifting cultivation, the annual cycle of rites begins with the clearing of the trees and shrubs from the hillsides during the Hindu month of Chaitra (mid-March to mid-April). The date for all agricultural rituals is set by the village headman in consultation with the village priest.

Adivasi worship is imageless, except where Adivasis have adopted Hinduism. Deities or spirits are not portrayed in anthropomorphic or animal forms. It is important to recognize that stones, pools of water, clusters of trees, hills, and so on are never considered objects of worship in their own right but only as dwelling places of the spirits.

Sacred Groves

Most village religious ceremonies occur in the sacred groves, the last remnant of India's once extensive forests. Sacred groves are places of near-natural vegetation dedicated to tribal deities and ancestral spirits and preserved because Adivasi belief forbids their use in a profane manner. Sacred groves are managed by the person in charge of local religious ceremonies. Trees may not be removed from sacred groves for sale, trade, or business but

only for religious purposes. A grove is expected to protect its village against witches and all other forms of evil.

Individual sacred trees (*sthalavrikshas*) are revered and protected by *taboos*. Scientific surveys of *sthalavrikshas* have discovered that nearly all have medicinal or other important uses. Trees that belong to rare species are also considered sacred and are protected by *taboos*.

Under British colonial rule, forestry became a secular state enterprise rather than a local religious enterprise, and the landscape of India changed. British rule radically altered India's resource use pattern. Before colonial rule, India produced a variety of goods for local consumption. Under British rule, India produced a few commodities largely for export. The groves were exploited for commercial benefit and became smaller and smaller as time went on. The change in resource use and the shrinking of the forests contributed to disastrous famines and epidemics between the 1860s and the 1920s.

Another threat to the sacred groves comes from Hindu and Christian missionary activity. Christianity *desacralizes* the groves and thereby legitimates commercial use of them. Hindus have been encouraging the identification of Adivasi deities with the gods and goddesses of Hinduism. When Adivasis begin to worship in Hindu temples, the sacred groves are abandoned as places of worship and commercial forces move in.

For millennia, sacred groves conserved biodiversity, maintained rare species, protected watersheds, and allowed for subsistence living. When the ability to subsist through gathering and hunting and shifting cultivation was lost, the once proud and independent Adivasis became dependent on moneylenders and many were reduced to poverty. Even in the face of severe economic hardships, India's tribal peoples attempt to protect the biological resources of their area.

The Adivasis managed the sacred groves for millennia, maintaining stability in the complex forest ecosystem by teaching the religious principle that nature itself in the groves is sacred. Sacred groves represent one of the finest examples of

traditional conservation practices in the world. India's farmers depended on the sacred groves for downstream soil fertility, and ayurvedic doctors depended on the sacred groves for their pharmaceutical needs.

GROWING UP ADIVASI

Influences That Affect Adivasi Society

Adivasi society differs in many ways from the Hindu society that surrounds it. Adivasis had no *caste system*, for example. The caste system was a pan-Indian social structure developed by Hindus, a hierarchical system that divided people into occupational groups; those in the upper classes were believed to have a higher degree of religious purity than those in the lower classes. A person's place in the caste system was determined by birth.

Adivasi society was far more egalitarian, with no degrees of purity. Those in authority were granted a greater degree of prestige only while they were carrying out the specific tasks over which they had authority. Otherwise, the village headman and the priest worked in the fields alongside everyone else.

Caste was a complex system that provided for both division of labor and economic exchange. A single *jati* (group within the caste system) never produced all that its members needed to survive. Tribes of Adivasis, in contrast, enjoyed a high degree of self-sufficiency. Although India's tribes traditionally barter for a few things, each tribe produced almost everything that it needed for survival.

Adivasis have unique marriage and divorce laws. Monogamy is most common, but polygamy is not prohibited. Divorce rates are higher than among Hindus. This may be partly because of the breakdown in traditional culture and social structure, but it may also reflect the fact that Hindus expect to journey from life to life with their spouses, meeting again in each new lifetime, whereas Adivasis have no such vision of the afterlife.

Despite the social and religious differences separating Adivasis from Hindus, a great deal of borrowing has occurred on both sides over the millennia. Sometimes it is difficult to

determine whether a particular practice began among Adivasis or among Hindus.

Adivasi religion also differs from Christianity. It has no concept of a personal god similar to the Western God. The Adivasi creator deity is generally not involved either in history or in the personal lives of individuals. Adivasis have no concept of a savior god or of the need for one. They do believe in spirits but not in a single spirit. Christian missionaries are active in India, however, and in certain areas one can trace their influence on Adivasi culture and religion.

The degree of acceptance of Hinduism or Christianity varies a great deal. Some Adivasis worship Hindu deities in Hindu temples, whereas others maintain a much higher degree of cultural purity. Some Adivasis have introduced a Western-style high god into their pantheon of deities or even have made a complete conversion to Christianity.

In addition to religious influences, Adivasi society has been affected by loss of land, loss of traditional lifestyle, and impoverishment. This has led to some terrible situations: Some families must sell a daughter into prostitution to enable the rest of the family to survive, and alcoholism has become commonplace. Such problems were not originally part of Adivasi culture but rather result from the deterioration of that culture.

Traditional Adivasi Society

A traditional Adivasi village is a small cluster of houses. People help each other in times of need without being asked, and even nonemergency work is often communal. An entire village works together to construct a house, dig a well, or harvest a field. Each village has a collective meeting place for religious ceremonies and dances inside its well-defined boundaries. The village council enforces the rules, organizes festivals, and settles disputes.

Ceremonies that involve the birth of a child, marriage, and death are usually observed by the family. Those that involve the agricultural cycle or hunting are observed by the entire village. Each group has its own rites and ceremonies.

Traditional Adivasi culture displays a high degree of gender equality, but many tribes allow a man to have more than one wife. If a woman's husband dies, she is allowed to marry whichever of her husband's brothers she chooses, either younger or older than herself. Consequently, an Adivasi child might grow up in a family where his or her father has more than one wife, but he or she could observe a relationship in which power is shared between the genders.

When the British controlled India, they tried to move the Adivasis toward settled agriculture. Some tribes, such as the Santals and the Murias, adopted this form of agriculture. Others retain a traditional Adivasi lifestyle that involves shifting cultivation or hunting and gathering. Even the settled Santals retain a great deal of fondness for hunting. Some tribes, such as the Abhuj Marias (a Gond tribe), still subsist through hunting and gathering.

The Abhuj Marias live in isolation in a densely forested hill region. All village land is owned collectively. They engage in some cultivation, but they do not plow, as that would inflict pain on the body of Mother Earth. Instead, they pierce the ground with pointed wood implements and place the seeds in the depressions created. Such isolated Adivasi groups are one of Earth's few remaining examples of a subsistence lifestyle. The Abhuj Marias only take from the earth that which they need to survive. They do not make a profit and do not buy anything with money. They make what they need and share what they have.

A child who grows up in a traditional Adivasi setting is immersed in music, dance, folk art, and religious rituals. Religious rituals include *life-cycle rites* (birth, puberty, marriage, and death), agricultural cycle rites (sowing and harvesting), and veneration of ancestors. Amassing wealth may be of little concern, and the arts and religious rites would be of central importance. They bind the community together, reinforcing the social cohesion necessary for the group to survive.

Traditional Adivasi society displays a high degree of social equality. Everyone in a village lives in the same kind of hut. It is believed that any outward show of wealth can bring bad luck

down on the ostentatious person's head. Furthermore, it is viewed as a disgrace to the entire village if any of its residents are visibly poorer than the rest.

Although a village council exists, the main authority figures in an Adivasi village are the headman and the priest. The priest performs all the worship for the village, but no ceremony, public sacrifice, or festival can take place unless it is initiated by the village headman. The headman also mentors the village youth.

Some tribes have a "youth dormitory" that plays a key role in preserving tribal culture and is a place for learning tribal arts, skills, and lore. The dormitory building is a large hut, walled on three sides and open in front. The young people dance in front of the hut every evening, and the village council meets there nearly every day to discuss matters that concern the village or to fix the date and time of festivals. All of this provides training for the young people. People leave the dormitory when they marry.

Village-sanctioned violence against someone who engages in antisocial or criminal behavior is rare. Usually, some other means of dealing with transgressors is found. The Santals have a ceremony (*bitlaha*) by which an evildoer is cast out of society. The outcast is not allowed to eat with the members of the tribe, and his or her children are not allowed to marry Santals. Another ceremony, called *jam jati*, reinstates an outcast into society.

DEFINING MOMENTS IN ADIVASI HISTORY

The Precolonial Period

Little in the prehistory of India can be verified, but the Adivasis believe that they were the original inhabitants of India, those who dwelled in the subcontinent before the Indo-European invasion. The Adivasis appear to have been pushed into the hilly and forested areas by the invaders. They remained there, living in isolation from the neighboring Hindu and Muslim communities that grew up around them. They retained their ancient culture and way of life.

Some Adivasis did not flee to the forested hills but instead became part of Hindu society. Whether this happened by force

or by enticement, those who were absorbed into Hindu society became part of the caste system. Former Adivasis typically became part of the lower castes. For those who fled to the forests and hills, however, the precolonial period was a time of relative freedom and prosperity. The period of British colonial rule is a different story.

British Colonial Rule (Circa 1757–1947)

Adivasi warriors fought the British colonizers. Legends and songs honor Birsa Munda, Khazya Naik, Tantya Bhil, and others who were heroes in the battle against the British.

The British found the Adivasis frustrating. Shifting cultivation, their method of agriculture, was considered unproductive and did not deliver much remuneration (profit) to the government. The Adivasis did not have private property, so it was difficult to levy a tax on them. When the tax collectors became too aggressive, the Adivasis migrated to a different area. The British therefore devised a scheme to extend their control into the forested areas, where the Adivasis had formerly lived in peaceful isolation.

After 1860, the British attempted to impose a system of fixed individual landownership. The land owned by each village was mapped out and divided into plots. Each cultivator was given as many plots as he wished. He was then registered as the owner and required to pay a tax on his property. When the Adivasis realized that this was simply a means to make them pay for the use of their own land, they left a number of plots unclaimed. Non-Adivasi land speculators moved in to claim the unoccupied plots. They posted guards on “their” land to prevent the original owners from taking timber or grazing cattle on it, making them trespassers on land that had been the Adivasis’ for centuries.

Adivasis were forced to pay fees for grazing cattle or harvesting the forest for medicine and food. They were also forced to work in the forest, planting saplings and clearing firebreaks. The forest officers who supervised them often treated them harshly and disrespectfully.

Money lenders (*shahukars*) siphoned off Adivasi resources while pretending to be benevolent mentors. The money lenders advanced seeds, grains, and money for cultivating, and collected a share of the crop at harvest time. Advances for food carried a 50 percent interest rate; seed for cultivating had to be paid back at double the amount loaned. In times of famine, large quantities of land passed from Adivasis to shahukars.

Liquor dealers hastened the processes of land loss and cultural disintegration. The Adivasis made and used liquor prior to the arrival of the British. It was considered a gift of the gods and was consumed at weddings and religious services. It was believed to be beneficial to health and was taken as a medicine during illness.

The British licensed the manufacture and sale of alcohol. They sold the right to oversee the making and sale of liquor within a certain area for the period of one year. The successful bidder was invariably a non-Adivasi. Although they produced the liquor very inexpensively, the Adivasis had to pay a lot of money to purchase it after it had gone through all the middlemen required by British law. Adivasis therefore were perennially in debt to the liquor dealers. Often, village land was mortgaged or even sold to liquor dealers.

The tax and licensing system imposed by the British directly undermined the Adivasi economy and was indirectly responsible for the breakdown in family ties and forest preservation. Independent India continues to pay the price for this mismanagement in welfare costs and the cost of attempts to repair ecological damage.

Attempts to Help the Adivasis

Prohibition Attempts

In the second half of the nineteenth century, moral reform movements attempted to stop the use of alcohol among Adivasis. It was assumed that Adivasis were poor because of their drinking habits. Consequently, much energy was spent encouraging young people to vow not to drink later in life. These campaigns enjoyed some limited success, but drinking was not the real root

of the poverty. The real root of the problem was government initiatives that granted economic privileges to liquor dealers and landowners.

Literacy Campaign

A literacy campaign enabled a few families to send their children to school. Unfortunately, the schools did not understand or teach the philosophy and values of Adivasi culture. Consequently, those children who went to school did not gain the knowledge to save the Adivasi way of life. The Christian missionaries, who worked closely with the British government and shared much of its educational and political philosophy, were unable to recognize this problem.

The Kisan Sabha Movement (1920s–1940s)

The first organized resistance to the landlords and shahukars arrived in the form of the Kisan Sabha movement (kisan = farmer, sabha = gathering, congregation; hence, a gathering or congregation of farmers). The Kisan Sabha demanded the return of “land to the tiller.” It was a Socialist, pan-India peasant movement that relied heavily upon demonstrations and civil disobedience. It was often led by local religious leaders, but it sometimes took a violent turn with beatings and lootings of the homes of shahukars and liquor dealers. While the Kisan Sabha movement played an important role in India’s bid for independence, its efforts on behalf of the peasants did not bear fruit until after independence arrived in 1947.

Land Reform and Ensuing Legislation

In 1950, the newly independent government of India divided some of the largest landholdings to distribute land to those who tilled it. Most of the liquor dealers and urban shahukars lost their estates to their Adivasi tenants. The land was not equally distributed, however, and the result was a class division among Adivasis, with richer ones supplying credit to poorer. Such class divisions were not part of traditional Adivasi culture.

A traditional Adivasi village would have been shamed by any such visible differences in personal wealth.

Because the majority of the people remained in poverty, the number of Adivasis who owned the land that they cultivated continued to decrease. In 1901, there were 724,000 Adivasi cultivators in India. By 1971, that number had dwindled to 561,000. In that year, a movement to prevent the transfer of tribal land to nontribal owners was launched. Two legislative measures were passed in 1974 and 1975. One forbade the sale of tribal land to a nontribal person, and the other restored land that was judged to have been illegally transferred to non-Adivasis in the past. Despite government attempts to implement these measures, land-grabbing by non-Adivasis continued to take place.

Socioreligious Reform Movements

The Satnam Panth

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, socioreligious reform movements played an important role in shaping and preserving Adivasi identity. The *Satnam Panth* movement emerged among the poor people of Chhattisgarh during the second decade of the nineteenth century. The new sect was led by Ghasidas, a humble farm worker. His followers, known as *satnamis*, abstained from eating meat, red beans or lentils, and certain other vegetables, and from using liquor and tobacco. Satnamis believed only in the formless absolute known as *Satnam* (“the True Name”). They rejected the gods, goddesses, and images of Hinduism, as well as the caste system. The Satnam Panth helped create a social consciousness for Adivasis that distinguished them from Hindus. To this day, it remains a proud claim of the Adivasi movement that they do not worship idols and have an egalitarian, casteless society.

The Oraon Movement

The Oraon movement (1914–1919) was an uprising of a section of the Oraons under the leadership of a young man named Jatra. When Jatra was 25 years old, he said that he had received

a message from Dharmesh, the high god of the Oraons. The message told him to revive the Oraon Raj (kingship).

Jatra attempted to purify the Oraon religion by eliminating exorcisms, belief in spirits, animal sacrifice, and drinking of alcohol. He advocated vegetarianism, austerity, and restraint. The basic thrust of the movement was not religious purity; it was agricultural and political justice.

Jatra reasoned that no one had the right to interfere with a tribe's right to its land, because land was a gift of God. Jatra told his followers to stop paying rent to their landlords. Because the colonial state had failed to protect them from land grabbers, the Oraons sought political independence.

Jatra declared that his followers would no longer plow the fields of landlords or serve as low-paid laborers for non-Oraons or for the government. Because Jatra and his disciples believed that true education is from Heaven, children were kept out of school and missionary schools were shut down. The movement developed an anti-British and antimissionary tone.

About twenty-six thousand Oraons followed Jatra. The new faith was communicated through the *Tana mantras* or "divine words," which were orally transmitted to youths who returned to their villages to set up further chains of communication. The Oraon movement enabled the Oraons to take back the minds and commitment of their youth who otherwise might have been seduced by the power of the British, the Hindus, or Christian missionaries.

ADIVASIS TODAY

Government Aid

Although the government has taken steps to improve the situation of the Adivasis, the amount of improvement is small compared with the amount of effort invested by the government and the Adivasis themselves. Structures and programs that would benefit people who are assimilated or are willing to become assimilated into mainstream Indian culture do not necessarily benefit the Adivasis who wish to retain their traditional identities. This is not only a problem in India, of course; it is a problem

wherever tribal people are under the authority of officials who understand nation-states, bureaucracies, and global economics but do not understand native philosophy, culture, or lifestyle.

The Problem of Debt

The Adivasis generally bear heavier burdens of debt than their mainstream counterparts. They go into debt in order to pay for agricultural activities, marriage, religious functions, death ceremonies, and health care.

Today, loans are often procured from the government, although moneylenders and landlords still offer financing. Agricultural loans generally are due after harvest, often at between 50 and 100 percent interest. Only about half of Adivasi borrowers know the rate of interest they are being charged. Often, the security taken for a loan is land, so if the loan is not repaid, the land passes into the hands of the government or the moneylender.

About a quarter of Adivasi borrowers have to repay their loans in the form of agricultural labor. Loans for marriage in particular are often repaid in the form of bonded labor. Family members are bonded to repay a loan after the death of the borrower, so that bonded labor carries over from generation to generation. About 8 percent of tribal families are bonded laborers. Bonded men work in agricultural activities, and women work as maidservants.

Adivasis have a well-developed system of diagnosis and cure that enables them to deal with many common diseases. Adivasis recognize when native methods of healing are not working, and at that point they seek additional help. Western-style medical facilities are extremely rare in Adivasi territory, however. It is perhaps only this harsh reality that has kept Adivasi indebtedness for health care at relatively low levels.

The Continuing Quest for Autonomy

Programs that offer direct assistance in terms of land reform, debt reduction, and health care need to be continued and even

increased, but it has become clear that they will not solve the root problem. An increasing number of Adivasis now believe that they will never become self-supporting until they are allowed to be self-governing.

Adivasis have been seeking a higher degree of self-government for centuries. They fought against the British colonizers, and they have struggled equally hard for a voice in independent India. In 2000, three new states—Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttaranchal—were carved out of India. It is commonly believed that these three states are predominantly Adivasi in population, but this is not true. They do have relatively large Adivasi populations, however. The expectation is that Adivasis will have a significant voice in the governance of these new states. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on the many problems facing Adivasis today.

African Indigenous Religions

*When the bee comes to your house,
let her have beer;
you may want to visit the bee's house some day.*

—Congo proverb

INTRODUCTION

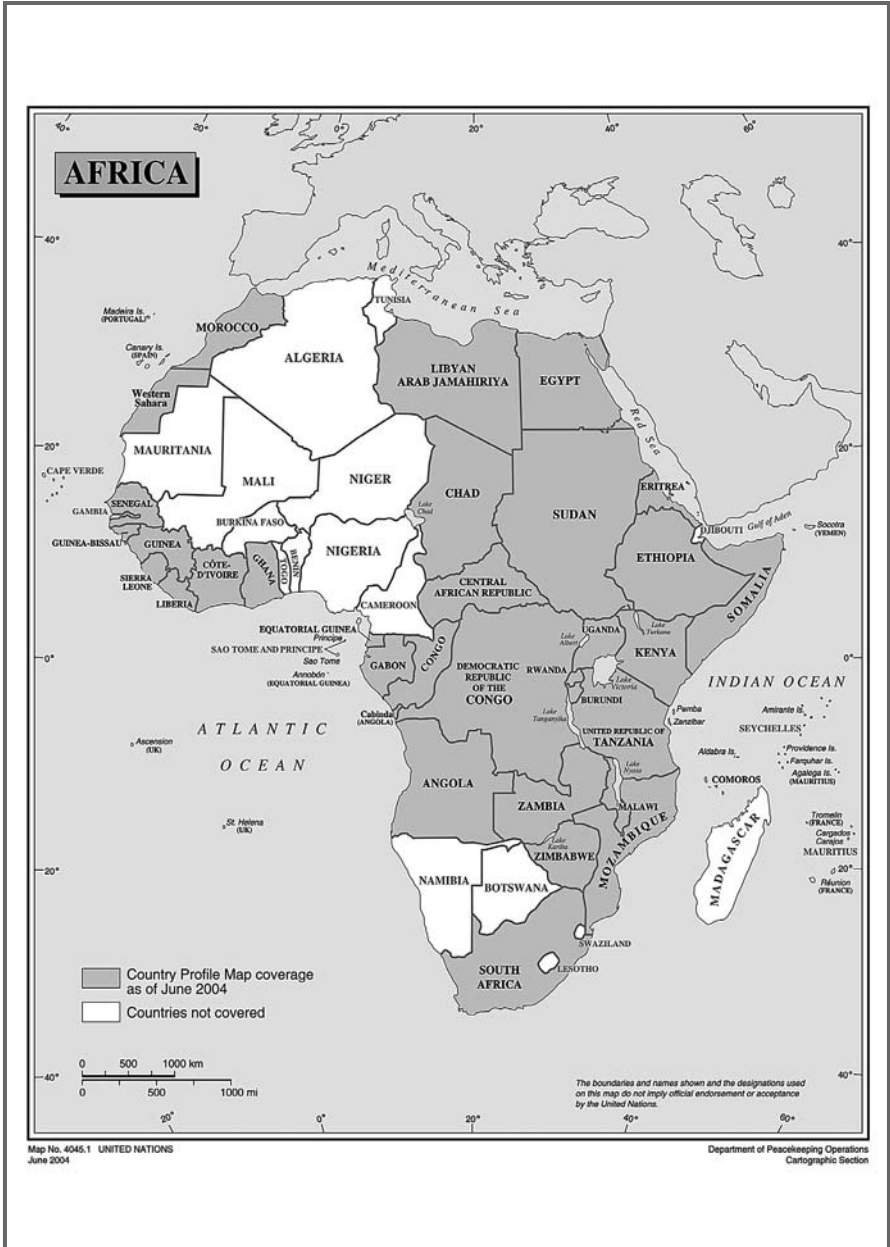
Africa is the world's second-largest continent (the largest is Asia). The equator nearly bisects this gigantic landmass. A mere 200 miles from the equator stands Mount Kilimanjaro, a 19,340-foot-high mountain with a snow-white glacier cap. Kilimanjaro is a tourist attraction because ordinary people can climb it. Climbers start in the tropical rain forest at its base and ascend through a variety of climatic zones, until finally they find themselves standing on a glacier. Aerial photographs demonstrate that Kilimanjaro's ice cap is retreating, and if present rates of global warming continue, its snowy top will be completely gone by 2021.

Tropical forests flank the equator, but nearly one-third of Africa is desert. The Sahara, in the north, is the world's largest arid area: It covers 25 percent of Africa. The Namib and Kalahari Deserts in the south make up the rest of Africa's desert area. Devastating droughts occur frequently.

About 700 million people live in Africa, but the continent is lightly populated by world standards. The birthrate in Africa is high but so is the death rate. There are several thousand different ethnic groups in Africa, each with its own language, history, way of life, and religion. Africa's ethnic groups include the Fulanis, Dogons, Ashantis, Bantus, Hausas, Kikuyus, Yorubas, and many others. A single country may have twenty or more different ethnic groups living within its boundaries.

For decades, scholars have debated whether the many indigenous religions of Africa have enough in common to warrant being called "African indigenous religion" (singular) or whether there is a multiplicity of different African indigenous religions. As of this writing, scholarly consensus favors the belief that either term is appropriate, depending on context and scale.

Indigenous religions are not alone in Africa. There are indigenous Christian churches in Egypt and Ethiopia that extend back to the earliest centuries of the Christian era. Beginning in the seventh century C.E., Arabs immigrated to northern Africa, bringing Islam with them. Today, most of



The world's second-largest continent is Africa. Along with Islam and Christianity, indigenous religions are an important component of African worldview and African cultures.

Africa north of the Sahara is predominantly Muslim. Europeans first settled in Africa in the mid-seventeenth century. Over the subsequent centuries, large numbers of Europeans immigrated to Africa, many of them settling in areas south of the Sahara. The Europeans brought their Christian faiths with them. Africa also has been visited by waves of Christian missionaries from Europe and the United States in the past several centuries. Today, many Africans, especially those living south of the Sahara, are Christians.

It is sometimes hard to disentangle indigenous religions and mainstream world religions, because many Africans do not practice one religion exclusively and because for many centuries Africa's indigenous religions have been influenced by the strongly monotheistic nature of their religious neighbors. This influence has almost certainly strengthened whatever monotheistic tendencies existed prior to the arrival of the Muslims and the Christians.

FOUNDATIONS

Religions about which there is extensive historical knowledge often look to the events and writings of their founding period as a guide for correct belief and action. There is not extensive historical knowledge about most African indigenous religions, and they do not have written scriptures. Consequently, the foundations on which these religions are built must be something other than the events of the founding period and the written record of those events. In native African religion, the guide for correct belief and action is tradition. If the traditions of a people are lost, its entire way of life will be destroyed.

Traditional wisdom passes from one generation to the next in the form of stories and *proverbs*. Social order and moral behavior are reflected in myths and reinforced through ceremonies and rituals. Because religious knowledge is transmitted directly from elders to young people without the intervention of scriptures or schoolbooks, the link between parents and children is critical. Children are expected to obey and revere

their parents, and parents are expected to teach their children and serve as role models for them. Parents do not fulfill these obligations alone: "It takes a village to raise a child," a proverb popularized by Senator Hillary Clinton, originated in West Africa.

Parents themselves revere their own parents throughout their entire lives, independently of whether their parents are alive or dead. When they are alive, parents' parents are called "elders." When they die, they pass into the spirit world and are known as ancestors. In Africa, vitality is believed to increase with age. Elders are more powerful than young adults, and ancestors are even more powerful than elders. Especially revered are the ancestors who stand at the head of an extensive lineage. Beyond them all stands God, the All-Powerful, who is "Grandfather" (in some cases "Grandmother") to all the world.

Laurenti Magesa,⁷ a writer and Roman Catholic priest from Musoma, Tanzania, underlines the significance of the concept of God as founder of both the people and their way of life: "God is seen as the Great Ancestor, the first Founder and Progenitor, the Giver of Life, the Power behind everything that is. God is the first Initiator of a people's way of life, its tradition."⁸

If God is the giver of tradition, ancestors are its custodians. They are the overseers of the behavior of individuals, families, and clans. They are the most direct critics of their living descendants, and they punish those who fail to abide by the way of life given by God.

The importance of family in African indigenous religions cannot be overstated, because it provides the mechanism for passing on not only physical but also spiritual life. As young adults, people pass on physical life. As elders and ancestors, they pass on spiritual life. There is no monasticism in traditional African religion;⁹ indeed, it is an imperative to share life by having children. In this sense, African religion is like Confucianism: It is considered ungrateful to one's parents to refuse to pass on the life that one received from them.

Individual identity is of small importance compared with one's identity as a member of a family, extended family, and

ethnic group. Isolated individuals are not part of the African indigenous worldview.

In sum, it can be said that the foundation of African indigenous religion is tradition. Tradition maintains the physical and spiritual life of an entire group of people and is given by God and safeguarded by the ancestors who use it to direct the lives of the living.

MYTHS AND PROVERBS

African indigenous religions do not have written scriptures, but they do have sacred words. Sacred words are found in myths, songs, and proverbs. This section examines the transmission of religious knowledge by means of myths and proverbs.

Myths

Myths address the topics that people consider most important. African peoples have myths about God, the creation of the universe, and the creation of man. They also have myths about social and political institutions; morals, values, and taboos; death; animal behavior; and natural forces. There are myths about leaders such as heroes and kings.

Myths describe the structures and relationships that people must understand and respect if life is to continue. African peoples consider their relationships with God, the ancestors and other spirits, other human beings, and animals, plants, and the earth important. These relationships may be damaged, but myths tell us how God intended them to be. In particular, myths about paradise often contrast the world as God created it with the world that we now know.

Paradise¹⁰

Many African myths describe an original blessed state. Heaven and Earth were very close together, and human beings lived in peace and harmony with God and with each other. God was a parent to humanity, providing people with food, shelter, domestic animals, fire, tools for hunting and cultivating, and

wisdom. People were intended to live forever. All the myths report that this original blessed state of humanity was lost: The direct link to God was severed, a vast chasm without bridge or ladder stretched between Heaven and Earth, and death, disease, and disharmony blanketed the earth.

What caused the loss of the closeness of Heaven and Earth? Some myths assign the blame to humans. Some myths claim that the separation came about when people broke one of God's rules by eating eggs, meat, fruit, or yams or by fighting with each other, for example. Other myths claim that people inadvertently caused God to withdraw. Myths from western Africa recount how the people constantly hit the sky with their pestles (club-shaped tool) when they were pounding their food. (Recall that the sky was very close to Earth.) In central Africa, myths tell of humans setting the grasslands on fire to rejuvenate them. The smoke from the fire poured into Heaven, and God was driven away. In eastern African mythology, it was not people but an animal that caused the problem. Along the Nile Valley in Sudan and Uganda, a hyena chewed on the rope connecting Heaven and Earth until the two worlds separated.

Other myths tell how God in his kindness helped people survive despite this disaster. God gave people new knowledge and new rules of behavior and also sent leaders of all sorts: kings and queens, priests, prophets, teachers, medicine men, and so on. Although the original state of perfection is gone, something of its beauty lingers: "Through religion people are still able to approach God. Through marriage and childbearing, they are still able to achieve something of the original immortality; and when they die, it is believed that their spirits continue to survive . . ." ¹¹

The Creation of Human Beings

Each group has its unique account, but African stories about the creation of humanity can be grouped into several broad categories. In one set of myths, human beings are created in the sky and then placed on Earth. They may be cast out of Heaven as a punishment for wrongdoing, or they may be placed on

Earth for the purpose of populating it. The first human beings are always described as at least one husband-wife pair. Often, there are two pairs so that their children can intermarry.

In another set of myths, God creates human beings out of the ground. Some describe God shaping a man and a woman from clay, and in such cases God is often called *Potter*. In myths from eastern and southern Africa, God often is said to make people underground and then allow them to emerge on Earth via a hole in the ground. Other myths describe how the first people fell from a tree like ripe fruit, and still others say that, when God created people, he sealed them in a vessel that later burst open and allowed the people to come out.

No matter how the myths say that God created people, they agree that God is their creator and that he created one or more husband-wife pairs. Finally, African myths usually place the creation of humanity at the end of the process of creation. In some myths, God works alone when creating people, but in others he directs the animals to help.

Proverbs

Proverbs encapsulate a people's wisdom in short, easy-to-remember statements. Proverbs are found all over the world, but Africa has more of them than most regions. The following proverbs are from the collection of Kofi Asare Opoku of Ghana:¹²

You do not teach the paths of the forest to an old gorilla.
(the Congo)

A little subtleness is better than a lot of force. (the Congo)

One falsehood spoils a thousand truths. (the Ashantis of Ghana)

There is no medicine to cure hatred. (the Ashantis of Ghana)

When you are rich, you are hated; when you are poor, you are despised. (the Ashantis of Ghana)

Knowledge is better than riches. (Cameroon)

Rain does not fall on one roof alone. (Cameroon)

When the heart overflows, it comes out through the mouth.
(Ethiopia)

Confiding a secret to an unworthy person is like carrying grain
in a bag with a hole. (Ethiopia)

The fool speaks, the wise man listens. (Ethiopia)

If you offend, ask for pardon; if offended, forgive. (Ethiopia)

Knowledge is like a garden: If it is not cultivated, it cannot be
harvested. (Guinea)

Because a man has injured your goat, do not go out and kill his
bull. (Kenya)

Virtue is better than wealth. (Kenya)

If you try to cleanse others—like soap, you will waste away in the
process! (Liberia)

WORLDVIEW

In African indigenous religions, human beings are positioned at the center of the universe. Humans are not the most powerful beings in the universe, nor are they the master of the universe. Rather, all the forces of the universe, both spiritual and material, impinge on and influence the human realm. Therefore, when the natural, moral, and spiritual laws of the universe are disregarded, humans suffer most.¹³

Less powerful forces than humans include the animal, plant, and mineral forces. Even inanimate elements such as minerals and water have their own force or power that supports human life. Plants have healing powers. Animals are sources of milk and meat. The vital force contained in plants, animals, and inanimate elements is necessary to sustain human life and fertility. Because all life (including that of people, plants, animals, and Earth) comes from God, it participates in divine life in some way. All life is therefore sacred and must be treated with respect.¹⁴

More powerful forces than humans include God and the spirits. Because each people has its own name for God and its own stories about God, it was once debated whether African indigenous religions held a concept of God in common. The scholarly consensus today is that a common concept of God does indeed exist and that it includes the following characteristics: God is the most powerful force in the universe. God creates all things and provides for them. God is all-powerful and all-knowing, and he rules the universe. God is present everywhere. God never changes or dies. God's nature is a mystery; human beings can know only very little about God. The people of the Congo and Angola call God the Marvel of Marvels, and this sentiment extends throughout traditional Africa.¹⁵

The power of the spirits is intermediate between that of God and that of humans. The spirits are created by God and are subordinate to him. Some of the spirits are connected to the natural world and others are human spirits. Some tribes consider nature spirits associated with the sky, such as the god of the sun or the god of rain, divinities. Sometimes sacrifices and offerings are made to these deities to ask for help or for the deity to speak to God on behalf of the worshiper. It is important to note that, although divinities play an important part in some countries (for example, Ghana, Uganda, and Nigeria), other peoples do not believe in sky deities at all. Other tribes have stories and myths about sky deities but do not offer prayers or sacrifices to them.

There are also spirits associated with things on Earth (mountains, forests, and waterfalls, for example), and there are spirits associated with diseases and conditions such as smallpox and insanity and also with death. Many people believe that it is possible to placate such spirits. Not all African peoples ascribe spirits to the same phenomena. Normally, a tribe associates spirits only with what influences their lives. In traditional Africa, the proof of the existence of a being is its power, and the power of a being is perceived in the impact it has on one's life. Because weather, natural forces, diseases, and death affect

people's lives dramatically, they are commonly associated with powers—that is, with deities.

Human life is thought to continue beyond death in spiritual form, and so traditional Africans believe in human spirits (ancestors). After an elder dies, he or she remains engaged in the life of family and community for up to four or five generations. For as long as an ancestor is actively remembered by family and friends, he or she is considered among the *living dead*. The living dead generally desire only good for their descendants, but they may punish wrongdoing by withdrawing their protection and allowing sickness and misfortune. The purpose of the punishment is not to harm but to restore the moral and social order so that disaster does not ensue. People are expected to remember and venerate their ancestors, and in return, the ancestors bless and help them. People feel close to the living dead, and, among all those in the spiritual realm, they turn to them first for help.

Every day, food and drink is symbolically presented to the ancestors. This is done as a sign of respect. The reverence shown to the ancestors was once erroneously called *ancestor worship*. In African indigenous religions, ancestors are not deities and are not worshiped. Still, just as living elders are given great respect, so do Africans remember and respect the spirits of the ancestors.

With the passage of time, deceased persons gradually fade from living memory. However, the spirits of founders of nations or other great men may continue to play an active role in their nations or communities for generations or even centuries.

All of these levels of being, from inanimate objects all the way up to God, are known through their impact on human lives. Therefore, these levels of being have not been theoretically established, but rather each is known to exist because it has been experienced. Scholars call this worldview *dynamism* (from the Greek word *dynamis*, meaning “power”).

WORSHIP

In African indigenous religions, worship includes prayer, sacrifices and offerings, and the performance of rituals. The first two are

investigated in this section. Life-cycle rituals are discussed in the next section. This section also includes explanations of religious leaders and sacred places.

Prayer

As in most religions, practitioners of African indigenous religions may pray to God individually at any time. Family prayers are usually led by the head of the household. Communal or public prayers may be led by a priest, a political leader such as a chief or king, a rainmaker, or sometimes a healer. Prayer includes praise, thanksgiving, and requests.

Intermediaries

Although people can and do pray directly to God, it is also common to use an intermediary. An intermediary carries prayers or petitions to God on behalf of another person. Intermediaries may be priests, rainmakers, or anyone else who performs rituals on behalf of members of the community. Their role in society obligates them to pray to God for the needs of the people. An intermediary may also be a spiritual being, such as a deity or an ancestor. Departed kings, for example, might be asked to speak with God on behalf of the living members of the kingdom. Ancestors often serve as intermediaries because they are presumed to know and care about their descendants.

Intermediaries are not worshiped; they are simply helpers or assistants in worship. People believe that they show more respect and courtesy by approaching God through intermediaries, just as it is considered more respectful of anyone in a position of power to speak to his assistants or secretary first. Nonetheless, God is considered approachable.

Sacrifices and Offerings

Sacrifices and offerings are pan-African practices. Sacrifices involve the shedding of blood, but offerings are nonbloody. Gifts of water, milk, and money are offerings. In a sacrifice, the life of an animal is taken. Sacrifices are carried out only for very

serious reasons, such as when the lives of many people are in danger. Sacrifices may be undertaken in time of drought, war, or an epidemic. Wild animals are sometimes used, but the most common sacrificial animals are domesticated cattle, sheep, goats, dogs, chickens, and guinea hens.

Of course, people know that God, being a spirit, has no need to eat the sacrificial meat or food offerings. Foods dedicated to God may be disposed of in several ways. It may be left at the place where the offering took place to either rot or be consumed by wild animals, or it may be given to the priest, to the people in attendance, or to the family that brought the offering.

Religious Leaders

Every religious tradition designates particular individuals to officiate at religious ceremonies—Judaism has rabbis, Islam has imams, Protestants have ministers, and Catholics have priests. Africa's indigenous religions have priests, rainmakers, and healers. Both women and men serve in all of these official capacities.

Priests officiate at ceremonies and rituals.¹⁶ These typically include marriage and birth celebrations, puberty rites, funerals, commemorations of ancestors, and planting and harvesting ceremonies. Many villages have a shrine to commemorate the founding ancestor of the community. The priest is in charge of this shrine and may also serve as the prophet of the ancestral spirit. The priest-prophet goes into a trance and allows the spirit of the ancestor to possess him or her. The priest is believed to communicate directly with the ancestor while in this state. Whatever the priest hears is passed on to the community.

Much of Africa is either arid or semiarid, and droughts occur frequently. Rainmakers are the ritual specialists responsible for determining the cause of a drought and prescribing a remedy for it. "Rainmaker" is an unfortunate translation, because the people are well aware that the rainmaker does not actually make rain. The rainmaker leads the community prayers for rain. When a drought occurs, the rainmaker may be possessed by ancestral spirits who are expected to tell him the reason for the

drought. A drought is usually ascribed to either inappropriate behavior on the part of a member of the community or the work of offended spirits. The rainmaker attempts to remedy the problem by ordering a change in behavior or making special offerings to offended spirits.

All African societies have healers. Some healers are herbalists—they use extracts from berries, roots, leaves, and bark to cure diseases. If an herbalist is confronted with an unknown disease, he or she will enter a trance and be possessed by a spirit that leads him or her to the appropriate plants to provide a cure. Other healers are diviners. They rely solely on spiritual means, usually a special ancestral spirit, to diagnose and cure illnesses. Until very recently, the Western world believed that African indigenous healing methods were fraudulent. Within the past thirty years, however, attitudes have changed. Today, African traditional healers and doctors trained in Western medicine often work side by side. Of course, as in every other part of the world, there are people in Africa who pretend to be healers but who are only looking to cheat the sick out of money by selling them useless objects and herbs that they claim are strong medicine. These frauds are especially prevalent in and around big cities, where people are not connected to traditional knowledge and may not be able to differentiate between a genuine healer and a fraud.

Sacred Places

Shrines are the most common form of sacred space. A family shrine may be a small hut or mound on the homestead. Family shrines are used for making offerings, for sacrifice, for family rituals, and as a place to pray. Graves are often treated as shrines. People pray there and leave symbolic offerings of food and drink. The grave is tended and cared for so that it is not overgrown with weeds.

Larger communal shrines are often natural places that have been set aside for religious purposes. Groves, waterfalls, forests, rivers, mountains, and rocks have all been used as communal shrines. Such places generally are used only for religious purposes;

it is believed that secular use would desecrate them. People do not plow sacred groves, nor do they allow their cattle to graze in them. Often, hunting is forbidden. Any person or animal that hides in a sacred grove has sanctuary and may not be killed. Killing that person or animal would bring swift punishment from God or the spirits.

GROWING UP IN A TRADITIONAL AFRICAN HOUSEHOLD

African life-cycle rituals extend from before birth until well past the moment of death. Because African indigenous religions do not encourage monasticism or the single life, all people are expected to conform to a template for life that includes marriage and raising a family. The result is that all persons have the same major life experiences as they mature, allowing for the formation of meaningful age groups.

Birth and Childhood

Before Birth

Until quite recently, American women often tried to conceal their pregnancies for as long as possible, but an African woman was always prone to announce her good fortune to the world. A woman's marriage is made secure by the proof that she is able to have children, and being pregnant garners an increased measure of respect from her in-laws.

There are many taboos designed to ensure the health of the mother and baby. A pregnant woman is not allowed to perform certain tasks (cutting firewood or drawing water, for example). She is not allowed to eat certain foods, and she may wear charms to protect the baby from harm. In some societies, she will not sleep with her husband until months or even years (if weaning is a prerequisite for sexual activity) after the child is born.

Birth

The baby is usually delivered by a *midwife*. Men are not allowed to be present at childbirth. The placenta, which is viewed as a

religious link between mother and child, must be disposed of (by drying it, throwing it in running water, or burying it) in a ritually correct manner. The same is true of the umbilical cord.

After childbirth, the mother undergoes purification rituals, and the child is protected against witchcraft, disease, evil spirits, and other dangers via other rituals. The local medicine man or diviner performs both the purification and the protective rituals.

Baby and mother rest in seclusion for a few days, and then they are brought forth to be formally introduced to society at a large feast in their honor. In some areas, the living dead are believed to be present for this occasion.

Naming

The naming ceremony is a very important event. Most African names have a meaning, and therefore a name must be carefully selected to match the personality of the child. In Ewe culture, every event that affects the life of a mother-to-be is scrutinized to determine whether it might reveal the *Se* (soul or spirit) of the unborn child. All circumstances of the birth itself are scrutinized as well. The newborn is also examined for any indication of the *dzoto* (ancestral soul) accompanying him or her, because the Ewe believe that all children are born accompanied by an ancestor who will assist the child in fulfilling its destiny.

Initiation

The next major transition point in the life of an individual occurs when he or she enters puberty. Most traditional African societies have puberty rites, which are typically referred to as *initiation*. In many parts of Africa, initiation includes circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls. Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin of the boy's genitals, and clitoridectomy is the cutting of some portion of the girl's genitals. In both cases, the operation is bloody and painful. Westerners generally look on both of these procedures with disdain and dismay,¹⁷ but they are highly treasured rites in traditional Africa. These rituals are the gate through which young adults must pass to be considered

ready for marriage and for the performance of religious rituals; a person who does not undergo this ordeal is shamed and will always be considered a child no matter how old he or she is in calendar years. The scars from the cuts on the organs identify the individual as a member of a particular people, so initiation therefore forges a bond of solemn unity between the individual and his or her people.

Marriage and Family

Marriage and childbearing are the focus of life, and thus they are considered a sacred obligation. Failure to raise a family is a failure to serve the flow of life and is considered evil.

Weddings

Among some peoples, marriages are arranged but others allow the bride and groom to select each other. Either way, marriage is an arrangement between two families, not just between two individuals, and it involves the entire community. The groom's family gives marriage gifts to the bride's family. These gifts provide legal authorization for the couple to live together and have children. If the marriage dissolves, the gifts must be returned.

One of the most dramatic moments of the wedding ceremony occurs when the wedding party finds out whether the bride is a virgin or not. If she is a virgin, there is much rejoicing and the family is praised. If evidence of her virginity is lacking, her family is shamed and the marriage is immediately dissolved. Males are not required to provide proof of virginity.

The Importance of Children

In traditional African societies, the main purpose of a marriage is to have children. This is so important that marriages that produce children seldom break up and marriages that fail to produce children often dissolve. An infertile couple may resort to extreme measures to attempt to have children and save their marriage. If the woman is barren, she may allow her husband to take a second wife so that there will be children in

the family. If the problem lies with the man, he may allow his wife to sleep with a close relative or friend so as to conceive a child for him.

Children are expected to be obedient and respectful and to help with the work in the home and fields. When the parents grow old, the heirs are expected to care for them and for the family property. When the parents die, the children must give them a proper burial, tend their graves, and venerate them. In traditional African society, people see themselves first and foremost as members of a family, and they share in the happiness and responsibilities of family life. They do not see themselves primarily as individuals with individual rights and individual responsibilities.

Death

Death Myths and Rituals

Many African myths attempt to explain where death came from. None of them blames God for it; rather, they suggest, death is a mistake, and the blame for it is laid on people, animals, or evil spirits. One African myth about the origin of death is similar to the story in Genesis 2–3. According to the African account, God forbade the first people to eat a certain kind of food (sometimes a fruit, sometimes eggs or meat). When they disobeyed God and ate the forbidden food, death entered the world.

Indigenous knowledge is full of the physical causes of death (sickness, drowning, animal attack, and so on), but it always proposes a spiritual cause as well. Spiritual causes of death include sorcery, curses, and broken taboos or oaths.

Death rituals vary. Usually, the body of the deceased is washed, and it may be anointed with oil as well. Africans dispose of the body by burying it. Signs of mourning are diverse but common ones include shaving the head and smearing the face with white clay. Several fasting days may intervene, but eventually burial is followed by a feast for those who participated in the funeral.

The Soul

The two primary components of a person in traditional African societies are the body and the soul (also called spirit, breath, or shadow). Death is the separation of the soul from the body. The soul or spirit does not disappear after death; it becomes a member of the living dead. It does not lose its identity or personality, and it is regarded much like a living human being. Members of the deceased's family may even report appearances of the deceased. This may happen for up to four or five generations. The living dead also make their presence known through dreams and visions and by possessing living persons.

The spirits of those who died far from home or who did not receive proper burial may cause trouble for the living until they are properly buried in their home compound. Even today, Africans who die in cities are likely to be buried on their original homesteads. Members of the family remember the dead by pouring beer, milk, or water on the ground for them to drink and by placing morsels of food on the ground for them.

For the most part, African indigenous religions do not include the concept of a heaven, where souls are rewarded for a good life, and a hell, where souls are punished. A belief in Heaven or Hell exists only in Nigeria and in a small part of Ghana.

DEFINING MOMENTS IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN HISTORY

Africa before European Involvement

Recent discoveries of human remains suggest that Africa is the birthplace of humanity. Evidence of religious practice is found in the lowest strata of the anthropological record, so Africa is quite likely the birthplace of religion as well. Because vast periods of African history still await the attention of researchers, however, not much is known about the development of religion (or anything else) in sub-Saharan Africa.

It is known that there were highly developed political states in sub-Saharan Africa before the beginning of European involvement. It is known that some parts of Africa traded with China

and India, because porcelain, coins, and beads from those countries were discovered in southeastern Africa. It is known that, more than one thousand years ago, African technicians built large stone walls, laid irrigation canals, and constructed stone-lined wells. Given the Western tendency to view sub-Saharan Africa as backward and primitive, it is important to recognize that there were great civilizations in Africa before European involvement, even if not much is known about the people who created them.

The first African state about which there is any significant information is the Kingdom of Ghana, located along the Upper Niger River to the northwest of the present-day Republic of Ghana. The Kingdom of Ghana emerged in the first millennium C.E. and was invaded around 1062 by Muslims from the north, after which it eventually broke up into smaller units. Ghana was a powerful, centralized kingdom with an economy built on the gold trade. It traded gold for salt from the Sahara Desert. Its smiths used iron to make the tools and weapons that enabled it to maintain control over neighboring peoples. Other African kingdoms of which there is knowledge include Mali, Songhay, and Great Zimbabwe; all of which flourished between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.

The Atlantic Slave Trade

The Atlantic slave trade, which operated between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, had a dramatic and tragic impact on the African continent. More than 15 million Africans were captured and held for months chained side by side in tiny, dirty cells before being shipped across the Atlantic Ocean in equally squalid conditions to be sold into slavery in the Americas. Families were torn apart—husbands, wives, and children sold to separate owners in different geographic areas. Today, Brazil has the largest population of people of African descent outside of Africa; the United States is second.

The Atlantic slave trade formed an economic triangle among Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Guns, textiles, and other

goods were sent from Europe to Africa, where they were traded for slaves. The slaves were shipped to the Americas, where they provided labor for cotton, sugar, and tobacco plantations. The European colonies in the Americas provided raw materials to Europe for manufacturing.

The Colonial Period¹⁸

The Atlantic slave trade ended in the nineteenth century, but Africa was not yet free of European interference. Africa's colonial period extended from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Although European nations had been involved in African affairs for centuries, they did not impose European administrators and European laws on Africans until this time period.

THE END OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE*

The Atlantic slave trade officially ended in the early nineteenth century, after more than four hundred years of operation. Olaudah Equiano played an important role in bringing about the change. Equiano was born in what is now Nigeria and taken to the Americas as a slave. He was eventually able to buy his freedom. He told about his experiences of being captured and being a slave in a book published in 1789. Equiano's book, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, was translated into various languages and read throughout Europe and the Americas. It profoundly affected public opinion about the slave trade.

Haiti, located on the western third of the island of Hispaniola, also played an important role in ending the slave trade. In 1791, Haiti's nearly half-million slaves revolted under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, an ex-slave. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti became the first black republic in the world in 1804 and the first country in the Americas to abolish slavery. The events in Haiti made people everywhere in the Americas realize that the system of slavery could be attacked and dismantled.

* Adapted from Michigan State University's Matrix project: Exploring Africa, Unit Two, Module 7B, Activity One, at <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum/>.

In a space of about twenty-five years (1885–1910), Great Britain, France, Portugal, Germany, Spain, and Italy divided Africa among themselves; by the beginning of World War I, only Ethiopia and Liberia remained free of European rule. Political and economic control was justified by claims of cultural superiority; Europeans saw it as their responsibility to “civilize” Africans.

The colonization of Africa aided Christian missionary activity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, about 5 percent of Africans identified themselves as Christian; today, 50 percent call themselves Christians. (Islamic missions were aided by colonialism as well.) The decrease in the number of self-identified followers of indigenous religions has been proportional.

Although they opposed certain particularly reprehensible aspects of colonialism, most Christian missionaries gave at least tacit support to the colonization of African countries. They believed that European control would facilitate missionary efforts. Sadly, their support for colonialism legitimated it in the eyes of many Europeans who believed that missionaries would not be involved in anything that was wrong.

The negative effects of colonialism are obvious and result in the creation of the following: national boundaries that have little or no relationship to ethnic boundaries; an economy geared to export rather than to the needs of the local populace; an infrastructure geared toward the needs of the occupying nation rather than toward the movements of the indigenous population; undemocratic forms of government; an emphasis on “law and order” at the expense of education, housing, and health care; exploitation of natural resources; deplorable labor conditions combined with low wages; disruption of extended families; dismantling of native political structures; and so on.

Resistance to Colonial Rule

Early resistance to colonial rule was sometimes led by indigenous religious leaders, as was the case in the Chimurenga Resistance in Zimbabwe. The British South African Company

colonized Zimbabwe in the early 1890s and took control of the best land of the Shona and Ndebele peoples. Led by traditional religious leaders in both instances, the two ethnic groups staged separate armed uprisings in 1896 and 1897. The British South African Company exercised brutal force to regain control.

The Maji Maji Uprising in Tanganyika (East Africa) in 1905 was led by indigenous prophet Kinjikitile Ngwale, after German colonizers had imposed forced labor and oppressive taxes. Ngwale asked his followers to apply holy water (*maji* in the local language) to their bodies to protect themselves from bullets from the Germans' guns. This uprising gained quite a bit of momentum and posed a serious challenge before it was put down.

Religious leaders continued to lead resistance movements as the twentieth century wore on, but later leaders came from Christian churches or African Independent Churches rather than from indigenous religions. By 1966, most of the nations of Africa had gained independence from colonial rule.

AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGION TODAY

In Africa

As a result of the combined pressures of colonialism, modernization, and Christian (and to a lesser extent Muslim) missions, the number of practitioners of indigenous religion declined in Africa in the twentieth century. More than half of the people of Africa practiced an indigenous religion in 1900; only 30 to 40 percent do so today. Even today, however, the percentage rises to perhaps 70 percent if one includes those who occasionally practice. The majority of converts to Christianity or Islam are not purists: They not only engage in indigenous practices occasionally but also continue to be informed daily by the worldview of African indigenous religion. The institutional and social structures of African indigenous religion have weakened in many parts of Africa, but indigenous religion remains the spiritual background of all Africans no matter where or whether they attend religious services. Simply by

virtue of the fact that they are culturally and philosophically Africans, they continue to believe in at least certain elements of African indigenous religion.

Growth in what are called African Independent Churches (AICs) has accelerated in recent decades. AICs have split off from missionary-led Christian churches to form separate churches that are run by Africans. Although technically Christian, many AICs incorporate indigenous religious elements (prophecy, spirit possession, permission for polygamy, and female circumcision, for example). Indigenous religions are seeing a decline in professed adherents, and Christianity is seeing an increase in indigenous influences.

VODOU

Vodou is an indigenous West African religion that came to the Americas with the slave trade. The word “vodou” is of uncertain derivation, but it probably comes from the Fon word for “spirit.” Anthropologists estimate that vodou is somewhere between six thousand and ten thousand years old.

Those who practice vodou believe in a good and powerful God and in a set of subordinate spirits called *loa*. The *loa* are intermediaries between God and people. Some of the *loa* are ancestors. The older ancestors are believed to have lived in Africa, but the newer ones are said to be from someplace in the Americas. Each person is also said to have a *met tet* (“master of the head” in Creole French), a *loa* who exercises a role similar to that of a guardian angel.

During vodou public ceremonies, there is singing and dancing to the accompaniment of drums. Some of the dancers go into a trance and are possessed by one of the *loa*. The *loa* are believed to communicate with living humans by speaking through the possessed dancer.

Many people associate vodou with hoodoo magic, dolls with pins stuck in them, and zombies. Except in Hollywood, none of these perceptions are very important to ordinary believers in vodou. Hoodoo is a type of African folk magic that operates independently of vodou or any other African religion. “Voodoo dolls” are derived from dolls used in European folk magic. Africans began to make voodoo dolls when their carvings of *loa* were taken away from

In the Americas

In the Americas, African-derived religions are growing. Indigenous religions brought across the Atlantic Ocean by slaves were combined with the religious traditions of the slaves' owners. This was especially true in Central and South America, where Roman Catholicism was dominant. The evangelical Christians of the United States were opposed to *syncretism* (fusion of two or more sets of beliefs); they attempted to eradicate indigenous practices. The Caribbean Islands and Brazil, in particular, were centers of religious syncretism and innovation.

The religion of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and surrounding areas is called Ifa. Santeria, which evolved in Cuba and is now

them by slave traders or slaveowners. They turned to the European dolls as a substitute.

Vodou considers a zombie to be a person whose soul has been fractured and partially stolen. Vodou believes in a multipartite soul: Each person participates in the universal soul, has an individual soul that maintains the life of the body, and has a soul that is the repository of his or her personality and spirit. It is the last of these that has been stolen from the zombie by an evildoer. Practitioners of vodou believe that zombies exist, but they do not create them. They might try to help someone who has been turned into a zombie, but a legitimate vodou priest or priestess would never attempt to harm someone in this way.

Many of the ill-founded beliefs that people have about vodou are the result of negative propaganda that began when Africans were slaves. Slaveowners knew that indigenous African religious beliefs fueled a sense of pride and rebelliousness in their slaves. In order to ensure obedience and humility, they destroyed all vodou altars and ritual instruments, murdered vodou priests and priestesses, forcibly baptized slaves, and punished those who were caught practicing any religion other than Christianity. Religion is the soul of a people, and if you wish to break a people's spirit you must first destroy their religion. The slaveowners understood this principle, and therefore they maligned African indigenous religion.

found in Los Angeles, Miami, and New York, is an Ifa-derived religion. In nearby Benin, 65 to 70 percent of the population practices vodou;¹⁹ the government of Benin formally recognized vodou as its official religion in 1989. African slaves brought vodou with them to Brazil, Haiti, Cuba, and Louisiana.

The religion of the Bantu people gave rise to the religion known in the New World as Kongo or Umbanda. Bantu-derived religion is found primarily in Brazil and Cuba. The Bantu people live in the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Angola, an area once frequented by Portuguese slave traders who transported their slaves to Brazil.

**INDIGENOUS
RELIGIONS**





This fort, on the Narmada River in central India, was built by Gond kings in the seventeenth century in response to invading Mongol forces. The Gond kingdom ruled central India from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries, and today the Gonds are India's largest indigenous group, residing in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Orissa.



The Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe flourished in Africa between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries and was home to the Shona people. This carving, circa eleventh to thirteenth century, was found at the ruins of Great Zimbabwe and is thought to represent a mythical eagle that carried messages from the gods. The ruins at Great Zimbabwe, which date between 400 and 1400 C.E., are the oldest and largest structures in sub-Saharan Africa, covering some 1,800 acres.



Uluru, the world's second-largest monolith, is located in Northern Territory, central Australia, and is sacred to the Aborigines. In 1985, the Australian government returned Uluru to a group of Aborigines known as the Anangu, who, in turn, leased it to the government to use as a national park for ninety-nine years.



Aborigine cave drawings abound in Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory, Australia. Aboriginal painters have traditionally used pigments made from rock, clay, and charcoal to create such figures as the Mimi, who are slender, stick-like spirit beings.



Inukshuks are stone representations of a person and are highly revered by the Inuit. They serve several functions: they guide travelers, are used to drive game animals, memorialize loved ones, and are message centers to warn of dangers. This inukshuk is located near Pond Inlet on Baffin Island, Nunavut Territory, Canada.



This Mayan fresco of a war dates to approximately 790 C.E. and is located in a Mayan tomb in Bonampak, Mexico, near the Guatemalan border. Bonampak was a prominent Mayan city from the sixth through the eighth century C.E. and was rediscovered by American photographer Giles Healy in 1946.



Incan ruins on Isla del Sol, Bolivia. Isla del Sol, or Island of the Sun, is located within Lake Titicaca—South America’s largest lake—and is a sacred site for the Quechuas, the descendants of the Incas. According to tradition, several Incan deities, including Manco Capac, the first emperor of the Incan Empire and the son of the deity Viracocha, were born on this island.



Alpacas are raised by the Quechuas but are not beasts of burden like the llama; these camel-like animals are specifically raised to provide wool for blankets and ponchos.

4

Australian Aboriginal Peoples

*Our story is in the land...
it is written in those sacred places...
My Children will look after those places, that's the law.*

—Bill Neidjie, Kakadu Elder

INTRODUCTION

Australia is an island continent; in land area, it is the sixth-largest country in the world. Its distinctive and dramatic landscape stands at the center of the indigenous religion of the Australian Aborigines. The states and territories of Australia are Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia. The remote interior, or outback, is primarily desert. The grasslands of eastern Australia are covered with many sheep ranches and a smaller number of cattle ranches. As an island nation, Australia has many beautiful beaches and its own unique wildlife, including kangaroos and koalas. Its major industries are mining and farming. Although much of its land is too dry to grow crops, sugarcane, wheat, and grapes are grown in some areas, and there is a burgeoning wine industry. In recent decades, the large and prosperous mining industry has frequently come into conflict with native land claims.

Australian Aborigines are the descendants of the people who inhabited Australia prior to the arrival of the Europeans. The word *aborigine* comes from two Latin words (*ab* and *origio*) and literally means “from the source, root” or “from the beginning.” Because the word was first used by Europeans and because it was not a native word, some Aboriginal people object to it. They prefer to be called *Kooris* or *Murris*. These terms, although native, belong to specific indigenous languages and, at the time of writing, have not been universally adopted by Australia’s indigenous people. Consequently, it seems best to continue to use the terms *Australian Aborigines* and *Aboriginal Australians* for the present.

The Aborigines make up 89 percent of Australia’s indigenous people; the other 11 percent are Torres Strait Islanders. The term *indigenous Australians* is used to refer to the two groups combined. There are numerous variations in beliefs and practices among different Aboriginal groups, but these differences are much less significant than those between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. For that reason, this chapter deals solely with Australian Aboriginal religion.



Aborigines, who make up between 2 and 2.5 percent of the population of Australia, live in every state and territory of this island continent.

The size of the Aboriginal population at the time of the first European contact (in the late eighteenth century) is uncertain but estimates range from 300,000 at the conservative end to more than one million. Many scholars now use an estimate of

about 750,000. This population declined dramatically in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the past twenty years, a change in social attitudes and political activism and a broader definition of Aboriginal origin have led to an increase in the number of people who identify themselves as Aboriginal.

In the latter part of 2004, there were approximately 20 million people in Australia. Between 400,000 and 450,000 or 2 to 2.4 percent of the total population, were Aborigines. (In comparison, approximately 1.5 percent of the population of the United States is Native American, and about 4 percent of Canadians are natives.)

Australia's Aborigines are a dispersed population: They live in every state and territory of Australia, in both urban environments and remote locations. Most of Australia's population is concentrated along the eastern seaboard and the southwestern coast, but the Aboriginal population is more widespread. A higher proportion than in the general population live in areas classified as remote (9 percent) or very remote (18 percent). Among Australia's states and territories, New South Wales has the largest number of Aborigines; however, Aborigines constitute the highest percentage of the population in the Northern Territory.

It is important to remember that *Australian Aborigine* is a general term that includes hundreds of groups spread across an area the size of the continental United States. They have names like Warliri, Wangkangurru, Iwaidja, Ngiyaampaa, Marrkula, Yolngu, Yuin-Monaro, Butchulla, and Ngarrindjeri. These different peoples have different languages and customs. Although there are enough similarities to make it possible to talk in general terms about Aboriginal religion, it should be kept in mind that each of the various groups has its own stories, sacred land forms, dances, kinship systems, art motifs, and ceremonies.

Many contemporary Aborigines share the religious beliefs and practices introduced by Europeans more than two centuries ago. There remains, however, a deep religious connection to the land, to ancestors, kin, and culture. This chapter focuses on indigenous Aboriginal religion, but it concludes with a brief look at the

synthesis between Christianity and Aboriginal religion that has developed in parts of Australia.

ORIGINS

Aborigines have lived in Australia for at least forty thousand years. Since the 1990s, some archaeologists have argued that human remains found in the Lake Mungo area are at least sixty thousand years old. Even assuming a conservative estimate of forty thousand years of residence, the Aborigines are possibly the world's oldest continuous culture.

Scholars believe that the Aborigines came to Australia from somewhere in southeastern Asia. During the last ice age, the oceans were lower because of the amount of water locked up in glaciers. New Guinea was part of the continent of Australia, and more land was likely exposed in other parts of the region as well. At that time, a series of short, one-day rides on a raft could have brought a small group of persons from southeastern Asia to Australia.

The Australian Aborigines form a distinct racial group. This fact has allowed both Brazilian and American researchers to independently conclude that humans similar to the Aborigines were among the first humans in the New World.²⁰ These proto-Americans likely would have entered the New World around thirteen thousand years ago.

The Australian Aborigines gave the world its earliest known human cremations, some of its earliest rock art, and its first boomerangs, ground axes, and grindstones. Other precontact tools included knives, scrapers, spears, digging sticks, and vessels for eating and drinking. Precontact Aborigines hunted with spears and fished with spears and fish traps (rockbound enclosures that stood above the water level at low tide). They were entirely a hunting and gathering population, meaning that they did not cultivate crops or raise domesticated animals. Partly for this reason, the European colonists (who began to settle in Australia at the end of the eighteenth century) considered them a “backward” people. Although they did not cultivate grains, they made a

kind of flour from various native plants, and it should be noted that Euro-Australians never domesticated the native animals of Australia (kangaroos, wombats, and opossums, for example) either. The Europeans simply imported sheep and cattle.

Because precontact Aborigines were strictly a hunting and gathering people, survival depended on knowledge of and respect for the life cycles of the native plants and animals. This respect for all life was viewed as necessary for the continuance of life, and it forms the basis of Aborigine religion.

MYTHOLOGY

Indigenous Australians have preserved and passed on their environmental knowledge, social mores, and ethical codes by means of storytelling. In an *oral culture*, mythology is the primary means of education. This may seem like a fragile way to preserve wisdom, but Aborigine stories have transmitted the culture for tens of thousands of years. There are no written documents about which a similar claim can be made. Indigenous peoples instinctively look to their traditional stories and rituals to heal individuals and communities damaged by cultural fragmentation. The spoken word is the umbilical cord of the spirit of a people, feeding each generation with more than bread. Sever the cord of the stories and the people will disappear, because the word is life.

A child who did not hear the stories would not learn the location of water holes and springs, because many of the stories follow a sequence from one landmark to another, telling the story of how each came to be. Without knowing where to find water in a dry year, a person could not survive in the arid parts of Australia. Without the stories, a child would not learn the habits and behavior of the animals and could not become a successful hunter. Without seeing the consequences of bad behavior as they unfold in the story, a child would not learn how to behave properly. The stories teach the survival and social skills that make up Aborigine culture, and a child who does not hear the stories will grow up literally uncivilized and uncultured.

The stories tell of the ancestor spirits who created the land, plants, and animals. They tell about the negative consequence of refusing to share and stirring up trouble. Using animal characters, they talk about love and loss, and the consequences of not obeying the elders. They tell how attentiveness to the animals can save entire villages from disaster, because animals often know when danger is approaching before people can hear or see it. Finally, the stories reinforce the idea that the sacred not only created the land and the forms of life that live on it but also continues to live in them. For that reason, the land and all life is to be treated with respect.

Australian Aborigine stories belong to the group of people who live in the area in which the stories take place. The stories belong to the whole group (they are not individually owned), but certain people act as “custodians” of certain stories. The custodian has the right to tell his or her stories, and he or she has the responsibility of handing them on to the next generation. Well into the twentieth century, Aborigines were discouraged from telling their stories because white Australians thought that they were nonsense. Today, the stories are being recorded and preserved.

The Australian Museum, in Sydney, has a Website that features twenty Aborigine stories as told by their custodians. The storytellers have been videotaped and audio taped, and it is possible to see and hear them as they tell their stories and to see some of the surrounding landscape. There is also a text version of each story. In addition to all its other benefits, this Website enables one to learn the correct pronunciation of many Aborigine words. The Website is called “Indigenous Australia”; the URL for the page with the stories is <http://www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm>.

WORLDVIEW

The Dreaming

The central concept of the indigenous Australian worldview is the *Dreaming*, alternatively referred to as the Dreamtime. The Dreaming is a rich term with several different meanings. First,

it is the Aboriginal word for the time of creation, the time when the land, plants, animals, and humans were created. Second, the Dreaming refers to the spiritual dimension of contemporary life, to the truth or reality that is responsible for both the world and its unfolding events, and yet somehow is hidden from sight and obscured by the world so that it is only apparent to those whose spiritual eyes are opened. Third, the Dreaming is the source of all life, both “in the beginning” and now. Because its creative energies can be tapped into, it is the source of all healing and renewal of life. Everything owes both its present and continued existence to the power of the Dreaming.

According to Aboriginal mythology, in the beginning, Earth was a flat plain, devoid of the hills and outcroppings and streams that make up what we call a landscape. Then the ancestral spirits rose up from within the earth and moved across the land, creating rivers, lakes, and mountains as they journeyed the length and breadth of Australia. They brought things into being by naming them. Their words joined together into verses and songs, and they sang mountains, streams, and deserts into existence. The ancestral spirits also created plants and animals. They laid down the laws that humans and all creatures were to follow. At the end of their journeys, the ancestors entered landforms, plants, or animals, but they left their songs behind, crisscrossing the countryside like a giant web. Today, Australian Aborigines know particular *song lines* by memory; these song lines describe, in sequential order, the sacred sites situated along the path taken by an ancestral spirit as it moved across the landscape. Each group exercises custody over a particular song line. They protect the area to which the song line refers (and its flora and fauna), and they are the custodians of the stories that relate what happened as the ancestor spirits traveled along that song line. An Aborigine child’s inheritance consists of a particular area and the right to hunt and gather there, but just as important, it includes the song line of that area.

Thus, each Aborigine group owns a certain segment of the creation story and has the right to tell the associated segment of

creation. "Property rights" include the right to gather, hunt, and fish, and also the right to tell the stories and express the spiritual aspects of that part of the Australian landscape in art. There were no wars of expansion or conquest in precontact Australia.

Each person is believed to be a partial incarnation of an ancestor. People are thought to have two souls, one derived from the human parents and the other derived from the totemic ancestor. Only the latter is immortal, and it returns at death to the sacred realm of the Dreaming. It remains there until it again takes form in the world as an animal or a human. Life as we know it would not be possible without the continued activity of the ancestors.

The greatest of the ancestral spirits is the *Rainbow Serpent*, a motif that has been continuously portrayed in rock art from six thousand years ago until today. The Rainbow Serpent dwells in billabongs (backwaters or stagnant pools), streams, and lagoons. Its body shines like quartz and shimmers like mother of pearl. It is associated with fertility, blood, and water and therefore with life itself. It is the source of all life and the preserver of the land and its people. If it is not properly respected, however, the Rainbow Serpent turns into a destructive force.

Each Aborigine group considers itself related to a particular plant or animal, usually an animal. This animal is the group's totem. An Aborigine never kills or eats his totem, because that is the equivalent of eating his own kin. Rather, each half of a totemic relationship is expected to protect the other. This explains an incident in which a European had his firearm trained on a raven and an Aborigine stepped into the line of fire, thereby protecting the bird with his own body, and said "him brother." The raven was the man's totem, and he was required to do everything possible to protect him. The raven was expected to return the favor with advance warnings of danger and other messages from the spirit world.

The Dreaming is central to indigenous Australian lifestyle and culture. It not only explains creation, it also determines an Aborigine's relationship to every living creature and to every feature of the land. It permeates song, dance, mime, storytelling

and ritual, painting and art, custom and law, property rights, and kinship relations. It provides the framework for all of Aboriginal life.

The Land

The land is the heart of indigenous Australian religion. Aborigines cannot truly practice their religion without the restoration of their land. Aboriginal groups are tied to specific song lines and sacred sites; they are the custodians of the associated stories and the protectors of that specific area and its forms of life. They believe that a certain tract of land is their inheritance and that they were appointed, from the time of creation, to be its protectors. There is a circle of mutual service: The people take care of the land, and the land provides for the people. Before the European conquest, there was no individual land ownership; the group as a whole had custody of the land. Land could not be purchased for money: It was a trust and an inheritance. The land was given by the ancestors, and it bestowed an Aborigine's sense of identity.

The Aborigines not only believe that their land was given to them by the ancestors, they believe that the land *is* the ancestors. When a person dies, his or her spirit is placed inside a tree. There, the spirit lives on, guiding the people from its new habitation. When forests are destroyed, the spirits have no place to go, and then both the people and the land become spiritually sick—their spirit has been stolen.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND PRACTICES

Religious Specialists

All Aborigines have direct access to the Dreaming by performing the right songs and rituals at sacred sites. Because all Aborigines can connect to the sacred realm directly, they have less need for religious specialists than do most other cultures. Everyone acquires knowledge of creation, sacred sites, healing, and so on by learning the Dreaming stories. Stories might be restricted to a certain audience (both genders have stories that could only be

told to members of the same gender), but they are still basically part of public versus professional knowledge.

A few religious specialists do exist. *Shamans* are initiated into their role by older shamans, and they work to reduce the chaos caused by magic. Initiation rites were (and sometimes still are) conducted by elders of the same gender as the person being initiated.

Initiation

The most important ritual is initiation; it marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Initiations take place at sacred sites used solely for this purpose. The initiation grounds have two circles that are drawn on the earth or outlined by rocks, and the circles are connected by a path. Symbols are drawn on

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SACRED PLACES

The following words are part of a statement by Cliff Humphries, a Nyoongar Aborigine born in 1910. Humphries goes on to speak about the way in which his people used to “spirit talk” before the white men arrived. While walking through the forest, they would ask the spirits for gray kangaroo meat or healing. Humphries poses the question of where the Nyoongar’s spirit will go when the white men have completely destroyed the wild forest. He answers that it will be finished: “The white men are stealing our spirit.”

Before the coming of the Wadjalla, our forests played an important part in our spiritual well-being, identity and survival. The spirits of our dead were placed inside both dead and living trees. Our capacity to hunt, seek healing and communicate spiritually was dependent upon our practices of putting into and returning to our country, the spirit of our people from where it had come. The Nyoongar forests are sacred to us. These places of old forest, untouched by the Wadjalla, were and continue to remain spiritual reservoirs. The destruction of these very sacred places will destroy links to our ancestors which in turn will eliminate our capacity to remain spiritually healthy.*

* From accounts recorded by Tim McCabe: <http://www.schools.wafa.org.au/nyoongar.htm>.

the ground surrounding the circles and carved into nearby trees. The symbols play an important role in the ceremonies, and they also serve to warn women, uninitiated boys, and those who are not members of the group to stay away from the sacred initiation grounds.

Boys begin the process of initiation, which extends over several years, when they are seven or eight years old. As time goes on, the boys gradually learn the stories, history, and customs of their group. Their teachers are initiated males. Initiation typically involves several of the following: circumcision, knocking out of a tooth, elaborate scarification (making cuts on the body that heal as raised scars), periods of fasting and solitude, and the ceremonial decoration of the body using sacred cosmetics.

Traditionally, girls entering puberty are prepared for marriage by their mothers and other women. Puberty rites include ritual bathing, isolation, and food taboos. In precontact Australia, girls were married as soon as they reached puberty.

Tjurunga

Just as certain parts of the landscape are believed to be charged with sacred presence and energy, so are sacred objects (the bullroarer and the *didgeridoo*, for example). Sacred objects are known as *tjurunga*. They serve as channels of interconnection among the various levels of the cosmos—that is, they connect the ordinary world to the Dreaming. The purpose of Aboriginal rituals is to channel the sacred in such a way that it can sustain and uphold the community and the natural world. The *tjurunga* are important instruments used to accomplish this goal.

Corroborees

Sacred celebrations are known as *corroborees*. Corroborees feature singing, dancing, and mime, all of which are accompanied by drums, a didgeridoo, or simply the beating of sticks. The mime may portray ancestral stories or perhaps the events of a particular hunt are acted out as a way to show respect for

the life of the animal. Dancers paint their bodies with symbols or with the creature they represent. The festivities may continue for weeks.

Aborigines believe that they have a sacred commission to be the caretakers and protectors of the land. This does not mean that they are not allowed to harvest and use Earth's resources; it simply means that they must respect the sacred nature of the land and not desecrate it. Honoring the spirit of an animal killed in the hunt is one way to show respect. Another example is the making of a didgeridoo, the native musical instrument often played at corroborees. A didgeridoo is a wind instrument made from long hollow tree limbs. It is possible to make a didgeridoo from a solid log that is hollowed out by a machine; didgeridoos made in the traditional way are fashioned from a tree limb that has been hollowed out by termites. The termite channels create the unique sound of each instrument. Experienced native craftsmen select the limbs with the best sounds and finish them by hand.

GROWING UP IN ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

A child raised in a traditional Australian household is educated by means of stories. From the stories, he or she learns about the landforms and forms of life, where to find food and water, and how to behave. Important values include taking care of the land and respecting all forms of life. Children learn the laws of their tribe through stories that tell about misbehavior and its consequences. Precontact Aborigines did not utilize corporal punishment or imprisonment, but stories about evil spirits were sometimes used to underscore the necessity of good behavior. Stories were told while on a trip to fetch water, when traveling past sacred sites, or while sitting around the fire in the evening.

Aboriginal society centers on family relationships, but the concept of family is not that of the nuclear family. In Western society, the family is a small unit set apart from the rest of society by clearly defined boundaries, but in Aboriginal society, family extends throughout all human society (and even beyond,

because a group's totem animal is also considered family). In this extended family, kinship terms are also extended. An Aboriginal child calls his or her mother's sister *mother* (not *aunt*) and his or her father's brother would be *father* (not *uncle*). Likewise grandfather's brother is *grandfather* and so on. Then, because father's brother is *father*, his son is *brother* (not *cousin*) and likewise mother's sister's children are not *cousins* but *brothers* and *sisters*. A brother's children, in the case of a man, are not his nephews and nieces but his *children*. For a woman, her sister's children are *sons* and *daughters* to her. The children of a man's sister, however, are his nephews and nieces, and the children of a woman's brother are her nephews and nieces.

In precontact Australia, children played games to develop survival skills. Dividing into teams and kicking balls taught individual agility and group cooperation. Children threw sticks in anticipation of the day when they would throw spears. Drawing animal tracks developed observation skills and helped young men prepare to hunt. (Aborigines were so skilled as hunters that Europeans often used them to track escaped convicts and criminals.)

All initiated males were considered equals: No adult male was granted rule or authority over another. There were people who had special skills and were considered authorities in a particular area (healing, for example), but there were no elected leaders. People generally asked elders for advice. Elders settled disputes and decided when the group would move camp and when ceremonies would be held. Generally, however, the elder functioned more like a wise man than a ruler. In traditional Aboriginal society, females did not act as elders. They did function as midwives and as experts on matters related to women. More recently, women have been accepted as elders.

Ancestors remain a source of wisdom and comfort even after death. Robert Bropho, custodian of the values of Nyoongar spirituality for the Swan Valley Nyoongar Community, in Western Australia, describes how a person with a problem may lay down on the ground near the grave of his or her mother or father. Perhaps the person will spend the entire night there, if it is a

serious problem. The concern is shared with the spirit of the dead parent in the belief that both wisdom and relaxation will arrive by morning.²¹

DEFINING MOMENTS IN ABORIGINAL HISTORY

First Contact with Europeans

European explorers in many parts of the world were initially welcomed by indigenous people. In Australia, however, conflict and resistance began almost immediately. Understanding the Aborigines' reaction requires some understanding of Aboriginal law, which required a person who did not belong to a certain area to request permission to enter it. An Aborigine could not simply wander onto the territory of a different Aboriginal group. This was considered trespassing, and it could result in the trespasser's death.

If an Aborigine wanted to visit another area, he or she carried a message stick—a piece of bark or wood decorated with certain symbols. The inhabitants of the area would come to meet the traveler, and they would communicate in either verbal or sign language, after which permission to enter would be given or denied. To simply cross a boundary line into the territory of another group without this communication was considered an act of hostility and such an action would likely result in a war.

Captain James Cook entered Australia's Botany Bay in 1770. In his journal, he described how the indigenous people threw stones at the *Endeavour* (Cook's ship) in an attempt to drive it away.²² The indigenous response to Cook's attempt to land makes sense given what we now know about Aboriginal law. These first Europeans to enter the territory of an Aboriginal group were committing an act defined by Aboriginal law as trespassing. This first crime was compounded by the disrespect shown by cutting trees and shooting animals.

Contrary to the wishes of the Aborigines, the British stayed. They used Botany Bay as a penal colony. The first officers and convicts arrived in 1788 and numerous conflicts with the Aborigines occurred that year. The British were harboring a

(continued on page 78)

SEPARATION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN FROM THEIR HOMES

As early as 1814, a school for Aboriginal children was established in Australia. When the local Aboriginal population learned that the school distanced the children from their families and communities, they refused to send them to the school, forcing its closure in 1820.

By the end of the nineteenth century, governors and so-called “Protection Boards” had been granted the power to remove Aboriginal children from their homes and place them in reformatories, industrial schools, dormitories, or apprenticeships. Between 1897 and 1965, the “chief protector,” or the director of native welfare, was the legal guardian of all indigenous children, independent of whether the parents were living or dead. Children could be removed from their homes by force and without a court hearing.

In the 1980s, the first large-scale attempts were made to link separated children to their families of origin, most of whom had no idea what had happened to their children. In 1995, the government of Australia launched the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (the Inquiry). The Inquiry was a long-overdue study of the long-term effects of separation from family. It tracked the history of the policies that made separation legal. The Inquiry commission also traveled to every state and territory capital in Australia, and conducted hearings in which evidence was received from indigenous people, government representatives, church and mission staff, foster parents and adoptive parents, medical and health professionals, academics, and police. These efforts resulted in the *Bringing Them Home* report issued in 1997.

The Inquiry interviewed people who had been put into an institution or mission dormitory, as well as those who had been placed in foster homes or adopted. They found that more than half (56 percent) of those removed from their homes as children had experienced multiple placements. Assimilation was the goal, and that meant erasure of whatever indigenous culture, language, and customs the child had learned in its Aboriginal home. Children were discouraged from seeing their families or were even forbidden to do so. One interviewee discovered letters that she and others had written to their families in a garbage bin. Many children were lied to and told that they were not wanted, that they had been rejected, or that their parents were dead.

Missions, government institutions, and children’s homes often lacked the resources to adequately clothe, feed, and shelter their charges. One interviewee reported crying at night with hunger, eating

old bread from the town dump, and smashing tomato sauce bottles to lick the remnants. In addition, most institutions inflicted severe punishments for breaking rules.

Parents were promised that their children would get a good education, but the education they received was training for menial labor. Children were often placed in work situations by the authorities, but they did not receive wages. Wages were to be held in trust until the children reached 21 years of age, but there were widespread reports that the children never received the money.

Almost a quarter of those who had been placed in foster homes or adopted reported being physically assaulted in their placements, and one in six institutionalized children reported similar attacks. Reports of sexual abuse were also higher among placed children than among those who remained institutionalized: 1 in 5 fostered or adopted children reported sexual abuse, and 1 in 10 reported being sexually abused in institutions. The welfare officials who placed indigenous children often failed to protect them from these abuses. Still, although reports of abuses were higher among those who had been placed in homes, so were reports of feeling welcomed and happy. Those placed in homes found themselves in either the best or the worst of the situations, and institutions occupied a middle position.

The removal of indigenous Australian children from their families was undertaken with the stated intent of improving their lives, but no long-term studies had been undertaken to show whether the program was effective. A 1994 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey found that twice as many indigenous people who were removed from their families as those not separated from their families were likely to state that they were not in good health.* People who had been separated from their families as children were not better educated, not more likely to be employed, and not earning higher incomes than people who were raised in Aboriginal communities. Those separated as children were twice as likely to have been arrested more than once in the preceding five years.** By 1999, mandatory sentencing laws in Western Australia and the Northern Territory had become a national issue, with many calling for repeal of these laws because they affected indigenous children disproportionately.

* Approximately 30 percent of those separated reported poor or only fair health as compared with approximately 15 percent of those who were not separated.

** Approximately 20 percent of those separated had multiple arrests in the preceding five years. In the same time period, approximately 10 percent of those not separated had been arrested more than once.

(continued from page 75)

deadly secret weapon unbeknownst to them: In 1789, smallpox decimated the coastal Aborigines and began to spread inland. Conflicts between the British and the Aborigines continued, and in 1790 Governor Arthur Phillip ordered the first punitive expedition; its target was an Aboriginal resistance fighter named *Pemulwuy*.

Pemulwuy was an elusive, powerful, charismatic leader with a fierce determination to drive out the European settlers who had invaded his land, killed his people, and restricted his people's food sources. With a fighting force of more than one hundred warriors, Pemulwuy planned and executed guerilla attacks against European settlements. Pemulwuy was wounded and captured in 1797, but he escaped. He was eventually shot and captured in 1802, and he died of his wounds shortly thereafter. The British thought that no one would believe that the great and elusive Pemulwuy was dead without proof, so they removed his head from his body and preserved it in a bottle of alcohol.

The Nineteenth Century:

Miscarriages of Justice and Racial Violence

The growing British colonies continued to dispossess Aborigines of their land. The British government viewed the confiscated land as British land because Captain Cook had taken possession of it in the name of the British crown. The British tried to stop what they viewed as unwarranted killing of Aborigines—that is, they punished white settlers who killed Aborigines if the Aborigines had not attacked first. However, the British attempt to be fair was handicapped by their lack of knowledge regarding Aboriginal law and religion. The British failed to realize that most Aborigine attacks were provoked and many Aborigines killed colonists in an attempt to defend their land. Unfortunately, the British did not know of the Aboriginal partition of land as related to the Dreaming, so they did not understand the Aboriginal concept of land ownership. They believed that all of Australia was *terra nullius*, land that “does not belong to anyone.” The Aborigines were considered mere occupants (not

owners) because they had no towns, interconnecting roads, or apparent system of government, and did not grow crops. The consequences of this imposition of European law codes on indigenous Australians have involved Aboriginal peoples in fights for land rights up to the present day.

Also because of the imposition of a foreign law code on the indigenous population, Aborigines could not defend themselves in a court of law, much less have their own complaints heard. On July 20, 1805, Judge-Advocate Richard Atkins ruled that Aborigines “are at present incapable of being brought before a criminal court,”²³ and therefore the only mode of punishment, when they deserve it, is to pursue them and inflict whatever punishment they deserve. Notice how the judge’s decision eliminated any possibility of self-defense for an accused Aborigine.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the government attempted to move Aborigines off their land and settle them in locations less desirable to white settlers. The Aborigines fought for their land, but in the long run their efforts were unsuccessful and they were dispossessed. There was only one attempt to purchase land through treaty, which took place in 1835, when John Bateman attempted to trade for Port Phillip Bay. Governor Sir Richard Bourke voided the treaty, and the colonists never again offered anything in return for the land they took.

Not only were indigenous people being dispossessed of their land, they were also dying in great numbers. In 1836–1837, a select committee of the British House of Commons reported that genocide was taking place in Australia. The problem grew more severe during the period of 1837 to 1845, when a drought in northwestern New South Wales dried up creeks and water-holes, forcing Aborigines to move toward their former hunting grounds to look for food. Their hunting grounds had by that time been transformed into European settlements, and the Aborigines found nothing to hunt other than sheep and cattle. In an attempt to fend off starvation, they killed some livestock. Several massacres of Aborigines followed. In addition, some

Aborigines were poisoned when they found and used poisoned flour left in shepherds' huts. It is widely assumed that the poisoned flour was left in the huts in the expectation that Aborigines who had been forced off their hunting grounds and were starving would take it.

The British referred to the Aborigines as "blacks." British law did not countenance a different standard for black people and for white people, but racism was rampant in the populace. In the late 1830s, Aborigines were hunted like animals. In May 1838, twenty-eight Kwiambal people, mainly women and children, were murdered by a European hunting party. Eleven Europeans were tried for murder in November 1838. The chief justice cautioned the jury that "the life of a black is as precious and valuable in the eye of the law as that of the highest noble in the land."²⁴ Despite those words, and in spite of overwhelming evidence, the jury found all eleven men not guilty after fifteen minutes of deliberation. In the face of great public indignation, a second trial against seven of the men was ordered. The seven were found guilty of murder and hanged. This was the first time Europeans had been sentenced to capital punishment for the murder of Aboriginal people.

In 1848, the Board of National Education opined, "It is impractical to provide any form of education for the children of blacks."²⁵ However, the first Aboriginal children were enrolled in public schools in New South Wales in the early 1870s, and by 1880, two hundred Aboriginal children were attending school in New South Wales. The thrust of public opinion was toward segregation, however, and Aboriginal children were driven out of public schools and into separate schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Twentieth Century: Inching toward Hope

By 1920, the Aboriginal population was estimated at sixty thousand, and they were widely spoken of as a dying race. In 1937, the federal government adopted an official assimilation policy. Anyone who was only part Aborigine was to be assimilated

into white culture, whether he or she wanted to be or not. Any full-blooded Aborigines not living on a reserve were to be given an education; all others were to stay on the reserves.

Aborigines were excluded from citizenship in 1901. Almost a half century later, in 1949, the Commonwealth Electoral Act extended voting privileges to Aboriginal ex-servicemen (Aborigines had fought against the Japanese in World War II) but to no other Aborigines. The vote was not extended to all Aborigines until 1962.

Between 1953 and 1957, a series of atomic tests was conducted on Maralinga lands in South Australia while Aborigines were present on the site. Occupants saw a black cloud pass, and many people suffered eye damage and radiation sickness. This happened not once but three times. The code names for these tests were Operation Totem, Operation Buffalo, and Operation Antler.

In 1963, residents of Mapoon, Queensland, were evicted from their homes and taken to other reserves. The settlement was burned down to allow mining by Comalco, an aluminum company. Aborigines were not allowed to stop mining on their territories until 1974, when Justice Woodward finally stated the obvious: "To deny Aborigines the right to prevent mining on their land is to deny the reality of their Land Rights."²⁶

A major victory for Aboriginal people occurred in 1967, when the Commonwealth Referendum passed, ending constitutional discrimination and providing for all Aboriginal people to be counted in the national census. Nonetheless, the Queensland Aborigines Act (1971) banned Aboriginal cultural customs and allowed censorship of Aboriginal reading materials, mail, recreation, and marital and sexual relationships. It further allowed the movements of Aborigines to be recorded.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Ordinance, prohibiting trespass and desecration of Aboriginal sites, passed in 1978. In 1985, the sacred site of Uluru was handed back to its traditional owners. Uluru, a large monolith, is the most popular vacation stop in the Northern Territory. In 1992, the High Court of Australia recognized that Aborigines have land

rights. For more than two centuries, Aborigines had been removed from their land to make way for white settlers. They were not compensated for their land because white Australians did not believe that they had ever owned it.

Europeans began to settle in Australia in 1788, when Governor Phillip claimed possession of it on behalf of the British Crown. Under European law, Great Britain owned these “crown lands” as they were called. How could Great Britain claim ownership of Australia when there were people already living there? The answer to that question lies in the concept of “terra nullius,” mentioned on page 78. Under European law, the Aborigines were not considered to be owners of the land because they did not have European forms of government, law, and religion, and they did not cultivate the soil. Hence all of Australia was terra nullius, and the British Crown could claim ownership of it.

As owner, the British Crown could give or sell the lands to whomever it wished. Some of the crown lands were granted free of charge to white settlers, others were sold, and still others were leased to corporate or individual users—all of these are “alienated” lands. Today, unalienated crown lands are lands owned by the state government, including national parks and state forests. In a landmark decision in 1992 (*Eddie Mabo & Others v. The State of Queensland and The Commonwealth of Australia*), the High Court of Australia invalidated the concept of terra nullius and recognized that native title exists for unalienated crown lands, national parks, and reserves.

While the Mabo case set an important legal precedent, it only allowed Aborigines to claim land if they could prove that they had a traditional association with it. In practice, this was difficult to do, especially in the heavily colonized areas.

ABORIGINAL RELIGION TODAY

Status of Aborigines in Contemporary Australia

Today, indigenous Australians make up more than 2 percent of the Australian population. They are far more likely to have diabetes and respiratory diseases than nonindigenous Australians, and

their life expectancy is sixteen to eighteen years less. Their unemployment rate is three times the national average, and those who do have jobs earn less than two-thirds of the national average. They are eighteen times more likely to be imprisoned.

Equally as alarming as the imprisonment rates is the large number of indigenous deaths in prison: ninety-nine indigenous Australians died in prison, detention centers, or police cells between 1980 and 1989. The record number of deaths in 1987 led to a national investigation into the causes. The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody appeared in 1991. The commission did not find widespread foul play, but it did conclude that racism was the major contributing factor to deaths in custody. It also pointed out profound similarities in the lives of those who had died: nearly half had been separated from their families as children, most were unemployed, and nearly all had early and repeated contacts with the justice system. The commission found that Aboriginal people were brought into contact with the justice system more often and for lesser offenses than their white counterparts. State and territorial governments claimed that they implemented the commission's recommendations, but the ninety-six Aboriginal deaths in custody between 1989 and 1996 suggest otherwise.

The Native Title Act (1993) allowed indigenous people to apply for recognition of native title if they could demonstrate a traditional and ongoing link with the land. Native title could only be claimed after leases (for mining, for example) had expired. The Wik Decision of 1996 ruled that native title could coexist with pastoral leases. Angry pastoralists demanded complete repeal of native title. This did not happen, but there has been contention over the issue ever since. Because the land is central to Aboriginal spirituality, failure to acknowledge native title amounts to a denial of religious rights as well.

Aboriginal Art

Today, Aboriginal art is known around the world. The federal government recognizes it as a natural resource, and sales have

been lucrative for decades. This was not the case before the 1970s. At that time, Aboriginal painting was done on pieces of eucalyptus bark. These bark paintings were traditionally used for a specific ritual purpose and destroyed after the ritual was completed. In 1971, however, Aboriginal painting took a dramatic turn, thanks to a new patron.

Geoffrey Bardon taught in an Aboriginal elementary school in Papunya in central Australia, and although he was white, he had developed a close relationship with the local Aboriginal families and was invited to some of their ritual events. He had seen the designs used in body painting and ground paintings. One day, Bardon decided to assign his students a project that he hoped would strengthen their pride in their Aboriginal heritage: He told them to design and paint a wall mural about the honey-ant (the honey-ant was the most important totem in the region). Even though the children loved to draw, they did not make much progress on the mural. Bardon eventually discovered that painting the honey-ant story was itself a ritual act. It could only be done by students of a certain personal heritage and with a certain initiation status. When several local elders stepped in to help with the project, everything went more smoothly. The finished mural displayed to the world a vibrant and colorful artistic style, complete with a complex symbolic structure.

Painting and other forms of artistic expression bring economic benefits to Australia's Aborigines, but they also do much more: They empower Aborigines by allowing them to fulfill one of the main purposes for which they believe they were created. Paintings related to the Dreaming are believed to repeat the creative work of the Ancestors, thus maintaining the life of the world. Like most indigenous peoples, Aborigines take their responsibility toward the rest of the cycle of life seriously.

Aboriginal Christianity

Aboriginal evaluation of Christianity is mixed: Some believe that evangelization helped destroy native culture and others think that it enabled Aborigines to survive their terrible ordeals.

Aboriginal Christians do not necessarily sever their connections to the spiritual aspects of Aboriginal culture. Rather, they have blended their culture with Christianity to create a uniquely native Australian theology known as *Rainbow Spirit Theology*. Rainbow Spirit Theology assumes that God the Creator Spirit has been speaking through Aboriginal culture since the beginning of time. This Creator Spirit entrusted the continent of Australia to the Aboriginal people. The Rainbow Spirit is the chosen symbol of this theology because it represents life and rebirth.

Aboriginal baptisms combine the use of water (a nearly universal symbol of cleansing or purification) with the use of smoke. Smoke is seen as a purifier by many indigenous people, including the Australian Aborigines.

Christian and Aboriginal elements mingle in art, as well. A Christian cross may be surrounded by sets of footprints, the latter an Aboriginal motif, inviting speculation as to who is standing near the cross. In one painting, the energy emanating from the bread and the wine used at the Eucharist is depicted by arches and scallops that ripple outward like waves from a stone tossed into a pond. In indigenous art, crescent shapes symbolize people sitting on the ground; in nativity scenes, these figures enfold and protect the infant Jesus, who may lie in a *coolomon*, a wooden vessel with a hollowed-out center used as a crib by Aborigines. Totem or other animals may be used to symbolize Christ or the Holy Spirit. One Aboriginal woman depicted the Holy Spirit as a bird with God's blessings (portrayed as streams of drops) flowing into and out of it. The bird was the totem of the woman's people, famous for having led the people to their ancestral home by leaving trails through the desert.

Aboriginal painters employ the traditional pigments used in cave drawings to produce earthy reds and yellows, as well as black and white. The colors are bright and, when combined with the energy of the designs, they produce vibrant, vivid artwork.

5

The Inuit People of the Arctic Areas

*People come here and ask me who are the Inuit?
I don't know what they want me to say
but probably they want us to be who they think we should be?
We simply want to be who we are. Just Inuit.*

—Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

INTRODUCTION

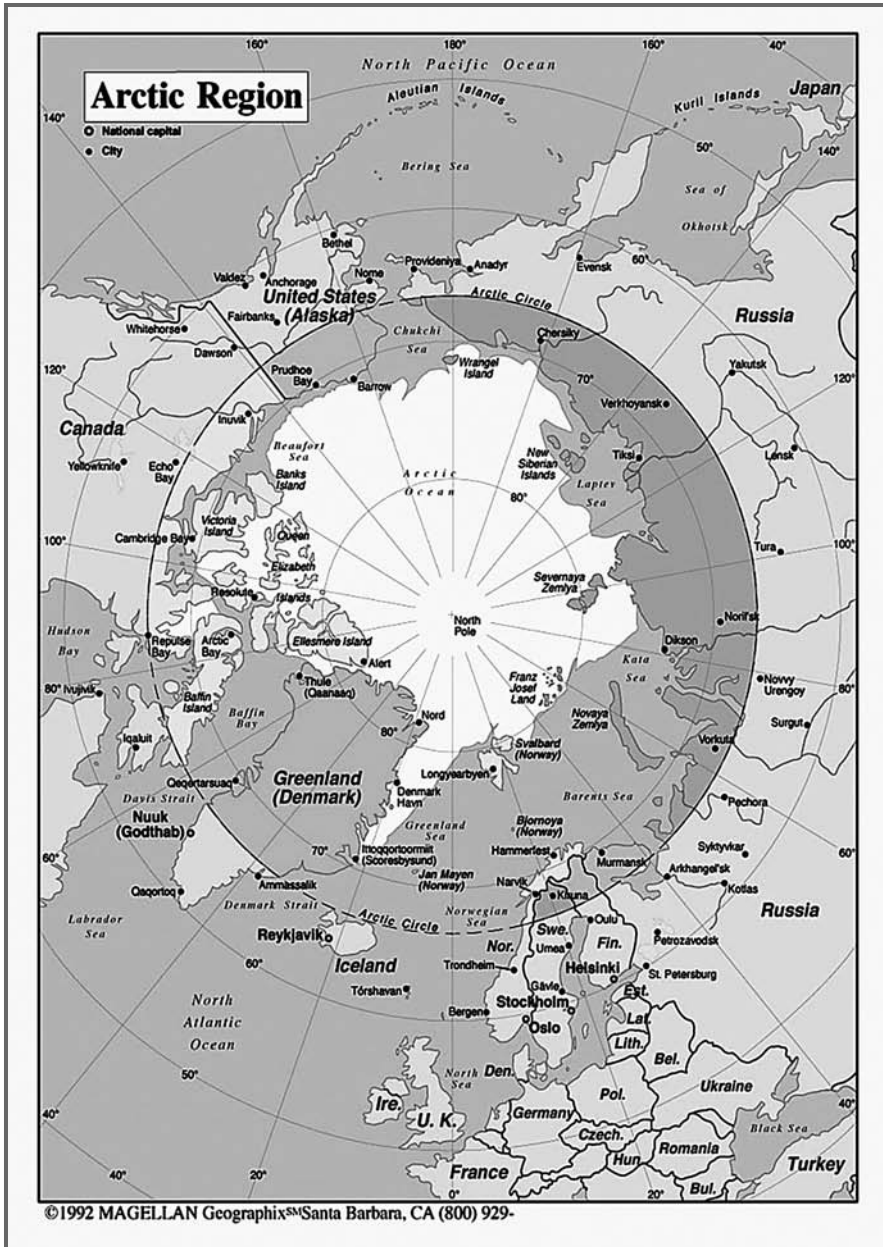
The Inuit Homeland

The Inuit live in the Arctic areas that stretch from northeastern Russia across Alaska and northern Canada to Greenland. A few mountain ranges etch a frozen path across the landscape, but much of the Arctic terrain is flat, and almost all of it is treeless. Rivers meander slowly across vast areas with little gradient. The snow and ice that melt during the brief summer pool above the soil, which is still frozen, dotting the landscape with kettle lakes and sloughs. Caribou, muskoxen, and bears have staked out a claim here. Polar bears inhabit the coastline, and grizzly bears live inland. To the north of the Arctic lands, whales, walruses, and seals surface and dive in the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean, which is located within the Arctic Circle. Waterfowl and fish abound. Even the tiny mosquito manages to survive in the far north.

The Inuit were once, and sometimes still are, called Eskimos. Eskimo is a foreign word, and *Inuit* is a native word meaning *the people*. The singular form of Inuit is *inuk*, meaning person. In past generations, the people hunted and used animal skins to make tents and clothes. In summer, they traveled in boats covered with animal skin (*kayaks*). In winter, they moved around on sleds pulled by teams of dogs. Depending on location, purpose, and time of year, dwellings consisted of tents, sod houses, or dome-shaped huts made of blocks of hard snow (igloos).

Today, the Inuit use snowmobiles and outboard motor boats. Many hunt with rifles rather than with traditional weapons and live in houses made of wood. Inuit life has changed over the past centuries, but contemporary Inuit culture remains firmly attached to the land and the Inuit are determined to maintain their language and traditional arts, customs, laws, and survival skills.

Inuit villages today may be as small as a few people or as large as a few thousand people: They are business, cultural, and educational centers. They are also places where the native language is spoken, where storytelling and drum dancing are still viable



A little less than 200,000 indigenous people occupy the Arctic lands of Greenland, northern Canada, Alaska, and the part of Russia closest to Alaska.

forms of entertainment, and where traditional arts and crafts are used to make items that are sold to tourists.

A Sacred Landscape

The Arctic terrain may appear desolate and forbidding to outsiders, but the Inuit call it *Nunatsiaq*, “the beautiful land.” To them, it is a sacred landscape, filled with places of spiritual power. The *inuksuit* (singular, *inukshuk*) that dot the landscape are examples of these places of power. You may recognize the word for person (*inuk*) in this word. An *inukshuk* is a stone representation of a person. *Inukshuk* literally means something that acts in the capacity of or performs the function of a person. *Inuksuit* were used to drive game animals, to guide travelers, and as message centers to indicate dangers or directions. Some were personal expressions of grief, marking the spot where a loved one died. As places filled with power, some *inuksuit* were never to be approached. Others, viewed as a source for healings and protection, were venerated and touched. The approachable *inuksuit* also served as a repository for offerings. An *inukshuk* is portrayed on the flag of the Canadian territory of *Nunavut*.

SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION OF ARCTIC SOCIETIES

	RUSSIA	ALASKA	CANADA	GREENLAND
Yupiits*	1,300	25,000	—	—
Inupiats	2,000	50,000	—	—
Inuit	—	—	45,000	55,000

* The Yupiits are technically not Inuit, but their lifestyle and culture are similar enough for them to be included in this discussion.

ORIGINS

The Sea-Ice Hunters

About thirteen thousand years ago, when the extensive glaciers of the last ice age had not yet completely melted and the sea levels were lower than they are today, there was a land bridge between Siberia and Alaska. Archaeologists conjecture that small communities settled along the coastline of that land bridge over the next several millennia. These settlers were not the direct biological ancestors of the Inuit, but they developed cultural traits that were later adopted by the Inuit.

The settlers on the land bridge most likely hunted marine and coastal mammals, birds, and fish. During certain seasons of the year, they probably moved inland to hunt and fish in the vicinity of interior freshwater lakes. As these settlements gradually spread eastward along the northern coasts of what is now Alaska and Canada, they encountered seas with solid winter ice packs. This necessitated the development of the knowledge and technology needed to use the winter sea ice to hunt marine mammals. This environmental adaptation survives as one of the defining characteristics of Inuit culture.

By about five thousand years ago, the groups who learned to use sea ice had expanded into what is now Canada and southern Greenland. In Canada, they traveled east and south as far as the Strait of Belle Isle, the northernmost part of the

THE LEGACY OF THE ANCESTORS

“Today, no matter where we choose to travel, hunt, and camp, we find the traces of our ancestors. From these, we have come to understand that our life is a continuation of theirs, and we recognize that their land and culture has been given to us in trust for our children.”*

“We think that it is true to say that no other living culture has maintained such a continuous and consistent way of life for such a long period of time over such a large territory.”**

* Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami: http://www.itk.ca/english/inuit_canada/history/origins.htm.

** Ibid.

island of Newfoundland. In all of this vast territory, the sea-ice hunters used marine as well as land resources year-round, just as the Inuit of today do. As archaeologists continue to map these early settlements, it becomes increasingly apparent that the *sea-ice hunters* occupied the same territory that is now occupied by the Inuit. In addition to tools and weapons, archaeologists have found beautiful small carvings that probably had a spiritual use.

The sea-ice hunters lived in skin tents in summer. In winter, they occupied houses that were partially underground. These houses may have had walls constructed of fitted stone or of sod blocks and roofs made from the skins used for tents in summer. The sea-ice hunters did not hunt whales, but they did hunt seals, walruses, and caribou. They also ate fish, clams, seaweed, bird eggs, and berries. They hunted birds and waterfowl, and used delicate bird-bone needles to make boots and clothing from the skins of seals, caribou, and bears. They worked by the light of soapstone lamps. The Inuit of today still use their quarries to procure stone for carving.

However, unlike the Inuit of today, these early sea-ice hunters did not use dogs to pull sleds. They may have pulled small sleds by hand, or perhaps they used polar bear skins to haul things in the winter.

The Thule Culture

Biologically, culturally, and linguistically, the Inupiat and Inuit (but not the Yupiit) are descendants of the *Thule culture*, which arose in northwestern Alaska a little more than a millennium ago and rapidly spread east through the arctic regions to Greenland. The Thule people were of Asian origin. They lived in houses constructed from driftwood and sod, and they almost certainly spoke an early version of Inuktitut, the Inuit language. They developed the technology to hunt large whales and this, along with warming climates, was probably responsible for their rapid expansion. A whale could weigh seven tons or more, and the amount of meat provided by a successful hunt gave the

Thule people a competitive edge over other hunting peoples. The culture received its name after remains were discovered in northern Greenland, near a place called Thule (pronounced THOO-lee).

Traditional Inuit culture was like the Thule culture in most ways. It was a highly developed hunting culture with winter houses made of sod blocks. There are also significant differences between the two cultures: The Thules rarely inhabited the upland areas, whereas the early Inuit culture made use of such areas, and the Inuit used fish nets and hunted small whales from kayaks, while the Thules did neither of those things.

MYTHOLOGY

Inuit storyteller Michael Kusugak grew up in igloos and sod huts, living the traditional nomadic life of the Inuit. He recalls hunting seals, walruses, whales, and polar bears out on the sea ice in the winter. Every night he and his father would return to an igloo filled with grandparents, aunts, and uncles. As he lay in bed at night, he listened to the adults tell stories. The stories were told over and over again, and were so well known that he could fall asleep, wake up, and still follow the story. The stories always had a message about how to live life, he says, and it was a message for everyone, not just for children.²⁷

Inuit stories include ravens, wolves, caribou, and whales. They talk about Inuit life and also about universal human problems and emotions. Inuit stories also feature gods and goddesses and demons. The spirits that appear in Inuit stories are not necessarily purely good or purely evil. God and goddesses can be morally complex or even amoral.²⁸ The following myths have to do with the spirits of the sun, the moon, and the sea.

The Sun and the Moon

Among the Inuit who live in Greenland, there is a sun goddess, *Malina*, and a moon god, *Anningan*. In most mythologies, the sun deity is masculine and the moon deity is feminine, but in a few cultures, as in the case of the Inuit, the genders are

reversed. Because the Inuit are of Asian descent, it is interesting to note that the Japanese also have a sun goddess. It is possible that the two mythologies are related.

According to the story, Malina and Anningan grew up together. They played together as children and continued their games as young adults. One night, as they were playing in the dark, Anningan raped his sister. Malina ran as far away from her brother as she could. She ran up into the sky, where she became the sun. Anningan pursued her into the sky, where he became the moon. To this day, he chases her through the heavens, occasionally catching up to her and causing a solar eclipse.

Anningan is so filled with desire for his sister that he often forgets to eat, and this is why he gets thinner. Once a month he disappears for three days to eat, but he always returns to chase his sister again. The sun and the moon hate each other, and because of their troubled relationship, they also hate people of the opposite sex. People need to be very careful not to offend these spiteful spirits, for fear that diseases and calamities are sent down upon them.

Sedna

Sedna has control over the sea and the sea mammals necessary for Inuit survival. Hunting success or failure is believed to depend on her unpredictable mood. This queen of the seas personifies the capricious, uncertain nature of life in the Arctic realm.

Even as a young girl, Sedna was unpredictable, refusing to marry anyone until her father forced her into an unnatural marriage with a dog. Sedna bore children, but eventually her father felt sorry for her and drowned her husband. Unable to support her children without her husband, Sedna abandoned them. One day, a petrel (a type of sea bird) disguised as a man proposed to her and she accepted. Soon, she discovered her new husband's deceit. When her father came to visit, she left with him in his boat. Angry, the petrel beat his wings and created an enormous storm that threatened to sink the boat. The frightened father tried to throw Sedna overboard to her husband,

but she clung to the boat's side. Fearing for his life, her father cut off her fingers at the joints until she fell into the sea. Her severed fingers turned into seals and other sea mammals. Sedna herself sank to the bottom of the ocean, where she resides as the great sea spirit. When game is unavailable, an Inuit shaman will travel to her court under the sea to find out why she is displeased with the people.

The story of Sedna seems to imply that it is better to appease the capricious nature of the life-giving sea than to try to overrule it, as Sedna's father did when he forced her to marry. The great tragedy of the story occurs when Sedna's father reacts in fear to the power of the storm and tries to cast her out of the boat. It is imperative, the story suggests, that people learn to live with the capricious, unpredictable, and fearful nature of the sea, because they cannot survive without it. It is the source of life.

WORLDVIEW

The Worldviews of Oral Cultures

The Website of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Canada's National Inuit Organization, makes this strange-sounding claim: "In our culture

THE WOLF AND THE CARIBOU

In the beginning, there was a man and a woman. Nothing else swam or walked or flew on or over Earth. The woman dug a big fishing hole and started fishing. She pulled up all of the animals, one by one. A caribou was the last animal pulled up. The woman set the caribou free and ordered it to multiply. It did, and soon the land was full of caribou. The people were well fed and very happy. The hunters killed only the big, strong caribou, however, and soon all that was left were the sick and weak. The people began to starve. The woman had to work magic again, and she called Amorak, the spirit of the wolf, to winnow (weed out weaker elements) and strengthen the caribou herd. Soon, the herd regained its strength, and the people realized that the caribou and the wolf were one, for the caribou feeds the wolf and the wolf keeps the caribou strong.*

* This story is retold from "Never underestimate the persuasive power of an Inuit story," <http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/Network/6437/Inuit.html>.

we do not divide the past from the present . . . ”²⁹ This odd statement (“odd” from our perspective as nonindigenous people) is the bedrock of an oral culture. In an oral culture, the past is not a fixed, objective artifact viewed across a span of time that can never be crossed. In an oral culture, the past evolves as the present unfolds, because it is a part of the present. The myths recited by the storytellers bring the past into the present. As the ancient stories are retold, the people hear their message for today and they make decisions based on that message. The stories from the past remain alive in the lives of the people today.

Inuit Beliefs

The indigenous religion of the Inuit holds that all humans, animals, objects, and forces of nature have spirits. The spirits of the sun, moon, and sea were introduced in the previous section. The spirits of humans and animals are believed to live after death in another world. From this other realm, the spirits of dead humans and animals can influence events on Earth. When displeased, the spirits may cause sickness or misfortune. It is important to pay as much attention to the dead as to the living and to placate the dead. Some people are believed to have special power that enables them to communicate with the spirit world. Such a person generally is called a shaman, but the Inuit call him or her an *angedkok* (pronounced ang’-guh-kank). There is more about Inuit shamans in the next section.

Holding the belief that all things have spirits means that the Inuit worldview has nothing similar to what we would call an inanimate object. Everything in the Inuit world has a power or force and this is evidence that it is alive. Anyone can observe that the dead lack power or force, whereas the living are filled with vitality. Following this line of reasoning, one would have to conclude that the winds, storms, and the sea are alive. Through rituals, the Inuit attempt to communicate with the spirits of all these forces.

Each species of animal has a “keeper” or a “master.” Sedna is the keeper of the sea mammals (whales, walruses, seals, and

so on). Because sea mammals are the staples of the Inuit diet, Sedna is viewed as the most powerful of the keepers. Every keeper controls its animals, and if a keeper is displeased, it will make certain that hunters cannot find the game animals it controls. In such an event, the *angedkok* might have to enter a trance state and journey to the keeper of the species to find out why the game is being withheld.

Many sections of the Arctic do not support much vegetation. Here, the staff of life is not bread but animals, especially the large sea mammals. For this reason, Arctic hunters may appear more concerned about their relationship with the animal spirits than about their relationship to the spirits of their family members. The ancestors play less of a role in Inuit ritual than they do in Mayan or African ritual. The primary recipients of ritual offerings are the spirits of the animals.

RITUALS AND RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

Rituals and Taboos

The traditional lifestyle of the Inuit is filled with rituals and taboos that exist for the purpose of ensuring health, good fortune, and the availability of game animals. Therefore, when illness, disaster, or famine strikes, it is most likely explained as the result of the violation of a ritual prohibition.

The Inuit worldview, like that of many hunting and gathering peoples, treats hunting as a special kind of relationship with game animals. In this conception, the animals willingly sacrifice their lives to the hunters, but if the animals are not treated with respect, their spirits will avoid the hunters when they are reincarnated. This may lead to famine and death for the Inuit, because their diet is about 95 percent meat and their clothing is made from animal skins. For the Inuit, it is necessary to destroy life in order to feed and clothe the people. It is also necessary to appease the spirit of the animal (which does not perish with its body), lest it take revenge on the hunters by refusing to give its life in the future. For these reasons, hunting and consumption of game animals is enveloped in taboos and rituals. There are

ritual elements involved in preparation for a hunt, and various taboos are observed throughout the hunting season. For example, the crew on a whale hunt must be very solemn because light-hearted activities are believed to offend whales. When any animal is slain, its spirit must be offered a drink of water. A slain seal can only be butchered on a fresh snow floor. By observing many such commands and prohibitions, the people show honor and respect to the animal that gave its life so that the people may live.

The Inuit observe a ritual separation of winter and summer months. A child born in winter is an *axigirn* child, and a summer child is called *aggirn*. These two groups of children form teams for games and competitions. Birth rituals vary depending on the season of birth. A summer child's first meal is soup made from a land animal or river fish cooked in freshwater; a winter child's first meal is soup made from a sea animal cooked in saltwater. The winter/summer division also affects relations with the animal world. There is a taboo against bringing the skin of a summer animal (one hunted in summer—a reindeer, for example) into contact with the skin of a winter animal (one hunted in winter—a seal, for example). It is also forbidden to eat the meat of a summer animal until all the winter clothing has been put away. Taboos of separation (not planting a field with two types of seed, not wearing the clothing of the opposite sex, not working on a day of rest, and so on) are found in many societies.

The Angekok

Religious specialists known as shamans exist in many parts of the world including the Arctic, South America, Korea, Japan, and Africa. The techniques used by shamans are some of the oldest forms of religious practice. Shamans are found primarily but not exclusively in hunting and gathering societies. Because very few of these societies still exist, there are very few indigenous shamans left. (There is a neopagan movement called shamanism, but participants in that movement are not typically members of traditional societies.)

The angekok has more extensive knowledge of taboos and observances than anyone else. He or she (there have been angekok of both genders) often serves as a wise person or as a “library” for the group. Typically, the angekok is called on to discern the reason for a misfortune that has befallen the people. This is accomplished by entering the spirit world and learning what offense has led to the misfortune. Misfortune is believed to have several causes, among which are evil spirits, offended game animals, or an offense to Sedna, the master of the sea mammals. After determining the cause of the trouble, the angekok enlists the aid of spirit helpers to rectify matters. The angekok communicates with the spirits while in a state of trance precipitated by drumming, dancing, and singing.

People do not decide to become shamans. The Inuit would say that the spirits choose them. Signs that a person is destined to become a shaman include any escape from death that appeared miraculous and special sensitivity or receptivity to the spirits. These signs are typically spotted by an older shaman who mentors the angekok-to-be. During the period of training, the young shaman observes food and sex taboos, endures privations and solitude, learns techniques and “languages” for communicating with the spirits, obtains magical songs, and establishes alliances with spirit helpers. The power of Inuit shamans comes from their ability to harness the powers of their spirit helpers. As with all Inuit spirits, an angekok’s spirit helpers can be difficult or even dangerous.

An angekok enters a trance during a public gathering involving songs or chanting, drumming, dance, and feats of magic performed by the angekok. The feats of magic serve to make the people’s minds more receptive to the declarations of the angekok, who is believed to carry the commands and wishes of the spirits. The two most important social functions of the angekok are curing the sick and removing obstructions that affect the entire group (bad weather or inability to find game animals, for example).

GROWING UP INUIT

Although the traditional Inuit way of life has been under attack for centuries, it has survived. The traditional economy and social structure never completely died out, even though most modern Inuit live in wood houses instead of igloos or sod homes, wear Western clothes instead of animal skins, and speak a national language in addition to their native language. Through stories, ceremonies, and modern-day whale hunts, traditional knowledge and skills have remained a vital part of an Inuit child's inheritance. Indeed, with increasing native control over land resources and educational systems, there is

THE BLADDER FEAST

Among the Yupiit people of western Alaska, the Bladder Feast was an important ceremony. It was held once a year, and its purpose was to honor the spirits of animals that had been hunted and killed in the previous year. Because it was believed that the animals willingly sacrificed their lives to the hunters, it was most appropriate that the animals were thanked in some way for the gift of their lives.

Each hunter saved the bladders of the animals he killed. It was believed that the spirit of the animal dwelled in its bladder. The bladders were inflated like a balloon, painted, and hung in the area where the ceremony would take place.

The people who participated in the ceremony were purified with the smoke of wild celery and sweats.* Myths in which animal spirits instructed Yupiit ancestors in the proper way to honor the animals were recited. Dancers wearing special masks reenacted hunting scenes by mimicking the movements of the animals and the hunters.

At the end of the ceremony, the bladders were taken down, deflated, and pushed through a hole in the ice. These actions released the spirits of the animals from their bladders. Once freed, they could be reborn and return as game animals. If they felt properly honored, they were expected to return to be hunted again by the same group of people.

* A "sweat" is a ceremony in which the participants sit in a circle in a tightly enclosed space. Heated rocks are placed at the center of the circle and water is poured over them, causing steam to fill the air and also causing participants to sweat as they sit and pray. The sweat is a purification ceremony used by many Native American groups.

some hope that the encroaching loss of traditional knowledge and skills can be halted, perhaps even reversed. Ensuring that Inuit children are exposed to traditional learning and experiences, as well as modern knowledge and technology, appears to be the best way to ensure the continuation and success of Inuit culture, as well as the happiness and success of children. Attempts to modernize the Inuit have resulted in no successful alternative paradigm (framework) for Inuit life. Rather, the collapse of the traditional way of life has resulted in unemployment, suicide, and addiction. Consequently, when the Inuit want to teach their children about the right way to live, Inuit parents only describe the successful, prosperous, and happy life in their cultural memory, namely, the traditional life of the people. Traditional life remains the model of the good life.

The basic unit of Inuit society is the family. The Inuit permitted *polygyny* (a man having more than one wife), but it was not common; most families were monogamous. Men were generally responsible for foraging, especially if it required significant travel. Women processed skins and did some local foraging. Gender roles were flexible when circumstances required; women could be full-time hunters if necessary. Even in ordinary times, women participated in whale hunting as paddlers in the *umiak* (a boat larger than a kayak and without the kayak's skin top—that is, with an uncovered top).

Most families were grouped into bilateral kindred of ten to twenty people. Kindred often lived together in joint households consisting of two brothers and their wives and children, plus the parents and their daughters' husbands and children. Members of a joint household shared labor and resources.

Families and households congregated into winter villages of fifty to one hundred or more people. Because it was a time when many people came together, winter was the most social season of the year. There were games, drum dances, and ceremonies. In spring and summer, the population dispersed into family and kindred groups to do inland hunting and gathering. Members of the winter village regrouped in autumn for the caribou hunt.

Kindred heads were known as *umialiks*. They managed the affairs of the extended family and held the highest form of political authority in the traditional Inuit world. A successful and generous umialik could attract a large following, because people could chose to join his kindred group by adoption.

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Early Contact with Europeans

The first contact between the Inuit and Europeans likely took place in what is now northern Newfoundland, Canada. Norse settlers lived in that area for a short time around 1000 C.E. The first Inuit entered Greenland around 1250 C.E. Here, they encountered Norse hunters, descendants of the colonies founded by Viking explorer Eric the Red shortly before 1000 C.E. For a period of time, the two cultures coexisted, but by the middle of the fifteenth century, the Norse colonies disappeared. Scholars speculate that their disappearance was linked to a progressively colder climate that forced the abandonment of whaling expeditions in most of the Arctic Ocean.³⁰ Under these changing climatic conditions, the Norse hunters could not compete with the Inuit, the latter being better adapted to Arctic life.

More extensive contact with Europeans took place in the sixteenth century, when whalers and fishing crews met many Inuit along the coast of what is now Labrador. Englishman Martin Frobisher spent some time in an Inuit village in the Baffin Islands in the 1570s. For the next several centuries, however, the Arctic and the Inuit figured only as an obstacle in the minds of explorers from western Europe who were seeking the Northwest Passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. European whalers did not begin to hunt in the Arctic Ocean until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Destruction of the Traditional Inuit Way of Life

Before 1850, changes in Inuit life as a result of contact with Europeans were gradual. The Inuit started using iron for making tools and weapons rather than relying exclusively on stone,

for example. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Moravian missionaries traded with the Labrador Inuit and converted many of them to Christianity. These incremental changes did not disrupt Inuit culture, but the same cannot be said for the more monumental changes of the nineteenth century.

Around 1850, European and American whalers began to operate in the Arctic. Whaling companies based in Great Britain, New England, and San Francisco killed thousands of whales in Canadian waters. They hired hundreds of Inuit to work on the ships, and they introduced the Inuit to rifles, ammunition, wood, tent canvas, and flour. The whalers also brought infectious diseases—such as smallpox and measles—for which the Inuit people had no natural immunity. In the western Canadian Arctic, the Inuit population was reduced from an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 people in 1850 to 150 people in 1910.³¹

The commercial fur trade moved into the Arctic regions of Canada after World War I, just as the whaling industry was dying. Fur traders were accompanied by the Anglican and Roman Catholic religions and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. By 1925, the Inuit had been brought under the control of the Canadian government. As a result of missionary work, Inuit religion was abolished or driven underground. With the loss of traditional religious beliefs about the animals and their keepers, Inuit began to hunt animals not to fill their own needs for food and clothing but to trade pelts for rifles and other goods. This led to a depletion of game supplies and ultimately resulted in an alteration of the traditional Inuit way of life. With the loss of the game animals, the Inuit people were no longer independent and self-sustaining. They fell into poverty, abjection, and alcoholism, and became dependent on government programs for survival. Had the Inuit retained their reverence for the spirits of the animals, they could not have participated in the loss of their people's economic independence. Nonetheless, the Inuit almost certainly would have lost control of their land to European or Euro-American governments even if they had

not cooperated with the fur traders. This factor alone would have resulted in the loss of economic independence.

With the loss of political sovereignty and control over lands, it was impossible for the Inuit to rebuild the network of social and ecological relationships that constituted Inuit religion and that had allowed Inuit life to be self-sustaining and spiritually meaningful. There was no possibility of rebuilding traditional Inuit society and economy until the Inuit regained control of their ancestral lands. This did not happen until the last decades of the twentieth century.

INUIT RELIGION TODAY

The establishment of “Eskimo co-ops” in the 1960s inaugurated the Inuit’s fight to regain control of their land and their lives. The purpose of the co-ops was to help the Inuit retain control of the sale of their artwork. By competing with the Hudson’s Bay Company as a buyer and distributor of furs, the co-ops also helped maintain a reasonable price for both the purchase and the sale of furs.

The Inuit Brotherhood, which later changed its name to Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, was founded in 1971. In 1976, the Inuit proposed the creation of a territory to be called Nunavut (“our land”). The proposed territory was located in the central and eastern sections of the Northwest Territories. In 1993, the Nunavut Final Agreement was signed, and Nunavut became Canada’s newest territory on April 1, 1999. Comprehensive land claims were signed in the western Northwest Territories (1984) and in northern Quebec (1975), as well. The Inuit now own most of the Arctic lands of Canada and enjoy political influence in that broad area, especially in Nunavut.

The Inuit population is growing rapidly. Economic development is still lagging, although cultural tourism and mining are growing in importance. As contemporary Inuit pursue avenues for economic development, they examine proposals carefully to be sure they will not negatively affect hunting opportunities or the ability to earn an income using traditional skills. Modern

Inuit seem determined that economic development not come at the price of cultural survival.

The Inuit have also been active in the fight against global warming. This issue concerns them greatly, because the melting of Arctic ice has already led to lower populations of Arctic mammals. It has long been predicted that global warming will affect the Arctic areas first.

It appears unlikely that large numbers of Inuit will return to the rituals that sought to placate Sedna, Malina, Anningan, and the other traditional spirits of the natural world. Most Inuit have become Christians and remain happy with that religious affiliation. In that sense, indigenous Inuit religion is dead, but in another sense it is very much alive, for a religion is more than its divinities. Religion is a sense of and a respect for that which is sacred, and it is a sense of being connected to the sacred. The Inuit today, as in centuries past, recognize the sacredness of the Arctic landscape and its wildlife. They are reestablishing their traditional connectedness to the Arctic land and the sea mammals, and they are revitalizing the traditional set of respectful relationships that kept the people and the environment strong and healthy. Inuit religion will never die out as long as Inuit culture survives, because this culture is based on a set of relationships to the sacred as perceived from the vantage point of the Arctic environment.

The Mayas

*Make my guilt vanish, Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth;
do me a favor, give me strength,
give me courage in my heart, in my head,
since you are my mountains and my plain;
may there be no falsehood and no stain...*

—Translation of prayer from the Popol Vuh

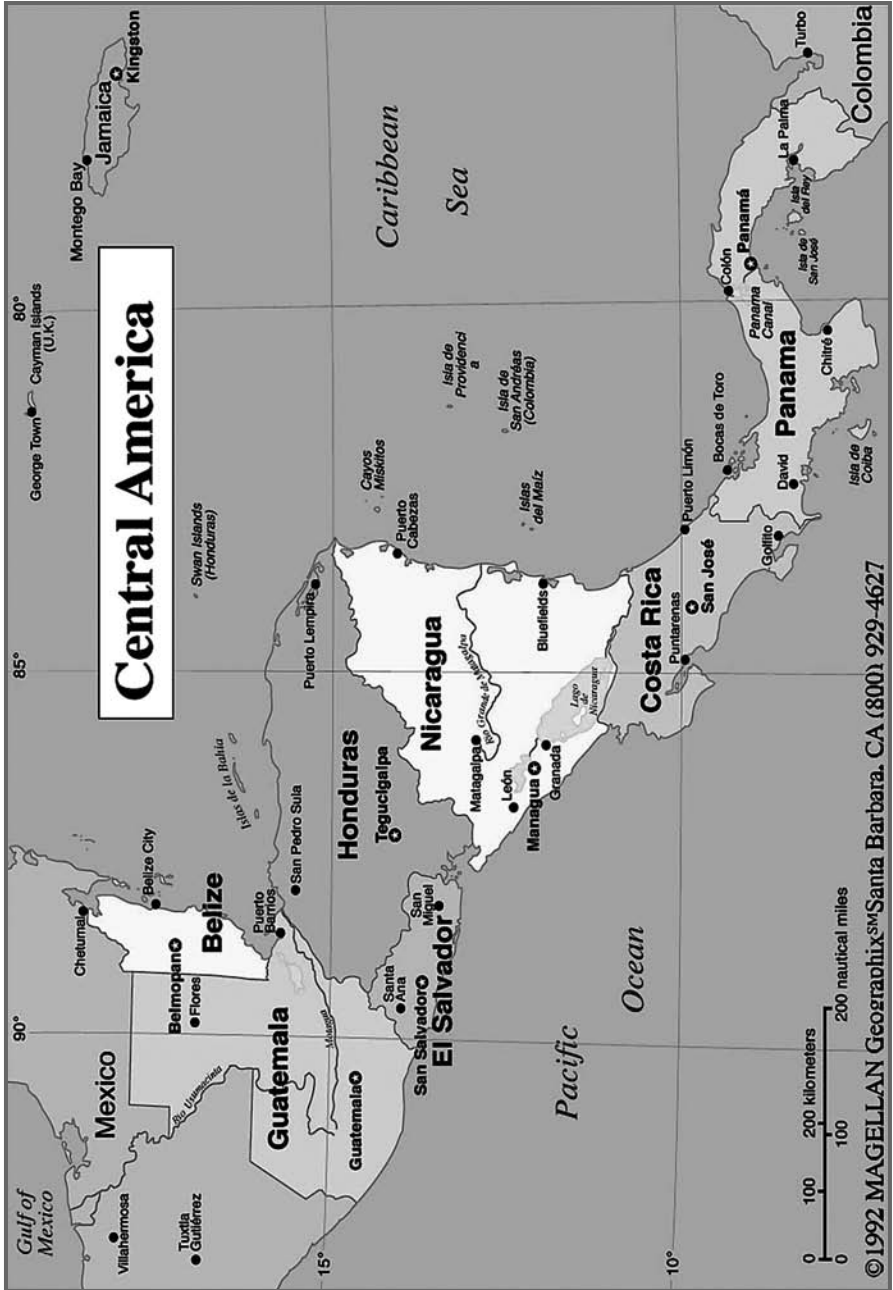
INTRODUCTION

The Mayan homeland stretches through southeastern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and the westernmost sections of Honduras and El Salvador. In Mexico, it includes the Yucatán Peninsula and Chiapas and Tabasco Provinces. The entire area is about 562 miles from north to south and about 344 miles from west to east.

The Yucatán Peninsula is flat and arid. The tectonic plate on which it is located is being pushed southward into the Guatemalan highlands, forming high ridges. The natural vegetation here is rain forest, but much of the rain forest has been cleared to make way for cornfields. Maize, or corn, is a sacred plant; according to the *Popol Vuh* (the Mayan sacred book) human beings were created from it. South of the highlands is a belt of active volcanoes and south of that is a narrow strip of Pacific lowlands. The Mayas live between two seas, the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south.

The origin of the indigenous peoples of the Americas is not yet completely understood, but most scholars believe that Asian hunter-gatherers crossed the frozen Bering Strait and entered the Americas thirteen thousand years ago or earlier. By the first millennium B.C.E., the Olmec culture of Mexico had built large cities. Some of these people made their way to the Guatemalan highlands around 600 B.C.E. They lived in villages and practiced agriculture. By 250 C.E., they had become a hierarchical society ruled by kings and nobles, and included scribes, architects, administrators, merchants, and laborers. The city of *Tikal* (in present-day Guatemala) was the first great Mayan city.

Between the third and sixth centuries C.E., more than one hundred fifty thousand people lived in Tikal. It was a city of kings and priests and ritualized warfare. Messages were inscribed on rock or bark paper using hieroglyphs. The city was part of a civilization with complex astronomical and mathematical knowledge. The residents of Tikal had an extremely accurate and unique calendar and used books made from bark paper covered with plaster and folded like an accordion into what are



Around 8 million Mayan Indians live in Guatemala, Belize, and parts of Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador.

called codices. Much like Mayan artists today, their painters used vibrant red, green, yellow, and orange colors. They built two-hundred-foot-high temple-pyramids without the use of metal tools—theirs was a stone-age culture. Despite that, the Mayas of the classical period (circa 250–900 C.E.) built one of the most advanced civilizations of the ancient world.

For reasons that are not completely understood, the Mayan cities were abandoned between 900 and 1200 C.E. The last date inscribed at Tikal was the equivalent of 869 C.E. The Mayas returned to their rural villages and grew maize, a practice that has continued to the present day. Today, there are estimated to be about 8 million Mayas, making them one of the largest indigenous groups in the Americas. There are thirty-one Mayan groups, including the Yucatecs and the Tzotzils in Mexico, the Quichés of Guatemala, and the Kekchis of Belize.

FOUNDATIONS

Mayan religion of the classical period centered around time as determined by astronomical events. Mayan priests were teachers, wise men, healers, and, most of all, timekeepers who carried out their functions by literally looking to the heavens for guidance. Using only the naked eye aided by a forked stick, priests who were also astronomers charted the movements of the sun, planets, and stars. To them, these movements were not simply the result of physical forces; they also displayed the actions of the gods. The sacred structure of the cosmos was not static but rather was always in motion. The priest applied what he saw happening in the heavens to affairs on Earth. The most sacred writings of the ancient Mayas were not law books but astronomical charts and tables, because the divine-human relationship depended on such knowledge.

The observations of the priests enabled them to develop calendars that were both complex and accurate but very different from either the Western (Gregorian) calendar, which is a solar calendar, or the Islamic calendar, which is a lunar calendar. Most calendars have twenty-nine or thirty-day months based on the

movements of the moon, but the Mayas had twenty-day months. They did have a calendar based on a 365-day solar year, but it was not their sacred or ritual calendar. Their sacred calendar, called the *tzolkin*, or Sacred Round, was a 260-day calendar that is neither solar nor lunar. The *tzolkin* was used to determine almost all important activities, including the dates for rituals, the naming of children, and dates that would be auspicious for marriages or warfare. The 365-day calendar was called the *haab*. It was composed of eighteen months of twenty days plus a five-day period at the end. The *haab* charted the seasons of the solar year and was used primarily for agricultural purposes.

The *tzolkin* and the *haab* were linked together to create a longer cycle of approximately fifty-two solar years, but this was not the longest of the Mayan calendars. Some Mayan monuments record the dates of events believed to have happened millions of years ago, and others predict events three thousand years in the future. The Mayas kept track of such events by means of a calendar known as the *Long Count*. The Long Count was based on its own units of time, which included a 20-day month and a 360-day year. Its largest unit was the *analtun*, which was equivalent to 64 million 360-day years.

The Mayas believed in recurrent cycles of creation and destruction, and the Long Count was used to keep track of these cycles. According to the ancient Mayan calendar, the date of the most recent creation was about 3113 B.C.E. on the Gregorian calendar. This cycle of creation is expected to end on December 23, 2012.

The ancient Mayan calendar is one ten-thousandth of a day more precise than the calendar we use today. This calendar was at the heart of priestly duties and everyday life, because the Mayas believed that it was impossible to live as the creators desired humans to live without “keeping the days.”

SCRIPTURE

Unlike many indigenous people, the Mayas have a written scripture. The *Popol Vuh* (“Council Book”) is the Mayan holy book. Its stories of creation, sacrifice, and victory over death

carve out Mayan worldview and ritual just as biblical accounts of creation, sacrifice, and victory shape Jewish and Christian belief and practice.

Most of the Mayan codices were burned by the Spanish when they conquered the Mayas in the sixteenth century. The Popol Vuh did not survive in written form. Thankfully, the Mayas also had an extensive oral tradition, and the Popol Vuh was part of it. The Popol Vuh was transcribed into Spanish shortly after the Spanish conquest and was translated into Spanish in 1703 by a Mayan Indian who had learned to speak and write that language. Dennis Tedlock completed an English translation that was published in 1985.

The Popol Vuh is filled with creation stories. One of the acts of creation is the lifting of the sky into its present position (it had been laying flat on the earth). The four corners of the sky-earth are measured and staked. At the center of the universe stands a World Tree, symbolized by a cross. The Mayas eagerly adopted the Christian cross, because they equated it with the World Tree. The creators (with names like *Makers*, *Modelers*, *Bearers*, *Begetters*, *Sovereign Plumed Serpent*, and *Great White Peccary*) call forth the earth by simply saying, "Earth." They filled the earth and sky with animals and birds that made many different sounds but were unable to praise the creators. The animals were unable to pray or to "keep the days" (a reference to the sacred calendar). Disappointed in their first creation, the creators decided to try again to fashion beings that could call their names and invoke them. The animals would provide food for these beings.

It took several tries before the attempt to create beings who could praise was successful. The creators first shaped people from mud, but the mud crumbled and dissolved when it rained. Next they tried wood, but the wooden people had no feelings and therefore were unable to care for each other or for the animals who served them. They became monkeys. (The Mayas believe monkeys are beings left from the previous creation.)

In the third creation, a set of Hero Twins engaged in a series of exploits in the underworld. They were able to come back to

life after being killed, and they could also kill other beings and resurrect them. One of the people they resurrected was their father, the maize god (also known as “First Father”). The final event in the third creation was an altercation between the Hero Twins and a beautiful and vain Macaw who declared himself the sun and demanded worship. The twins wounded the Macaw, and while in great pain he agreed to have his teeth and eyes removed in order to be healed. This stripped him of his pretense to greatness.

The fourth creation is the present world. The creators made humanity from maize and the water in which the First Mother washed her hands. First Mother molded the first four human beings. They were perfect beings and knew as much as the gods, because they could see as far as the gods. The creators did not like this, but they did not want to destroy the people either. They decided to weaken their eyes so that they could only see what was near them. What happened to their eyes is described as being like what happens to the face of a mirror when someone breathes on it—the breath condenses to form a “fog” on the glass.

WORLDVIEW

There is no copy of the *Popol Vuh* from the classical period, but archaeologists have discovered descriptions of creation inscribed on royal monuments and painted on pottery. The first act of creation is the placing of three stones in the sky in a pattern similar to that of the hearth stones in a Mayan house. The next actions include the making of a house in the sky, the raising of the World Tree (*Wakah-Chan*), and the setting of the stars in motion around it. Such stories do not initially appear to have any connection to highly sophisticated Mayan astronomy. The work of anthropologists such as Linda Schele and David Freidel in the 1990s showed that the creation stories of the Mayas and their astronomical knowledge were intimately linked. It appears that the Mayas of the classical period knew of no tension between religion and science—their worldview was a seamless whole.

This discovery of worldview began with an ancient Mayan pot that showed a scorpion at the base of the Wakah-Chan tree. This scorpion turned out to represent a constellation of the zodiac as recorded in the Paris Codex, one of only four codices surviving from the preconquest Mayan period. Schele had already argued that the World Tree of the Mayas did not point straight overhead when it was raised but rather pierced the pivot point of the north sky, the point around which all the stars appear to rotate from a vantage point on Earth. (This agrees with the statement in the creation stories that First Father set the stars in motion around the World Tree after he raised it.) The crown of the World Tree stood in the north sky, not in the zenith. Combining her belief regarding the orientation of the World Tree with the new information about the scorpion constellation at its base, Schele studied a star map of the sky when the constellation Scorpius was opposite the North Star. She discovered that “the Milky Way stretched south to north from Scorpius past the North Star”³² and concluded that the Sacred Tree was the Milky Way. It was also the upright beam of the Mayan sacred cross symbol.

The crossbeam of the Mayan cross was often portrayed as a double-headed snake. Ethnographer John Sosa discovered that the contemporary Yucatec Mayas symbolized the ecliptic in the same way. The ecliptic, which traces the path of the sun and the planets across the sky, moves back and forth from north to south during the course of a year. In the tropics, where the Mayas live, it crosses directly overhead—that is, it occupies the zenith of the sky at a certain point in the year. At the moment of creation, First Father stretches the path of the sun and the planets across the sky. He holds the ecliptic snake in his arms as he does so, and the snake has a head on each end. Once again, the fit of Mayan myth, art, and science was perfect.

Anthropologists Dennis and Barbara Tedlock identified the prideful Macaw of the Popul Vuh with the Big Dipper. In addition, Dennis Tedlock’s translation of the Popul Vuh identified the three stones of the hearth as Orion. Three stars in Orion

(Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel) are the hearthstones and the cloudy area between them (the M42 nebula) is said to be the smoke from the fire. The first thing the Creators did was lay the hearthstones for the fire of Creation.

The Milky Way is not fixed in the north-south position described previously. At the time of the winter solstice, it stretches from east to west across the night sky. Its western end is split into upper and lower pieces. It looked to the Mayas like a crocodile stretched across the sky with its mouth in the west; they called it the Cosmic Monster. The Cosmic Monster was another important mythical symbol.

As the Milky Way rotates from its north-south position as the World Tree and turns into the east-west crocodile, the Big Dipper appears to be driven downward until it disappears beneath the horizon—the defeat of the proud macaw!³³ It appeared, as Linda Schele said, that the “the gods wrote all of these actions in the sky so that every human, commoner and king alike could read them and affirm the truth of the myth.”³⁴

Modern Mayas still build their houses, stake out their fields, and perform their ceremonies according to the same sky patterns that their ancestors followed millennia ago. Since the time of the Spanish conquest, five hundred years ago, however, the ancient practices have either been carried out under cover of night or wrapped in Christian garb. Although a few Mayas were never Christianized, most contemporary Mayas practice a religion that is a blend of indigenous Mayan religion and Catholic Christianity. Examples of this syncretism are explored in later sections.

A MAYAN RITUAL

The Mayas of the classical period built impressive temple-pyramids that are still used as pilgrimage sites today. However, most contemporary Mayan rituals take place at shrines, on mountaintops, in caves, or in homes.

The person who presides at a ritual is a shaman-priest; the Mayan term in the Guatemalan highlands is *chuchkahaw*

(plural *chuchkahawib*, literally *mother-fathers*). Traditionally, the role of *chuchkahaw* was passed from father to son but others can be initiated as well. The future *chuchkahaw* must undergo an extensive training process that involves ceremonies, lessons, pilgrimages, and transformation rituals. Barbara Tedlock became a *chuchkahaw*; she described her training in *Time and the Highland Maya* (1982).

The role of the shaman-priests is closely connected to the Sacred Round (the 260-day calendar) and astronomy. They conduct traditional rituals for individuals and for the community on the appropriate calendar dates. For this reason, shaman-priests are also called *day keepers*.

Both the ancient and the contemporary Mayan religions involve sacrifices, some of which are blood sacrifices. Today, a blood sacrifice is most often the sacrifice of several chickens, but in the distant past the Mayas practiced human sacrifice. Blood sacrifice also included bloodletting—that is, piercing the skin of the worshiper and offering blood from the wound. The principle behind blood sacrifices, whether practiced by the Mayas or any other religious groups, is the belief that life does not come into existence from nonlife but only from life. The living are alive only because of the sacrifices of those who gave their lives so that others might live. In addition to humans, sacrificers include animals and the gods, because, in Mayan mythology, even divine beings share their life force through bloodletting in the process of creating. Consequently, blood sacrifice is a way of participating in creation.

Scholars of religion are also accustomed to finding the belief that life must be laid down or given away as a prelude to resurrection, and this, too, constitutes part of the rationale behind blood sacrifice for the Mayas. Finally, the Mayas believed that gods as well as humans had need of the power in the blood; human bloodletting therefore constituted a sacrifice that the gods actually *needed*.

There are many kinds of rituals, including divinations, healing rituals, rituals petitioning for rain, and initiation rituals.

One such example is that of a healing ritual for an infant.³⁵ In 1992, the year in which Grace Bascope observed this ritual, she was a trained nurse and a student of medical anthropology. The shaman-priest who performed the ceremony was Don Pablo.

The mother of a nine-month-old baby boy told Don Pablo that the infant had been suffering from chest congestion for a few months, although he seemed otherwise healthy. The ritual took place in the hut that served as the family's home. The mother sat with the baby in a hammock at one end. Don Pablo stretched a rope above the baby's hammock and parallel to it, fastening it at both sides of the hut. From it, he suspended thirteen tiny gourd bowls filled with maize gruel. He placed thirteen additional gourd bowls in the shape of a cross between the hammock and a table containing some stones, a small switch of leaves, a single candle, and a packet of dried herbs that would be given to the family after the ritual with instructions for how to administer them. The thirteen bowls on the floor were filled with alcohol (a substitute for the preferred cane liquor).

Six more candles were placed on the floor, two at the end of the cross near the baby, two at the end of the cross near the table, and one at the end of each arm of the cross. Don Pablo had a corncob wrapped with white cotton thread. He strung the thread along the rope from which the thirteen gourd bowls were suspended; down onto the floor, where he wrapped the arms and the head of the cross; and finally up onto his table. Don Pablo then sat on a low seat behind the table and prayed, after which he used a candle to peer through each of the stones. Getting up, he brushed the arms and legs of the baby with the switch of leaves, shaking the switch after each movement as if he were shaking something off it and onto the cross on the floor. He then returned to the table and prayed again, after which he returned to the baby to pray over it for an extended period of time. He blew on the top of the baby's head, shook his switch at the cross on the floor, and once more returned to the table to pray. After this, the thread, bowls, and rope were taken down, and most of the materials used in the ritual were buried in a hole

in the side of a nearby hill and covered with rocks. Don Pablo continued his prayers while he took down and buried the materials. When he returned to the hut, Don Pablo announced that all would be well.

The symbolism of this healing ritual is connected to Mayan stories of creation, birth, and rebirth. The thirteen bowls suspended from the rope are the thirteen constellations that lie along the path of the ecliptic. The cross (or World Tree) lies perpendicular to the ecliptic, as it does at the time of creation. The cross is the “source of baby souls and the symbol of creation and rebirth.”³⁶ The white thread is the umbilical cord that connects the baby to the source of all life. The path etched by the white thread follows the path that First Father’s soul followed when he was reborn into this world. (First Father is the maize god who was resurrected by his sons in the Popol Vuh.)

MAYAN BONESETTERS

Today, few Mayan communities are isolated and unaware of the rest of the world. Men have traveled to other countries to work as seasonal laborers for decades. Mayan communities have embarked on modern entrepreneurial ventures such as selling Mayan paintings or accommodating tourists who come to climb the ancient temple-pyramids. Some old ways, however, seem unshakable. An interesting example of such cultural conservatism is the retention and even growth of the traditional art of bonesetting. After his wife was successfully treated by a bonesetter in San Pedro in 1941, Benjamin D. Paul of Stanford University did some research on this indigenous healing art. The following information is adapted from an article by him.*

The Mayas consider bonesetters, along with shamans and midwives, sacred healers. Some Mayan bonesetters use only prayers and spiritual methods, but the bonesetters of San Pedro also use their hands. Paul observed them manipulate the bone, massage the injured area with beef bone marrow, lay warm tobacco leaves on it, and wrap the injured limb in tight bandages. Sometimes a splint was fashioned from cardboard or slats. Paul adds, however, that bonesetters do not credit any of these methods with the power to heal; that power is believed to reside in a small sacred bone held in the hand of the healer. This

GROWING UP MAYAN

“It all began when the gods inscribed their great signs on the stelae of time.” So begins Gaspar Pedro González’s masterful novel, *A Mayan Life*. Indeed, every Mayan child is born under the auspices of these great signs, signs recorded by the position of the stars and the date on the ritual calendar (the tzolkin). It is believed that the specific characteristics associated with the date of birth will have much to do with the course of the baby’s life.

Mayan mothers prefer to use Mayan midwives, even though Mayan midwives don’t possess official identity cards to be presented when registering a birth with the town secretary. This complicates the process of registering a birth and adds to its cost, but Latino midwives do not know how to perform the Mayan birth ceremonies. Consequently, even the poorest families prefer to use a Mayan midwife.

special bone locates the break by generating a force that feels like an electric current and jumps in magnitude as the bonesetter’s hand passes over the point of the injury.

Mayas do not enter the profession of bonesetting on their own initiative. One becomes a bonesetter only after receiving a supernatural call that often comes in a dream. In waking life, the person who receives the call may encounter a small bone that moves by its own power. Additional dreams instruct in the use of the bone for healing. If the person resists the call, he or she will often become ill until the call is accepted. Because this is a sacred vocation, the bonesetter must not charge for services rendered. Some people make an offering but others give nothing. If a healer must travel a great distance to treat an injured patient, however, meals and travelling expenses usually are provided.

The healer is viewed as having a gift, and the gift is understood to mean both the ability to heal and the little bone. The Mayas consider the bone the healer, and the bonesetter is its instrument. The bone is the vehicle of supernatural forces that its possessor merely senses.

* The entire article is available online at www.artemaya.com/bone.html.

Ox q'in takes place three days after birth. In preparation for this festival, the parents select the child's godparents and its name. The godparents' lives will serve as a model for the child. On the day of *ox q'in*, the child is publicly presented to the community; prior to this time, no one has seen the baby except the mother and the midwife. The newborn's family hosts a large feast in honor of the child, and all the guests bring a present, often a gift of food.

At a ceremony held 260 days after birth, the child officially becomes a member of the community. The godfather cuts a lock of hair from the child's head; this lock is stored in a little bag until the day of death, at which time it is placed in the coffin with the body to accompany the deceased in the search for his or her protector in the next life.

A Mayan child learns to bow his or her head and ask for a blessing in the presence of an elder. Children are also taught how to blow on their hands each time they take a tortilla as a sign of respect to Mother Corn. Girls learn how to weave using ancestral design patterns that pertain to the Mayan worldview. Boys are taught to use the tools necessary for subsistence farming.

The Mayas observe certain taboos and use herbs to ward off evil spirits and guard against soul loss. Smoke is used for purification. The sweat lodge represents another means of purification, and almost every hut has an attached sweat lodge.³⁷ Children fear *nawals*, phantoms that roam in the mist. Parents may use the threat of a *nawal* attack to reinforce good behavior. The sputtering of the hearth fire are believed to signal the advent of both good and bad events, and children learn how to interpret the fire's signals.

Perhaps the most important thing a Mayan child learns is how to receive the presence of Our Father God (also known as the Great Spirit). In González's novel, the protagonist, Lwin, is still a child when his parents take him to his grandfather's house to be introduced to the presence of God. The instruction involves prayers and narrations of creation and stories about the earliest ancestors, as well as historical accounts of the arrival

of the white men. Lwin learns that God “is in all of his creatures, in every time and in every place.”³⁸ He learns how to communicate with God using incense and smoke and how to listen to the language of the river, the sun, the wind, and the fire. Finally, Lwin and his grandfather climb to the summit of a great mountain to listen to the voice of God himself as night falls. The smoke lifted their prayers up to the stars. It was an evening that Lwin never forgets.³⁹

CRITICAL MOMENTS IN MAYAN HISTORY

The Spanish Conquest

In 1511, a shipwrecked Spaniard named Gonzalo Guerrero washed up on the shores of Yucatán. He adopted the Mayan lifestyle and married into a noble Mayan family. As far as is known, Guerrero was the first European to encounter the Mayas.

In 1517, the first Spanish fleet arrived in Yucatán. Commander Hernandez de Cordoba eventually died of wounds received in battle against the Mayas, but the Mayas were not really the victors. The Spanish brought smallpox, influenza, and measles, diseases against which the Mayas had no immunity. Ninety percent of Mesoamerica’s indigenous population died within a century of European contact, most of them from these diseases.

Pedro de Alvarado attacked the Quiché Mayas in 1524, and in 1528 Francisco de Montejo began the conquest of the northern Mayas. By 1541, the Mayas had succumbed, although sporadic revolts continued for the rest of the century. The Spanish forced the Mayas to learn to read and write Spanish and to relinquish their indigenous religion in favor of Catholicism. Large quantities of sacred documents were destroyed as part of the effort to obliterate native traditions. A few courageous Mayan priests hid sacred documents and continued to practice the indigenous rituals.

Over the years, the Mayas discovered how to continue some of their native practices by disguising them as Christian practices. For its part, the Catholic Church became more willing to incorporate Mayan traditions into festivals and even the Mass. The Maya-Catholic syncretism that emerged remains the dominant

form of religion in Mesoamerica to this day. The Mayas are able to manipulate this syncretism to create a sense of ethnic identity and to construct community boundaries.⁴⁰

The Civil War (1960–1996)

Officially, the Guatemalan civil war began in November 1960, when officers on the political left attempted to remove a right-wing military government. After the coup failed, many of the leftist officers disappeared into the countryside to organize guerrilla groups. These were the “insurgents” that the government sought to apprehend and punish. Many believe that the cause of the war was an earlier coup, however. In the 1950s, the American CIA supported the removal of the democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz and replaced him with the first of a series of rightist military governments. Which side actually started the war is only one of many hotly contested issues regarding the Guatemalan civil war.

David Stoll, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, and author of *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, believes that the guerrillas must shoulder some of the blame for the atrocities against civilians. In his view, the Guatemalan people were caught in the middle between ideologues on the right (the government) and ideologues on the left (Marxist-inspired guerrillas). Other researchers believe that the majority of the massacres, abductions, and killings were carried out by the army, often under the guise of seeking insurgents. None of the researchers were on site for the entire duration of the thirty-six-year war. Their general mode of operation was to visit for a brief period, perhaps revisiting the same areas for equally brief periods one or more times. Each time they visited, they interviewed residents of the town.

Most of the evidence points to the culpability of the army. Benjamin Paul, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Stanford University, and anthropologist William Demarest carried out extensive on-the-ground research in San Pedro la Laguna. This

is only a single location, but it is noteworthy that the residents do not report a single guerrilla atrocity committed against civilians. Paul and Demarest documented how the many abductions and murders suffered by the residents of San Pedro in the 1980s were blamed on insurgents, when the nearest insurgent camp was far away and never affected life in San Pedro. In this town, all of the terrorist actions were government-sponsored.⁴¹ Almost all of those killed were civilians.

The Guatemalan truth commission, which issued its report three years after the end of the war, summarized the war by saying that the Guatemalan government, with considerable support from the United States, committed acts of genocide against Guatemala's Mayan Indians. More than 80 percent of the 200,000 killed between 1960 and 1996 were Mayas. The Mayas endured massacres, abductions, executions, and scorched-earth operations supposedly aimed against the guerrillas; in actuality, these operations destroyed Mayan cultural values and the social cohesion of Mayan communities. Commissioners and secret agents were planted in every community; they used their offices and army connections to eliminate political opponents and critics of the government.

Roman Catholic clergy and nuns were also singled out for persecution. Many Catholic priests were killed by the death squads of the 1970s and 1980s or forced to flee with the Mayan refugees. Evangelical Christians often accused the Mayas and Catholics of idolatry, of being influenced by *liberation theology*, and of being on the political left. These accusations played into the hands of a government eager to brand entire families and villages subversives in order to justify their extermination. In the 1980s, army repression against Mayan Catholics became so pronounced that many converted to evangelical churches to escape persecution.⁴²

The truth commission's report has been challenged by the U.S. government and by evangelical Christian groups but, although some of the minor points can be debated and perhaps even refuted, there is no reason to suspect its overall conclusions.⁴³

INDIGENOUS MAYAN RELIGION TODAY

After the civil war, evangelical growth slowed among the Mayas of Guatemala, but evangelicals continue to play an important role. The Catholic Church remains an active presence as well, but many Mayas are reevaluating their relationship to it. Five hundred years after the Spanish conquest, the Catholic Church is still associated with colonialism in the minds of many. Increasing numbers of Mayan Indians are seeking their pre-Columbian and preconquest roots—they are returning to indigenous Maya spirituality. The evangelical churches regularly discourage any mixing of indigenous Mayan and Christian beliefs, but the Catholic Church has traditionally tolerated it. Today, however, the Catholic hierarchy is forced to ponder the question “How far is too far?” When does a Maya become so indigenous that he or she is no longer a Christian?

The Guatemalan Peace Accords of 1996 protect Mayan spiritual practices and spiritual leaders, Mayan temples and sacred sites, and traditional dress.⁴⁴ Not long ago, Mayan ceremonies were often carried out under cover of night or disguised with Catholic ceremonies. Today, traditional priests (day keepers) openly perform rituals at the sites of ancient temples and other traditional holy places. Cultural activists use the Mayan calendar as visual scripture during public ceremonies. There are plans for a university of indigenous Mayan knowledge and plans for the publication of hieroglyphic texts on the Internet.

Other aspects of traditional Mayan life are not as well protected, however. The Mayan myths say that humans were created from corn, and the Mayas have traditionally provided for their families by growing their native eight-to-ten-foot corn. Over time, soil nutrients were depleted and increasing amounts of fertilizer were required to obtain comparable yields. The building of the tourist paradise of Cancún in Mexico provided an opportunity for young men to earn money, provided they were willing to leave home for extended periods. Their earnings bought houses built of brick or concrete instead of mud and thatch to Mayan villages. The Mayas now

have televisions, refrigerators, bicycles, washing machines, and Western clothes.

The building boom in Cancún and similar tourist resorts fizzled after the events of September 11, 2001. Today, many Mayas are looking farther north, to the United States, as the closest land of opportunity. The importation of cheap corn from the United States makes it even more certain that Mayan men will not be able to make a living on their ancestral lands. Traditionally tight-knit Mayan families are being torn apart by these changes. Today, a Mayan widow enjoys the right to share a meal with her deceased ancestors, because indigenous religion is no longer repressed, but she lacks the opportunity to share food and conversation with her children and grandchildren.

7

The Quechuas

*What I know is a gift from the apus
and cannot be passed on.*

—Don Nazario Turpo, Quechua pacu (shaman priest)

INTRODUCTION

With about 8 million members, the Quechuas are one of the largest American Indian groups. They live in the Andes Mountains, primarily in the countries of Peru and Bolivia. There are also Quechuas living in the Amazon rain forest, but this chapter focuses on the Quechuas who live in the mountains of Peru.

The Peruvian Andes are young mountains in terms of geologic time. Their peaks soar to twenty thousand feet or more. Even though Peru lies just south of the equator, these mountains are covered with snow and glaciers. High plains (*altiplano*) covered with grasses nestle between the peaks. The *altiplano* are dotted with mountain lakes; grazing llama, alpaca, and vicuña; and the one-room stone, adobe, or sod houses of the Quechuas. Quechua houses have thatched roofs that need to be replaced on a regular basis to keep the rains that fall during the wet summer (November to March or April) from seeping inside.

The Quechuas live among the ruins of the Inca Empire, at elevations between nine thousand and sixteen thousand feet. They practice subsistence farming and herd llamas and alpacas. Potatoes and carrots are the primary crops grown at the higher elevations. In the lower elevations, there are additional vegetables, including corn, squash, peas, and beans. Some of the valleys have roads, but most transportation is by foot. Llamas were originally used as pack animals and sometimes still are, but the horse, introduced by the Spanish, is now the more common beast of burden. Alpacas are not used to carry loads. They are treasured for their soft hair, which is spun and woven into the famous and beautiful Andean textiles. The Quechuas do eat meat but only sparingly. Protein-rich grains such as quinoa and kiwicha supplement the small amounts of meat.

The language spoken by the indigenous people of Peru is called Quechua, and it is the most widely spoken Amerindian language. In Peru, about a quarter of the people speak it, and about a third of those speak no Spanish. Quechua was the language of the ancient Inca Empire. You may be familiar with

some of the following English words that are derived from Quechua: coca, condor, guano, Inca, jerky, lima (bean), llama, pampa, puma, quinine, quinoa, and quipu.

The Quechuas refer to themselves as *Runa*, which means *the people*. They make up almost half of Peru's population, but they are at the bottom of the social strata. They are oppressed by the "whites" (full-blooded Spanish), who make up only 15 percent of the population, and by the mestizos (mixed-blood people), who constitute a little more than one-third of the population. The novels of José María Arguedas describe both Quechua culture and the oppression suffered by the people.

The largest lake in the Andes, Lake Titicaca, is also one of the highest navigable lakes on Earth. The Quechuas use the name *Mamaqocha* (mother of all waters) for only two bodies of water: the ocean and Lake Titicaca. Titicaca means *rock of the mountain cat*. A story recounts how a wildcat swam from the shore of the mainland to Isla del Sol (Island of the Sun), where it was worshiped. Lake Titicaca is a holy site for the Incas and their modern-day descendants, the Quechua and Aymara Indians. According to the Incan creation myth, *Wiraqocha*, the creator, made the sun, moon, stars, and the Incan people from Lake Titicaca. Wiraqocha brought his son, Manco Capac, and his daughter, Mama Ocllo, up from the deep near the north end of Isla del Sol. Manco Capac was the first Inca; he and his sister-wife were the progenitors of the Incan race.

Probably the two most famous contributions of the Quechua people to the rest of the world are potatoes and quinine. The farmers of the Andes have been growing potatoes for about seven thousand years. Western people did not know about the potato until the conquistadores marched across Peru in 1537. Unfortunately, the Spanish brought malaria with them, and the Quechuas survived its first onslaught by using quinine, which they obtained from the bark of a Peruvian tree. Quinine had previously been used to treat cramps, chills, and heart-rhythm disorders. The Quechuas learned that it also cured malaria. When this knowledge was shared with the



The Quechua Indians live high in the Andes Mountains of Peru and Bolivia. Lake Titicaca, which lies on the border between Peru and Bolivia (lower-right corner of map), is one of their holiest sites.

Europeans, they quickly monopolized the use of quinine, leaving the Indians to die of a disease for which they had discovered the cure.

ORIGINS

The Quechuas probably are the biological descendants of the first Andean population, but the line of descent is not direct. Several times in the history of the region, populations were moved in and out. Culturally, today's Quechuas are the inheritors of an indigenous Andean culture that extends back at least to 8000 B.C.E. and quite likely as far as 20000 B.C.E.

Most anthropologists contend that the indigenous Andean population resulted from the southward migration of people who crossed Bering Strait around thirteen thousand years ago or before. There are alternative hypotheses, one of which was popularized by Thor Heyerdahl's journey on a balsa raft from Peru to Polynesia. Heyerdahl intended to prove that traffic between the two was possible. It is interesting to note that the term *tiki* is used for "god" in both regions.

The Quechuas were one of the first groups conquered by the Inca Empire, and they view themselves as its descendants. At the height of its existence, the Inca Empire was the largest nation on Earth. It stretched north to south twenty-five hundred miles along the Andes Mountains from Ecuador to Chile. At its head stood the emperor, the Inca, who was believed to be a descendant of the sun god, *Inti*.

Agriculture was the basis of the economy. The Incas lacked wheeled tools and draft animals. Like the Quechuas of today, they used foot plows to grow potatoes.

Money existed only in the form of work. Silver and gold were abundant, but they were used only for aesthetics, never for currency. Each subject of the empire paid "taxes" by laboring on roads, crop terraces, irrigation canals, temples, or fortresses. In return, rulers paid their laborers in woven textiles and food. Incan law stated that no person was allowed to go without shelter, food, or clothing.

The Incas had no writing system; they kept records by means of a *quipu*. A quipu is a series of short, knotted strings hung at intervals from a long top string. By varying the colors and kind of string used and the spacing of the strings and knots, the Incas could record populations, troops, and tribute, as well as their legends and achievements. The quipu was a memory aid rather than a literal record, and only a trained *quipucamayo* could interpret it.

Incan architecture is famous for its finely worked stones. They are fitted together so well, without the use of mortar, that a knife blade does not fit between the stones.

Although they did not have the wheel, the Incas constructed an extensive system of well-built and constantly maintained roads, which spanned at least twenty thousand miles. Sometimes paved with stone, the roads were often supported by retaining walls that have lasted for more than five hundred years. Along these thoroughfares moved mobile army units, accompanied by pack trains of llamas. *Chasquis*, specially trained runners, relayed memorized news and the orders of the emperor between carefully spaced *tambos*, or way stations. These messengers formed a communications system that could guarantee one-day delivery for every 140 miles of road.

Despite these many accomplishments, the Inca Empire existed only for about a century (1438–1532). On November 16, 1532, the Incan emperor arrived at an arranged meeting with Francisco Pizarro only to be ambushed and captured. Thousands of his subjects were killed or routed. After 1532, the Quechuas lived under Spanish rule.

MYTHS

In Quechua mythology, the last world order was that of the Incas; the half millennium since the collapse of that empire is viewed as a protracted time of turmoil. According to one story, Inkarrí, who represents the Incas, lost his head and went into hiding at the time of the Spanish conquest. In the future, he will be reunited with his head. This myth appears to reflect both a

historical fact (the abduction and death of the Incan emperor) and a messianic expectation that the world of the Incas will be reborn when Inkarrí returns.

Water is a recurrent theme in Quechua mythology. The annual cycling of water between Mother Sea (*mamaqocha*) and the Andean highlands is essential for the survival of life in the region. The Incas brought black llamas to the main plaza in Cuzco, the capital of the Inca Empire, and kept them there without drinking water, intending for the llamas to pray to *Wiraqocha* for the return of the waters. This ritual took place in October, the month before the start of the rainy season. The black llamas in Cuzco were probably seen as the earthly counterpart of the Black Llama constellation in the sky. When viewed from the Andes region, this constellation dips toward the horizon in the month of October until it appears to drink from the ocean (*mamaqocha*) waters. It then brings the water back up into the sky overhead, from where it falls as rain. The runoff from the rains is stored in the lakes, which are viewed as storehouses of the sacred waters.⁴⁵

It is possible to have too much water as well as too little. Many cultures in various parts of the world have stories about a great flood that covered Earth. The Bible describes such a flood as occurring in the time of Noah (Genesis 6–8). The following is the Incan story about the great deluge. Llamas figure in this story as well.

The story begins by describing a time when cruelty and murder flourished. Human beings were preoccupied with wars and other evils. The only part of the world that remained uncorrupted was the high Andes, where two shepherd brothers of unimpeachable character dwelled. One day, the brothers noticed that their llamas were acting strangely; they were not eating and every night they gazed sadly at the stars. When the brothers asked the llamas the reason for their behavior, the llamas replied that they had heard from the stars that a great flood was imminent. This flood would destroy all life on Earth.

The two brothers and their families and flocks took shelter in a cave on a very high mountain. Soon, it began to rain and

didn't stop for months. The cries of the dying rose from below, but the brothers and their families were safe, because the mountain in which they had taken shelter miraculously grew taller as the waters rose.

One day, the rains ceased and Inti, the sun god, appeared and caused the waters to evaporate. The mountain returned to its normal height, and the households of the two shepherds emerged from the caves and repopulated Earth. Humans now live everywhere, but llamas remember the great flood and prefer to live only in the mountains.

WORLDVIEW

The Quechuas who practice their indigenous religion and live in a traditional way do so because they believe that there is a holy and right way to live, as well as a heedless and careless way to live. The holy and right way is to always remember the spirits, to make offerings to them, and to live in extended kinship relations that involve reciprocal help for everyday tasks and mutual support in difficult times.

A traditional Quechua's sense of identity is not based exclusively or even primarily on his or her own body, abilities, and personality. Rather, a Quechua is a Quechua because of connections to certain spirits, to a community of people, and to a specific landscape. These connections are expressed in the Quechua way of life, which involves offerings to the spirits, subsistence agriculture (both herding and growing crops), weaving textiles, and communal work projects. This complex sense of identity is expressed in the woven textiles worn by Andean highlanders. The traditional designs woven into clothing represent lakes, condors, pumas, and llamas. Anyone who knows how to read this woven form of communication can tell much about the wearer: ethnic group, *ayllu* (work group), gender, age, family, marital status, and offices held in the community.⁴⁶

Most important to the Quechuas is not individual success but rather good relationships with the spiritual world; growth

and health of families, communities, herds, and crops; and stewardship of the physical and social worlds. In this intricately interwoven world, the spirits, people, and land live or die together. Humans are responsible for carrying out the rituals that mend the world order when it is threatened.

The right to use a certain piece of property is based on kinship and descent. The introduction of private property would disrupt kinship-based residential and agricultural arrangements. This is true not only for the Quechuas but also for many other indigenous peoples around the world. In the Bible, the ancient Israelites based land rights on kinship affiliation rather than on a concept of private property rights.

Mother Earth is revered as *Pachamama*. She is the mother of all life. The landscape is sacred for another reason: It plays a role in the measurement of time. In the mountains, the horizon line is seldom horizontal. Peaks are readily identifiable by their rugged dawn or dusk silhouettes. Knowing the landmark by which the sun or the moon rose or set enables one to tell what time of the month or year it is.

Lakes (*qochas*) are also sacred. They are filled with the sacred waters that originate near the sacred mountaintops. They store these life-giving waters, the gift of the *apus* (“mountains” or “mountain spirits”).

WORSHIP

The Roman Catholic missionaries who traveled with the conquistadores taught Christian beliefs and practices. Although the Quechuas adopted the new religion, they did not abandon their native beliefs and practices. After the Spanish conquest, Quechua religious practice became a blend of Roman Catholicism and indigenous Quechua religion, and it remains so to this day.

A typical Quechua family attends Mass on Sundays and participates in the sacraments of the Catholic faith. These Catholic religious practices are supplemented by indigenous practices in three ways: through private prayer to the spirits, by

celebrating indigenous festivals, and through offerings to the spirits made by a spiritual leader known as a *pacu*.

Apus are believed to influence the well-being and good fortune of human beings. Pacus are human beings who serve and communicate with the apus. (There is no English word that adequately translates “pacu”; translators often use “shaman,” but that is a very rough equivalent.) *Despachos*, offerings to the apus, are made by pacus. *Despachos* consist of flowers, foods, and alcohol. Although alcohol is offered to the apus, pacus do not drink it; to do so would be contrary to their spiritual calling. *Despachos* are burned at the end of the offering ceremony, because it is believed that the gifts are conveyed to the apus by means of the smoke rising from the fire. Pacus live in or near sacred places called *huacas*, and most *despachos* are performed in these sacred locations.

People do not choose to become pacus. The apus select them, often by means of a bolt of lightning that strikes but does not kill them. The lightning strike is thought to dissolve the person, who is then recreated as a *pacu*. This is an example of a death and rebirth experience; such experiences serve as initiation experiences for spiritual leaders in many different religious traditions. Many charlatans make a living preying on those gullible enough to believe their spiritual claims. These spiritual vendors are typically not Quechuas (although they may assume Quechua-sounding names), they are not pacus themselves, and they certainly are not apus. Quechuas believe that only the apus can select who will become a *pacu* and, although the selected person may enjoy the mentorship of an established *pacu*, there is no formal course of study leading to initiation.

Although a traditional Quechua consults a *pacu* many times in the course of his or her life, prayers do not require the aid of a *pacu*. People often pray quietly or silently as they go about their daily activities, blowing the prayer across coca leaves held in their hands in order to send it to the spirits. Coca leaves are highly valued; they are chewed or made into tea, and they are often included in offerings to the spirits.

THE FESTIVAL OF QOYLLUR RIT'I

Qoyllur Rit'i (the Snow Star Pilgrimage) may serve as an example of a festival that combines Christian and indigenous religious elements. Annually, in late May or early June, thousands of pilgrims trek up mountain trails to a Catholic church near the foot of a glacier named *Qolquepunku* ("silver gate"). At an elevation of sixteen thousand feet, it is very cold in midwinter.

The pilgrims carry crosses and cloth banners bearing the image of Christ, El Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i. The roots of this festival go back not only to pre-Christian times in this region but even to pre-Incan times. Qoyllur Rit'i has descended from a prehistoric winter solstice festival that focused on the disappearance of the Pleiades constellation ("the Seven Sisters") from the sky for a period of about forty-five days before the solstice. This was believed to be a period of great danger. The Incas maintained the tradition with their celebration of Oncoymita, a fiesta in honor of the Pleiades.

The Qoyllur Rit'i shrine is located on the side of a sacred mountain named *Ausungate*, a 20,905-foot peak in southern Peru. In precolonial legends, Ausungate appeared to local peasants as a white-skinned boy with blond hair. In the eighteenth century, a local shepherd boy encountered such an apparition. Shortly thereafter, some church officials saw the same mysterious youth and assumed that they were seeing a vision of the Christ child. Catholic pilgrimages to the site began in 1783, accompanied by the clergy's declaration of Christ's appearance. Thus began the multicultural use of this indigenous sacred site.

Pilgrims camp near the Qolquepunku Glacier for several days. Despite the difficult journey, many wear their best clothes. Elaborately costumed and adorned dancers, representing the real and mythological populations of various areas of Peru, are accompanied by nonstop music. Among the costumed dancers are the *ukukus*, generally said to represent bears. The *ukukus* stand all night on the glacier to converse with the gods, bringing back large chunks of sacred ice that they have earned through their sacrifice. Some die in the attempt, but most return to dispense the life-giving sacred waters to the pilgrims. The carved ice blocks are blessed by the priest at the church but their power comes from the mountain.

GROWING UP QUECHUA

First Haircutting

The first haircutting is the most significant ceremony of early childhood, even more important than the baptism ceremony, which ordinarily takes place in a Catholic church. First haircutting occurs when it seems clear that the baby has survived the dangerous period of infancy. The harsh climate in the high Andes results in high infant mortality rates, and parents fear to celebrate a new family member too soon. The first haircutting reflects a sense of confidence that the baby will live. This ceremony usually takes place when the child is between one and four years of age.

Those invited to be the child's godparents officially assume their role at the first haircutting. The godparents cut the first locks of hair. Family members and friends stand in line to be next to cut a lock of hair. As each person takes his or her turn with the scissors, a gift of money is placed on the plate that holds the scissors. This money is set aside for the child's future, so that it is available when a special need arises. This ceremony is followed by celebratory eating, drinking, and dancing, which can last throughout the night.

Ayllu and Ayni

A set of social obligations known as ayllu binds Quechua families together in reciprocal work relationships. Claims to land and water rights have historically been based on these labor relationships. At birth, a Quechua person inherits a set of relationships that extend beyond the family and serve as the basis for communal sharing of labor, land, and water. Being part of an ayllu is a serious responsibility.

Ayni is a set of reciprocal labor obligations dating back to the Inca Empire. Work done by one Quechua for another involves no exchange of money and no written contract. Labor exchange takes place through a set of nonverbal understandings. When people receive food or assistance in tasks, they know that they are obligated to return it at a later date. A person who has

donated goods and labor to other ayllu members can “call in ayni” whenever he or she needs help. The help may be in preparation for a wedding or for rethatching a roof before the rainy season arrives. A person may give gifts to other families at times of celebration and expect to receive gifts in turn when he or she has something to celebrate. Ayni gifts are always made or produced by the giver; they are never purchased. The two most valuable things that a Quechua might give or receive are woven textiles or labor.

Marriage⁴⁷

Despite pressure from the Catholic Church, it is not uncommon for a couple to remain unmarried until they have several children. In such a case, the priest may baptize the children immediately after the wedding ceremony.

Today, a Quechua groom may wear a business suit for his wedding and the bride may wear a Western wedding dress. Some, however, opt for “an Incan-style wedding.” The official wedding ceremony is the same in either case, but in the Incan-style wedding, the couple wears handmade woven clothes with traditional Quechua designs.

After the church service, members of the wedding party give speeches, enjoy a feast that likely includes roasted guinea pig (a Quechua delicacy) and potatoes, and exchange coca. This is followed by a party at which people dance with a large doll tied to their backs, symbolizing fertility for the newlyweds. Dancing, gift-giving, and drinking of the locally brewed beer might continue for several days, until everyone is exhausted. The wedding joins not only the bride and groom, but also their respective ayllus, in reciprocal commitments.

Death and Afterlife

There are no undertakers in Quechua society. People prepare the body for viewing and bury their dead without professional help. Mourners wail as a way of expressing their grief. Clothes of the dead person are washed in a ritual.

Relationships with the deceased continue after death. When the living visit the gravesite, they bring plates of the deceased's favorite foods so that living and dead may share a meal, at least symbolically. It is a place to cry and laugh as people tell their favorite stories about the dead person and even talk to him or her.

Autopsies, which are mandated by Peruvian national law in some cases, are a cause of great consternation to the Quechuas. They believe that cutting the body is dangerous to the dead person's soul or spirit.

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Incan Religion

When the first Europeans arrived at the end of the fifteenth century, the native population of South America is estimated to have been between 10 and 15 million; more than half of whom lived in the northern and central Andes.

The Indians of the high Andes had no written language. Consequently, the earliest written descriptions of their religion were those produced by the Spanish invaders. Religious studies scholars use the Spanish descriptions of Inca religion, but they do so with caution because the descriptions were produced by people who were both unfamiliar with Inca religion and predisposed to be antagonistic toward it.

According to the Spanish descriptions, the Incas venerated the sun, the moon, their ancestors, the highest mountain peaks, and natural phenomena such as lightning and thunder. Wiraqocha was both the creator and an Incan culture hero. Inti was the deity associated with the sun; he was believed to be the ancestor of the Incas. The winter solstice festival, *Inti Raymi*, honored Inti. He was the focal point of state religion. Pachamama was Mother Earth, considered the mother of all life. She was associated with the rainy season (November to April), when everything grows.

Ancestors played a significant role in Andean society. Ayllus were kinship groups named for their common ancestor. The fact that the Incas had mummies was probably related to ancestor

reverence. The mummies were brought out for important festivals and included in important meetings.

Huacas are holy places in the landscape, such as mountains, rocks, bodies of water, caves, monuments, places of origin, and the burial places of ancestors. Symbolic offerings were left at huacas and this practice has continued to the present day.

The Inca Empire had a highly organized state religion. Members of the official priesthood resided at important shrines. They maintained a House of the Sun and a House of the Moon on Titicaca Island in Lake Titicaca. The chief priest lived in Cuzco, where he oversaw all the shrines of the empire and was parallel in authority to the Inca (the head of the empire) himself. Incan priests combined shamanic abilities with ritual expertise. They used ritual to enter supernatural realms, where they mobilized the spiritual forces of the ancestors or other spirits on behalf of the people.

The Incas had convents of cloistered, chaste women whose duties included weaving cloth for the families and for ceremonies. The House of the Chosen Women (*acllawasi*) contained the highest class of cloistered women weavers. They wove cloth and prepared food for all the administrative centers and for the Inca himself. The most noble and beautiful girls were selected and trained for this service to the Incas and to the gods.

Spanish Conquest and the Imposition of Christianity

In 1494, Pope Alexander VI drew a line on the map that handed half the non-Christian world to Spain and the other half to Portugal, provided they converted the peoples they conquered to Christianity.⁴⁸ Incan religious institutions and sacred sites were destroyed by the Spanish conquistadores' campaign against idolatry. Incan state religion was replaced with Catholic state religion—with an accompanying threat of death to those who failed to comply. The “Tribunal del Santo Oficio de le Inquisición” (Court of the Holy Office of the Inquisition) functioned in Lima for two and a half centuries (1569–1820). Those who refused to profess the Christian faith were paraded

in dunce caps at public ceremonies called *autos-da-fé* before being burned to death at the stake.

The Quechuas were forced to build thousands of churches. Celebrations of the Catholic saints were substituted for Incan religious festivals. The Quechuas were accustomed to living in their fields, just as many farmers do today. They were forced into villages because officials thought that it would be easier to control them and enforce conversion to Christianity. Despite these measures, the Quechuas and other Indians were not entirely converted. Out of sight of Catholic clerics, the people continued to offer ritual gifts to Inti and Pachamama.

QUECHUA RELIGION TODAY

With the advent of religious freedom, protected by the modern constitution of Peru, the Quechua people are moving in several religious directions at once. The majority practice a blend of Catholic and native rituals. In traditional communities, statues of the Virgin Mary are used interchangeably as representations of Pachamama. Festivals mix prayers to Jesus and a visit to a Catholic church with offerings to the spirits carried out at sacred sites. Some Quechuas have divested themselves of all Christian practices in an attempt to recreate a pure form of Incan religion. A few have divested themselves of all elements of Incan religion in an attempt to adhere to a more pure form of Christianity. Many of this last group have become Protestants and have joined either Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, but conservative Protestantism has been less successful in Peru than in Central American countries.

The Catholic Church

One-third of Peru's population practices a blend of Roman Catholic and indigenous religion; the nation as a whole is 95 percent Catholic, at least nominally. The Catholic Church in Peru has historically been considered very conservative. Many bishops were large landlords, or *hacendados*. In the Andean highlands, priests continued to deal with the Quechua and

Aymara peoples in colonial fashion until the 1950s, when Catholic missionaries from the United States known as Maryknoll priests arrived and began to introduce changes. A populist and social activist segment of the Catholic clergy emerged, with liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez as its most famous representative. These priests and nuns placed a higher priority on helping the poor, and this led to a reinvigoration of many parishes. Pope John Paul II expressed reservations about liberation theology during his 1988 visit to Peru, however, and has appointed conservative bishops since that time.

Syncretism

This section offers two additional examples of the way in which modern Quechua people use both Catholicism and indigenous religion to make sense of their lives. The first example comes from a former silver mine in Potosí that has been converted into a museum. Under the direction of relentless Spanish foremen, more than 2 million Incas, Aymaras, Quechuas, and Africans were worked to death in the freezing tunnels of Potosí's silver mines. The museum display includes a very large figure of the devil in his traditional garb: a sequined cape, chartreuse satin trousers, and a horned serpent mask. Because miners removed treasures from the territory ruled by the devil (from the underworld), they offered prayers and gifts to him in an effort to appease his anger.

The second example is an autobiographical story told by Gregorio Condori Mamani, a Quechua Indian whose words are recorded in *Andean Lives* (1996). After Gregorio is discharged from the army, he does not want to go back to his hometown wearing soldier's garb, so he takes a job in a cemetery making adobe bricks. The modern view of the dead as objects to be disposed of clashes with Quechua reverence for the ancestors, and Gregorio fears that the work he is doing to earn money is wronging the souls of the dead. Under the *ayni* system, the Quechuas do not receive wages for labor. Furthermore, any work performed is of immediate and obvious benefit to the

community. How could Gregorio understand the strange work of pulling the dead out of their burial niches and burning the remains? His work partner recognizes that economic considerations are the motivation for their assigned task, although his guess as to the nature of those considerations is more humorous than accurate. Gregorio, on the other hand, worries about the repercussions of burning the dead, and he sees the spirits in his dreams:

. . . they all come weeping to the door of my house. . . .
they ask me:

“Gregorio, why have you burned us? Our bodies are covered with open wounds.”

But in my dreams, I’ve yet to see them enter my house. They always just talk to me from the doorway. . . .

So my wife told me:

“The day they enter our house, we’ll surely die.”

That’s why, to cure myself of that, I went to a healer several times, and he’d make offerings to those souls. But the healer said:

“Didn’t work. Those souls are all *misti wiraquchas* [Mestizos, and therefore of a higher social class than the Quechuas], and they don’t want to accept the offerings.”⁴⁹

CHRONOLOGY & TIMELINE

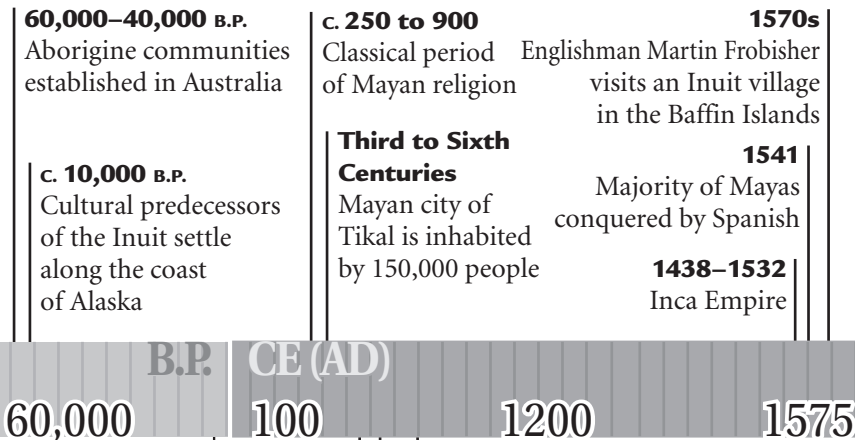
60,000–40,000 B.P. Aborigine communities are established in Australia.

Circa

10,000 years B.P. Cultural predecessors of the Inuit settle along the coastline of a land bridge that connected Siberia and Alaska during the last ice age.

c. 5,000 B.P. Sea-ice hunters (the ancestors of today’s Inuit) expand into what is now Canada and southern Greenland.

1000 B.C.E. Agriculture begins in the Andes region, the future home of the Incas and the Quechuas.



60,000–40,000 B.P.
Aborigine communities established in Australia

c. 250 to 900
Classical period of Mayan religion

1570s
Englishman Martin Frobisher visits an Inuit village in the Baffin Islands

c. 10,000 B.P.
Cultural predecessors of the Inuit settle along the coast of Alaska

Third to Sixth Centuries
Mayan city of Tikal is inhabited by 150,000 people

1541
Majority of Mayas conquered by Spanish

1438–1532
Inca Empire

1000 B.C.E.
Start of agriculture in Andes region

Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries
Kingdoms of Mali, Songhay, and Great Zimbabwe flourish in Africa

First Millennium C.E.
Kingdom of Ghana emerges in Africa

c. 1000
Thule culture arises in northwestern Alaska

900–1200
Mayas abandon their cities and return to rural lifestyle

CHRONOLOGY & TIMELINE

c. 600 B.C.E. The Olmec culture, which originated in Mexico, enters the Guatemalan highlands.

c. 250–900 C.E. The classical period of Mayan religion.

First Millennium The Kingdom of Ghana emerges in Africa.

Third to Sixth

Centuries More than 150,000 people live in the great Mayan city of Tikal (in present-day Guatemala).

900–1200 The Mayas abandon their cities and return to a rural lifestyle, which has continued to the present time.

1788 British begin to use Botany Bay, Australia, as penal colony	1970s Australian Aboriginal artwork becomes known around the world
1810–1820 Satnam Panth reform movement begins	1960–1996 Guatemalan civil war
1871 Criminal Tribes Act	1950s Indigenous peoples begin to form their own international networks

1775

1900

1950

2000

1901
Aborigines officially excluded from becoming citizens of Australia

c. 1920
Commercial fur trade and Christian missionaries come to Arctic region

1985
Uluru given back to Aborigines

1999
Nunavut becomes Canada's newest territory

2000
States of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttaranchal established in India

CHRONOLOGY

- c. 1000 Thule culture arises in northwestern Alaska and rapidly spreads east through the Arctic regions to Greenland; first known contact between Europeans and the Inuit occurs when Norse settlers lived in northern Newfoundland, Canada, for a short time.

Twelfth to Sixteenth

Centuries The Kingdoms of Mali, Songhay, and Great Zimbabwe flourish in Africa.

- c. 1250 The first Inuit enter Greenland.

1438–1532 The Inca Empire.

Late Fifteenth

Century The first Europeans arrive in South America.

Fifteenth to Nine-

teenth Centuries The Atlantic slave trade brings Africans to the Americas to be sold as slaves.

- 1494 Pope Alexander VI draws the Demarcation Line, which gives half the non-Christian world to Spain and the other half to Portugal, provided they convert the peoples they conquer to Christianity.

1511 The first known contact between a European, Gonzalo Guerrero, and the Mayas occurs.

1541 Almost all the Mayas have been conquered by the Spanish by this time.

1569–1820 A Tribunal of the Sacred Office of the Inquisition functions in Lima, Peru; those who refuse to profess the Christian faith are burned to death at the stake.

1570s Englishman Martin Frobisher visits an Inuit village in the Baffin Islands.

c. 1757–1947 The British rule India.

1770 Captain James Cook enters Botany Bay, Australia.

- 1788** The first British officers and convicts arrive in Botany Bay (a penal colony), and numerous conflicts with Aborigines erupt.
- 1789** Smallpox decimates the coastal Australian Aboriginal population and begins to spread inland; Olaudah Equiano's book describing his experiences as a slave is published and has a profound effect on public opinion regarding the slave trade.
- 1790** Governor Arthur Phillip orders the first punitive expedition against Australian Aborigines; its target is Pemulwuy, an Aboriginal resistance fighter.
- 1791** An ex-slave, Toussaint L'Ouverture, leads a slave rebellion in Haiti, which ultimately leads to the defeat of the French and independence for Haiti.

Late Eighteenth

Century Moravian missionaries trade with the Labrador Inuit and convert many of them to Christianity.

Nineteenth Century The government of Australia gradually moves Aborigines off their land and forces them to settle in locations less desirable to white settlers.

1804 Haiti becomes the first black republic in the world and the first country in the Americas to abolish slavery.

1805 On July 20, Judge-Advocate Richard Atkins rules that Australian Aborigines are incapable of being brought before a criminal court, thereby effectively condoning the imposition of punishment by whoever captured a fleeing Aborigine.

1810–1820 The social-religious reform movement known as Satnam Panth helps create a social consciousness for India's Adivasis.

CHRONOLOGY

1836-1837 A select committee of the British House of Commons reports that genocide is taking place in Australia.

1838 Twenty-eight Kwiambal people, mainly women and children, are murdered by a European hunting party in Australia.

c. 1850 European and American whalers begin to operate in the Arctic, leading to the spread of infectious diseases for which the Inuit have no natural immunity.

After 1860 The British impose a system of fixed individual landownership on Adivasi land.

1871 The British government lashes out against the Adivasis of India in the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, calling them “congenital criminals” because of their perceived hostility to British interests.

Late Nineteenth to Mid-twentieth Century

Africa is colonized.

1896-1897 The Chimurenga Resistance in Zimbabwe resists the British South African Company.

1901 Aborigines are officially excluded from Australian citizenship.

1905 The Maji Maji Uprising in Tanganyika (East Africa) opposes German colonizers.

Early Twentieth

Century Numerous people predict the imminent extinction of indigenous religions.

1914-1919 The Oraon movement takes place in India, which is an uprising of a section of the Oraon people under a man named Jatra, who sought to purify Oraon religion and recover Oraon land.

- c. 1920 The commercial fur trade moves into the Arctic regions of Canada, accompanied by Christian missions that drive traditional Inuit religion underground.
- 1920 The Australian Aboriginal population is estimated at 60,000 and they are widely spoken of as a “dying race.”
- 1949 The Commonwealth Electoral Act extends voting privileges to Australian Aboriginal ex-servicemen (but not to any other Aborigines).
- 1950 The newly independent government of India subdivides large landholdings and distributes the land to those who tilled it.
- 1950s Many indigenous peoples begin to form their own international networks.
- 1953–1957 Atomic tests are conducted on Maralinga lands in South Australia while Aborigines are present on the site, causing eye damage and radiation sickness.
- 1957 International Labor Organization (ILO) passes Convention 107 concerning the protection and integration of indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal populations in independent countries; this document laid the cornerstone for collective rights for tribal peoples.
- 1960–1996 The Guatemalan civil war, during which acts of genocide were carried out against Guatemala’s Mayan Indians, is fought.
- 1960s The establishment of “Eskimo Co-ops” inaugurates the Inuit fight to regain control of their land and the sale of their artwork.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1962** All Australian Aborigines are given the right to vote.
- 1963** Residents of Mapoon, Queensland, are evicted from their homes and taken to other reserves to allow mining by Comalco.
- 1966** Most of the nations of Africa have gained independence from colonial rule by this time.
- 1967** The Commonwealth Referendum passes, ending constitutional discrimination in Australia and providing for all Aboriginal people to be counted in the national census.
- 1970s** Australian Aboriginal artwork becomes known around the world.
- 1971** The Inuit Brotherhood, which later changes its name to Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, is founded.
- 1974** Justice Woodward of Australia rules that Aborigines have the right to prevent mining on their land.
- 1974–1975** India passes laws forbidding the sale of tribal land to a nontribal person or entity.
- 1975** Comprehensive Inuit land claims are signed in northern Quebec.
- 1976** The Inuit propose the creation of a Canadian territory to be called Nunavut (our land).
- 1978** The Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Ordinance passes, prohibiting trespass and desecration of Australian Aboriginal sites in the Northern Territory.
- 1984** Comprehensive Inuit land claims are signed in the western Northwest Territories of Canada.

- 1985** The sacred site of Uluru (Ayers Rock) in the Northern Territory is handed back to its traditional Australian Aboriginal owners.
- 1989** The government of Benin formally recognizes vodou as its official religion.
- 1992** The High Court of Australia rules that native title exists for unalienated crown lands, national parks, and reserves.
- 1993** Australia's Native Title Act allows Indigenous people to apply for recognition of native title after leases (for mining, for example) expire, if they can demonstrate a traditional and ongoing link with the land; the UN International Year of the World's Indigenous People is observed.
- 1994–2004** The UN International Decade of the World's Indigenous People is observed.
- 1996** In Australia, the Wik decision rules that native title can coexist with pastoral leases.
- 1999** On April 1, Nunavut becomes Canada's newest territory.
- 2000** Three new states with large Adivasi populations—Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttaranchal—are carved out of India.
- 2002** India's Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) passes; in Jharkhand, POTA is used to harass innocent indigenous and poor people.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

- 1 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Fact Sheet No. 9 (Rev.1).
- 2 All statistics on religious adherence should be viewed as estimates only. Some nations, including the United States, do not collect statistics of religious beliefs. Definitions of what constitutes membership in a religion vary widely: People are born into some, whereas in others, people must wait for years to attain full membership even if they have been participating in the religion's activities throughout their lives. Some religions demand exclusive adherence, but others allow simultaneous participation in other religions. Finally, political implications surround numbers of adherents in some countries, leading to the probability of bias in the collection and reporting of statistics. The statistical data in this book come from Adherents.com, an independent Internet initiative.
- 3 This cruel homage to development continues even today. According to Survival International, a U.K.-based organization that supports the rights of indigenous peoples, San (bushmen) in Botswana are being ordered out of the Kalahari Game Reserve to make room for diamond prospectors. The government of Botswana vigorously denies these charges, but allegations of harassment and forced removals are plentiful.
- 4 A quick google search of the histories of aspirin, digitalis, and quinine showed no sites crediting indigenous people with their discovery. One site mentioned that quinine came from the bark of the cinchona tree, which was used by the "natives" to bring down fevers. Even this site, however, credited "Peruvian Jesuits" and not the "natives" with the discovery of quinine.

CHAPTER 2:

The Adivasis of India

- 5 In a global or international context, *Caucasian* has a broader reference than

it does in American common usage. In the United States the term *Caucasian* is often used exclusively for someone of European descent. More broadly, *Caucasian* refers to the relatively light-complexioned people of Europe, northern Africa, southwestern Asia, the Americas, and the Indian subcontinent.

- 6 The Rajputs were members of the warrior caste. Although some Rajputs were Muslim, these particular Rajputs would have been Hindu.

CHAPTER 3:

African Indigenous Religions

- 7 Magesa received his Ph.D. and D.Th. from St. Paul University in Ottawa, Canada. He is the author of several books on African religion, culture, and politics. He is also a correspondent for *AFRICANEWS*, published by the Koinonia Media Centre in Nairobi, Kenya.
- 8 Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 35.
- 9 Monasticism does exist in Africa, however. Indigenous Christian churches in Egypt and Ethiopia are proud of their monasteries and celibate monks.
- 10 The ideas in this and the following section are drawn from John S. Mbiti, *African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, U.K.: Heineman International Literature and Textbooks, 1991), chapter 8.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 12 Opoku's collection of proverbs is available online at www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/af-prov2.htm.
- 13 Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, 72.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 15 Mbiti, *African Religion*, 2nd ed., 59.
- 16 Some African societies do not have priests. In such cases, ritual elders or traditional rulers may perform some of the functions of a priest.
- 17 Circumcision is acceptable in the West if performed in infancy but not if performed at puberty.

- 18 Colonialism may be defined as the occupation and control of one country by another.
- 19 There are variant spellings, including Voudoun, Vodun, and Voodoo.

CHAPTER 4: Australian Aboriginal Peoples

- 20 See *Science News Online* 159(14), 7 April 2001, at <http://www.science.news.org>.
- 21 The entire Interview with Robert Bropho is available at <http://web.archive.org/web/19981205085857/http://www.omen.com.au/~onelife/neopag/aborig.html>. (Part 1) and <http://web.archive.org/web/19990117080732/http://www.omen.com.au/~onelife/neopag/aborig2.htm.l>. (Part 2).
- 22 Cook's Journal, "Entry for Sunday the 29th of April 1770."
- 23 <http://www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenoustimeline2.cfm>.
- 24 <http://www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenouland.cfm>.
- 25 <http://www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenoustimeline2.cfm>.
- 26 Ibid.

CHAPTER 5: The Inuit People of the Arctic Areas

- 27 Michael Kusugak and other Inuit storytellers have been taped by Canada Digital Collections. You can listen to them at http://cado.ayn.ca/inuit_stories.asp.
- 28 "Amoral" means that no moral character is ascribed. "Immoral" means that someone or something is opposed to the morally correct path. Science teaches amoral knowledge, but that does not mean that scientific teaching is immoral. It simply means that scientific knowledge is not dedicated to the teaching of morality.
- 29 See Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "The Origin of Our Culture" at http://www.itk.ca/english/inuit_canada/history/origins.htm.
- 30 Bowhead whaling continued in Alaska.

- 31 Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation, "Canadian Inuit History: A Thousand-Year Odyssey," 2001, at http://www.civilization.ca/educat/oracle/modules/dmorrison/page02_e.html.

CHAPTER 6: The Mayas

- 32 David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1995), 76.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid., 113.
- 35 This ceremony, known as *Lo K'ex*, is described in *Maya Cosmos*, 219–222.
- 36 Friedel, *Maya Cosmos*, 222.
- 37 A sweat lodge is a small, dome-shaped structure that can be entirely sealed up. At its center lie hot rocks. When water is poured over the rocks steam fills the small, enclosed space, causing profuse sweating on the part of the occupants.
- 38 Gaspar Pedro González, *A Mayan Life* (Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.: Yax Te' Press, 1995), 89.
- 39 *A Mayan Life* (available from Yax Te' Press) is an invaluable resource for understanding many dimensions of contemporary Mayan life. It is written by a Mayan author who is an official of the Ministry of Culture of Guatemala. Even in English translation, González's thrilling images convey a sense of direct presence, as if one were seeing the world from inside the skin of his characters.
- 40 *American Ethnologist*, 17(1990): 131–150.
- 41 See Benjamin D. Paul and William J. Demarest, "The Operation of a Death Squad in San Pedro La Laguna," www.artemaya.com/viole.
- 42 But see Paul and Demarest for examples of Pentecostal Christians who stood up to the death squads or were killed by them.
- 43 Readers who wish to sort through the available evidence can begin

NOTES

with Glenn Garvin and Edward Hegstrom, "Heart of Sky" (1999) at www.uwec.edu/greider, and David Stoll and Robert Carmack (see bibliography). The Paul and Demarest article is available online at www.artemaya.com/viole.html.

- 44 Brett Greider, "Heart of Sky," Maya Religious Activism.

CHAPTER 7: The Quechuas

- 45 Andrea M. Heckman, *Woven Stories: Andean Textiles and Rituals* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 103. Heckman cites Robert Randall in "The Mythstory of Kuri Qoyllut," *Journal of Latin American Lore* 16:45 (1990) as the source of this information.

- 46 Heckman, *Woven Stories*, 40.

- 47 The information in this section is derived from chapters 4 and 8 of Heckman, *Woven Stories*.

- 48 This arrangement was formalized in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494).

- 49 From Ricardo Valderrama Fernández and Carmen Escalante Gutiérrez, eds., *Andean Lives: Gregorio Condori Mamani and Asunta Quispe Huamán*, Trans. by Paul H. Gelles and Gabriela Martínez Escobar (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1996). A *misti* is a mestizo, or a nonindigenous person. In Peruvian culture, mestizos are in a higher social class than indigenous people. A *wiraqucha* is someone who has power and wealth. The term refers to someone who is "white," in the sense of being rich, urbane, Spanish-speaking, and clothed in Western garb and shoes.

- Aborigines**—The largest group of Indigenous Australians.
- Adivasi** (“original inhabitants”)—An umbrella term for India’s indigenous peoples.
- aggirn**—An Inuit child born in summer.
- ancestor**—A deceased forebear.
- angekok**—An Inuit shaman.
- Anningan**—The moon god of the Greenland Inuit.
- apus**—The Quechua term for sacred peaks or mountain spirits.
- Ausungate**—A sacred mountain in southern Peru.
- autonomy**—Self-government.
- axigirn**—An Inuit child born in winter.
- ayllu**—A set of social obligations that binds Quechua families together in reciprocal work relationships.
- ayni**—A set of reciprocal labor obligations between Quechua families.
- ayurveda**—Native healing methods of India developed prior to contact with Western medicine.
- banam**—See *dhodro banam*.
- caste system**—A hierarchical, pan-Indian social structure that divided people into occupational and social groups.
- chuchkahaw**—A Mayan shaman-priest, also known as a day keeper because of his or her custody of the rituals prescribed by the sacred calendar (*tzolkin*).
- corroboree**—An Australian Aboriginal sacred celebration featuring singing, dancing, drumming, and mime.
- day keeper**—A traditional Mayan priest.
- desacralize**—To render secular, to no longer consider sacred.
- despacho**—An offering made to a mountain spirit (apu) by a pacu (Quechua spiritual leader whose job it is to serve and communicate with the apus).

GLOSSARY

- dhodro banam**—A stringed musical instrument used by the Santal people of India. The banam is considered to be an extension of the person playing it. It is also a means of communication between the human being playing it and divinity.
- didgeridoo**—An Australian Aboriginal wind instrument made from long, hollow tree limbs.
- Dreaming**—In Australian Aboriginal worldview, the source of landscape, life, and healing.
- dynamism**—Having the belief that something exists as a result of having experienced its power.
- haab**—A 365-day Mayan calendar used primarily for agricultural purposes (see also *tzolkin* and Long Count).
- huaca**—The Quechua name for a sacred place.
- indigenous**—Originating in the region or country where currently found; descendants of those people who inhabited a region prior to the arrival of persons from elsewhere with a different ethnicity and culture. The term *indigenous* is most commonly used in reference to a group of people who now constitute a minority in their country of origin.
- Indus Valley civilization**—A highly advanced civilization that developed in the Indus River valley (in present-day Pakistan and western India) prior to 2000 B.C.E. The cities of this urban culture had sanitation systems, carts pulled by bullocks, boats, and a written script that has not yet been deciphered.
- initiation**—Puberty rites; a set of rites pertaining to the passage of an individual from childhood to adulthood.
- intermediary**—A person or spirit who carries prayers or petitions to God on behalf of someone else.
- Inti**—The Incan sun god and the ancestor of the Incas.
- Inti Raymi**—Winter solstice festival honoring the Incan god Inti.

- Inuit** (singular, *inuk*, person)—Indigenous peoples of the circumpolar region (formerly known as Eskimos).
- inukshuk** (plural, *inuksuit*)—A stone representation of a person, used by the Inuit for a number of different purposes, including to memorialize deceased loved ones, drive game animals, guide travelers, or warn of dangers.
- jati**—A subset of the caste system (see *caste system*).
- kayak**—A boat covered with animal skin, used by the Inuit.
- liberation theology**—A type of Christian theology, influential in Latin America, that seeks to focus on God’s message to the poor.
- life-cycle rituals**—Rites that celebrate the passage from one stage of life to another. The most common of these rites are birth, initiation, marriage, and death.
- living dead**—An African ancestor who has died but is still actively remembered by family and friends.
- loa**—In vodou, an intermediary between God and people.
- Long Count**—The longest of the Mayan calendars, with a unit equivalent to 64 million 360-day years; used to keep track of recurrent cycles of creation and destruction (see also *tzolkin* and *haab*).
- Malina**—The sun goddess of the Greenland Inuit.
- Mamaqocha** (mother of all waters)—A term used by the Quechuas to refer to the ocean or Lake Titicaca.
- Mayas**—An indigenous American Indian who live in southeastern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and the westernmost sections of Honduras and El Salvador.
- midwife**—A female healer who assists with childbirth.
- myth**—A story that conveys philosophical, psychological, and social insights, as well as practical knowledge needed for survival.
- Nunavut** (our land)—A Canadian territory created on April 1, 1999, with a predominantly Inuit population.

GLOSSARY

- oral culture**—A culture that is transmitted orally (through stories, proverbs, etc.) rather than by means of written materials.
- ox q'in**—The Mayan naming ceremony, which takes place three days after birth.
- Pachamama**—The Quechua term for Mother Earth.
- pacu**—A Quechua spiritual leader who serves and communicates with the apus.
- Pemulwuy**—An Australian Aborigine resistance fighter against the British.
- polygyny**—A marital unit consisting of a husband and more than one wife.
- Popol Vuh**—The sacred book of the Mayan Indians.
- preconquest**—Referring to the period prior to the arrival and dominance of European colonial powers.
- proverb**—A short, wise saying that has been passed on for many generations.
- Qolquepunku** (silver gate)—A glacier on Ausungate Mountain in southern Peru, the site of the Qoyllur Rit'i festival.
- Qoyllur Rit'i** (the Snow Star pilgrimage)—A Quechua festival that combines Christian and indigenous religious elements.
- Quechuas**—An American Indian people who live in the Andes Mountains of Peru and Bolivia (some Quechuas also live in the Amazon rain forest).
- quipu**—A series of short, knotted strings hung at intervals from a long top string, used as a memory aid for recording statistics and narrating legends.
- quipucamayó**—A person trained in the interpretation of quipus.
- Rainbow Serpent**—In Australian Aborigine religion, the greatest of the ancestral spirits. The Rainbow Serpent is associated with fertility, blood, and water, all of which are symbols of life itself.

- Rainbow Spirit Theology**—A theology developed by Australian Aboriginal Christians that blends Aboriginal culture with Christianity.
- ritual**—A series of sacred actions, often accompanied by singing, chanting, or praying.
- sacrifice**—The offering of a life to God or a divine being.
- Satnam Panth**—A social-religious reform movement that took place in India between 1810 and 1820 and helped to create a social consciousness for Adivasis.
- Sea-ice hunters**—A group of people, the ancestors of today's Inuit, who developed the knowledge and technology needed to use the winter sea ice to hunt marine mammals.
- Sedna**—Very important Inuit goddess who is believed to control the sea and sea mammals.
- shaman**—Someone who is believed to have the ability to communicate with the spirit world; a religious specialist whose spirit is believed to travel (while he or she is in a trance state) to the realm of the spirits, where he or she will seek to learn the cause of an illness, lack of game animals, or any other trouble besetting the people.
- shifting cultivation**—A form of agriculture in which an entire village used a plot of land for several years and then moved on to a new location, thereby allowing the fertility of the soil to replenish itself.
- song line**—Among Australian Aborigines, a memorized mythological song that describes, in sequential order, the sacred sites situated along the path taken by an ancestral spirit as it moved across the landscape.
- sthalavriksha**—Among India's Adivasis, the individual sacred trees protected by taboos. There is scientific evidence that nearly all sthalavrikshas have medicinal or other important uses.
- syncretism**—The blending of elements from two or more separate religious traditions.
- taboo**—A food or act that is forbidden or banned in order to ensure the safety and well-being of an individual or a community.

GLOSSARY

- Thule culture**—A whale-hunting culture that was the biological, cultural, and linguistic antecedent of the Inupiat and Inuit people of today.
- Tikal**—The first great Mayan city, located in present-day Guatemala.
- tjurunga**—Among Australian Aborigines, a sacred object (a bullroarer or a didgeridoo, for example) that connects the world of ordinary experience to the Dreaming.
- totem**—A plant or animal to which a particular sub-group of an indigenous culture considers itself to be related.
- tzolkin**—The 260-day sacred calendar used by the Mayan Indians for all important purposes other than agriculture (see also *haab* and Long Count).
- umiak**—A boat used by the Inuit that is larger than a kayak and lacks the kayak's skin top.
- umialik**—The head of an Inuit extended family; the highest form of authority in the traditional Inuit world.
- vodou**—An indigenous West African religion that came to the Americas with the slave trade.
- Wiraqocha**—The Incan creator god.

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<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/>

Indigenous Australia—Australian Museum

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Inuit Stories—Canada’s Digital Collections

http://cado.ayn.ca/inuit_stories.asp

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