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OMAHA DWELLINGS, FURNITURE, AND IMPLEMENTS

BY

JAMES OWEN DORSEY

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OMAHA DWELLINGS, FURNITURE, AND IMPLEMENTS

BY JAMES OWEN DORSEY

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

The accompanying paper is one of the results of personal investigations

among the Omaha of Nebraska and cognate tribes of Indians, beginning in

1878 and continued from time to time during late years.

While the paper treats of the Omaha tribe, much that is said is

applicable to the Ponka, as the two tribes have long had similar

environments and a common dialect, for, until 1877, their habitats were

almost contiguous, and since 1880 about one-third of the Ponka tribe has

been dwelling on its former reservation near the town of Niobrara,

Nebraska.

Acknowledgments are due Dr. O. T. Mason for many valuable suggestions

early in the progress of the work.

DWELLINGS.

The primitive domiciles of the Omaha were chiefly (1) lodges of earth

or, more rarely, of bark or mats, and (2) skin lodges or tents. It may

be observed that there were no sacred rites connected with the earth

lodge-building or tent-making among the Omaha and Ponka.

Earth Lodges.

When earth lodges were built, the people did not make them in a tribal

circle, each man erecting his lodge where he wished; yet kindred

commonly built near one another.

The earth lodges were made by the women, and were intended principally

for summer use, when the people were not migrating or going on the hunt.

Those built by the Omaha and Ponka were constructed in the following

manner: The roof was supported by two series of vertical posts, forked

at the top for the reception of the transverse connecting pieces of each

series. The number in each series varied according to the size of the

lodge; for a small lodge only four posts were erected in the inner

series, for an ordinary lodge eight were required, and ten generally

constituted the maximum. When Mr. Say[1] visited the Kansa Indians, he

occupied a lodge in which twelve of these posts placed in a circle

formed the outer series, and eight longer ones constituted the inner

series, also describing a circle. The wall was formed by setting upright

slabs of wood back of the outer posts all around the circumference of

the lodge. These slabs were not over 6 feet in height, and their tops

met the cross timbers on which the willow posts rested. Stocks of hard

willow about 2 inches in diameter rested with their butts on the tops of

the upright slabs and extended on the cross timbers nearly to the

summit. These poles were very numerous, touching one another and

extending all around in a radiating manner, supporting the roof like

rafters. The rafters were covered with grass about a foot thick; and

over the whole lodge, including the sides or slabs, earth was piled from

a foot to 2 feet in depth. Such a covering lasted generally about twenty

years. A hole in the middle served as an exit for the smoke.

[Footnote 1: James' account of Long's Expedition to the Rocky Mountains

in 1819-'20.]

[Illustration: Fig. 306.--Yellow Smoke's earth lodge.]

In addition to the lodge proper there was a covered way about 10 feet

long and 5 feet wide, the entrance to which had a covering of tanned or

dried buffalo hides. This covering consisted of two hides hanging side

by side, with the inner borders slightly overlapping. They were fastened

to the passageway at the top and at the outer sides, but were loose at

the bottom where they overlapped. This part was raised by a person

entering the lodge. A similar covering was placed at the interior end of

the passageway.

Subsequently to 1855, the Omaha dwelt in three villages composed of

earth lodges, as follows: (1) Biku′de, a village near the agency; (2)

Windja′ge, Standing Hawk's village, near the Presbyterian mission house;

and (3) Jaⁿ¢a′te ("Wood Eaters,") named after an insect found under the

bark of trees Sanssouci's village, near the town of Decatur, Nebraska.

Earth lodges were generally used for large gatherings, such as feasts,

councils, or dances. Occasionally there was a depression in the center

of the lodge which was used as a fireplace; but it was not over 6 inches

deep. Each earth lodge had a ladder, made by cutting a series of deep

notches along one side of a log. On a bluff near the Omaha agency I

found the remains of several ancient earth lodges, with entrances on the

southern sides. Two of these were 75 feet and one was 100 feet in

diameter. In the center of the largest there was a hollow about 3 feet

deep and nearly 4 feet below the surface outside the lodge.

Lodges of Bark or Mats.

The Omaha sometimes make bark lodges for summer occupancy, as did the

Iowa and Sak. [T]iu′¢ipu jiñ′ga, or low lodges covered with mats, were

used by the Omaha in former days. Such lodges are still common among the

Winnebago, the Osage, and other tribes. The ground plan of such a lodge

forms an ellipse. The height is hardly over 7 feet from the ground. The

tent poles are arranged thus: Each pole has one end planted in the

ground, the other end being bent down and fastened to the pole

immediately opposite; a number of poles thus arranged in pairs formed

both wall posts and rafters.

[Illustration: Fig. 307.--Ground plan of Osage lodge.]

Generally there was one fireplace and one smokehole in such a lodge; but

when I visited the Osage in 1883, I entered a low lodge with two

fireplaces, each equidistant from its end of the lodge and the entrance,

each fireplace having its smokehole.

Skin Lodges or Tents.

The tent was used when the people were migrating, and also when they

were traveling in search of the buffalo. It was also the favorite abode

of a household during the winter season, as the earth lodge was

generally erected in an exposed situation, selected on account of

comfort in the summer. The tent could be pitched in the timber or brush,

or down in wooded ravines, where the cold winds never had full sweep.

Hence, many Indians abandoned their houses in winter and went into their

tents, even when they were of canvas.

[Illustration: Fig. 308.--Omaha tent (from a photograph by W. H.

Jackson).]

The tent was commonly made of ten or a dozen dressed or tanned buffalo

skins. It was in the shape of a sugar loaf, and was from 10 to 12 feet

high, 10 or 15 feet in diameter at the bottom, and about a foot and a

half in diameter at the top, which served as a smokehole (ʇihuʞaⁿ).

Besides the interior tent poles (ʇici--3, figure 309) and the tent skin

(ʇiha--1), the tent had the ʇi¢umaⁿhaⁿ, or the place where the skins

were fastened together above the entrance (4). The ʇi¢umaⁿhaⁿ was

fastened with the ʇihu¢ubaxaⁿ(5), which consisted of sticks or pieces of

hide thrust crosswise through the holes in the tent skins. The bottom of

the tent was secured to the ground by pins (ʇihu¢ugadaⁿ--6) driven

through holes (ʇihugaq¢uge) in the bottom of the skins, made when the

latter were tanned and before they had become hard. The entrance

(ʇijebe) was generally opposite the quarter from which the wind was

blowing. A door flap (ʇijebeg¢aⁿ--7) hung over the entrance; it was made

of skin with the hair outside, so as to turn water, and was held taut by

a stick fastened to it transversely. The bottom of the door flap was

loose, but the top was fastened to the tent.

[Illustration: Fig. 309--Exterior parts of an Omaha tent.]

The smokehole was formed by the two ʇihugab¢iⁿ¢a(9), or triangular ends

of tent skins, immediately above the entrance and ʇi¢umaⁿhaⁿ. When there

was no wind both of the ʇihugab¢iⁿ¢a were kept open by means of the

ʇihu¢ubajiⁿ(8) or exterior tent poles, which were thrust through the

ujiha, or small sacks, in the corners of the ʇihugab¢iⁿ¢a. When the wind

blew one of the ʇihu¢ubajiⁿ was raised to the windward and the other was

lowered, pulling its skin close to the tent and leaving an opening for

the escape of the smoke; but if the wind came directly against the

entrance both the flaps were raised, closing the smokehole to prevent

the wind from blowing down it. When the wind blew the people used

nandi¢agaspe to keep the bottom of each tent skin in place. These

consisted of twisted grass, sticks, stones, or other heavy objects.

Figure 310 represents the tent of [P]ejequde, an Omaha. The banners or

standards, which were carried by the leaders of a war party or a party

going on a dancing tour, are depicted with their decorations of strips

of red and blue Indian cloth. Sometimes these standards were ornamented

with feathers instead of with cloth. Each standard could be used in four

war expeditions.

No totem posts were in use among the Omaha. The tent of the principal

man of each gens was decorated on the outside with his gentile badge,

which was painted on each side of the entrance as well as on the back of

the tent.[1] The furniture of the sacred tents resembled that of the

ordinary ones.

Before the introduction of canvas tents by the whites no needles or

thread were used by the Siouan tribes. The women used sinew of the deer

or buffalo instead of thread, and for needles they had awls made of elk

horn.

[Illustration: Fig. 310.--[P]ejequde's tent.]

Since there were no outbuildings, public granaries, or other structures

of this description, each household stored away its own grain and other

provisions. There were no special tribal or communal dwellings; but

sometimes two or more households occupied a single earth lodge. When a

council was held, it took place in the earth lodge of one of the head

chiefs, or else two or three common tents were united, making one large

one.[2] There were no public baths, as the Missouri river was near, and

they could resort to it whenever they desired. Dance houses were

improvised either of earth lodges or skin tents.

Sweat-lodges were in the form of low tents (ʇiu¢ipu).[3] Stones were not

boiled for the sweat-lodge, but were put into the fire to be heated.

They were removed from the fire by means of sticks called iⁿߵĕbasi¢aⁿ,

and then water from the kettle was poured on them, creating steam. Cedar

fronds were dropped on the stones, causing a perfume to arise.

[Footnote 1: Third Ann. Rep. Bur. Ethnology for 1882-'83, p. 230; also

"A Study of Siouan Cults," in Eleventh Ann. Rep. Bur. Ethnology,

1889-'90, p. 351.]

[Footnote 2: Third Ann. Rep., op. cit., p. 294.]

[Footnote 3: Contributions to North American Ethnology, vol. vi, 1890,

pp. 152, 169, and 234.]

FURNITURE AND IMPLEMENTS.

Fireplaces.

Within the tent, in the center, was the fireplace (une¢ĕ), formed by

excavating a small hollow. Beside this was erected a forked post

(isag¢ĕ), on which was hung the apparatus for suspending a kettle over

the fire. This apparatus was called ¢exe u¢ugacke by the Ponka,

literally, "that by means of which the kettle is hung." The Omaha have

two names for it, uhaⁿ u¢ugacke, and u¢ugackeg¢e, the last syllable of

the latter name referring to the attitude of the post. Around the

fireplace was a circular space for the feet of the people as they sat

about the fire. The couches of the occupants of the tent were arranged

outside of and all around this circular space.

Beds and Bedding.

A couch was formed by laying down two or three winter hides dried with

the hair on. These hides were placed around the fireplace at a safe

distance. In the earth lodges, according to Joseph La Flèche, the Omaha

used sahi, or grass mats, for seats, as is the present custom of the

Winnebago; but at night they reclined on dressed hides with thick hair

on them, and covered themselves with similar hides.

For pillows they used ibehiⁿ or iⁿbehiⁿ. When the vegetation was about 3

inches high in the spring, the Indians killed deer and pulled off the

hair in order to remove the thin skin or tissue next to it. This latter,

when thoroughly dried, is smooth and white, resembling parchment. It was

used for pillows and moccasin-strings. When used for pillows the case

was filled with goose feathers or the hair of the deer until it was

about 2 feet long and 9 inches high. During the day, and whenever there

was occasion, they were used as seats; but if none could be had, the

people sat on winter robes or hides forming the couches.[1] Back of the

couches and next to the interior tent-poles were placed the baggage,

sacks of corn, and other household properties.

The upright tent is one form of the Dakota "wake′ya," the plural of

which, "wake′yapi," undoubtedly gave rise to the familiar "wick′iup" of

the plains, and also to "wä-ka′-yo" of Morgan.[2]

Cradles.

A board of convenient size, usually about a yard long and a foot wide,

was selected to form a cradle or u¢uhe. No pillow was needed. A soft

skin ([p]aq¢uqaha ¢aⁿ) covered with plenty of thick hair was laid on the

board, and on it was placed the infant.

[Footnote 1: Hammocks and bedsteads were unknown prior to their

introduction by the traders and other white people.]

[Footnote 2: Contributions to North American Ethnology, vol. iv., 1881,

p. 114.]

[Illustration: Fig. 311.--Omaha cradle--plan.]

In the annexed figures, <i>a</i> is the ĭndua¢isiⁿkaⁿhe, the object painted

on the board at the end where the infant's head is laid; <i>b</i> is the

ĭndei¢idĭndiⁿ ("that which is drawn taut over the face"), the two

strings of beads and sinew or thread (sometimes made of red calico

alone), which keep in place the fan, etc.; the fan (ĭndeagani), which is

suspended from a bow of wood, (<i>c</i>) is about 6 inches square, and is

now made of interwoven sinew on which beads have been strung. Occasionally

thimbles and other bright objects dangle from the bottom of the fan. The

i¢a¢istage (<i>d</i>) is the band by which the infant is fastened to the

cradle.

[Illustration: Fig. 312.--Omaha cradle--side view.]

Children's Swings.

For swings the ends of two withes of buffalo hide were secured to four

trees or posts which formed the corners of a parallelogram. A blanket

was thrown across the withes and folded over on them. The infant was

laid on top of the fold and swung from side to side without falling.

Brooms.

Brooms were of two kinds. One form was made of sticks tied together, and

was used for sweeping the ground outside of the tent or earth lodge, and

the interior of the earth lodge, except the fireplace. The other kind

was made of goose or turkey feathers, and was used for sweeping the

fireplace of an earth lodge.

Pottery.

Pottery has not been made by the Omaha for more than fifty years. The

art of making it has been forgotten by the tribe.

Mortar and Pestles.

A mortar was made by burning a large hole in a round knot or piece of

wood about 7 inches in diameter. The lower end was sharpened to a

point, which was thrust into the ground when needed for use. After

putting corn in a mortar of this description, the woman grasped the

wooden pestle in the middle, with the larger end upward; the smaller

end, which was about an inch in diameter, was put into the mortar. The

operation of pounding corn among the Omaha was called "he." The mortar

(uhe) and pestle (wehe) were both made commonly of elm, although

sometimes they were fashioned of white oak. Mortars were of various

sizes, some of them measuring 2 feet in diameter. Pestles were always of

hard and heavy wood, and fully 3 feet long, taperring from 4 inches to

an inch in diameter.

[Illustration: Fig. 314.--Omaha pestle.]

[Illustration: Fig. 313.--Omaha mortar.]

Spoons, Ladles and Drinking Vessels.

Spoons were made of horn, wood, or pottery. The black spoons made of

buffalo horn (ʇehe sabĕ), are not used by such Omaha as belong to the

Buffalo gentes (Iñkesabĕ, Ȼatada, [T]esinde, etc.) which may not touch a

buffalo head. Other horn spoons of light color are made of cow horn.

These are of modern origin. Wooden spoons (jaⁿʇehe) were made of knobs

or knots of trees. Spoons made of buffalo horn are found among the Omaha

and Ponka, but the Osage, Kansa, and Kwapa use clam shells (ʇihaba, in

Ȼegiha; tcühaba, tcühuba, in Kansa), so the Kansa call a small spoon,

tcühaba jiñga. Spoons of buffalo horn had their handles variously

ornamented by notches and other rude carving, often terminating in the

head of a bird, the neck or handle of each being elevated at an angle of

50° or 60° with the bowl, which, was about 3 inches in width by about 5

in length. As the handle of such a spoon usually terminates in a head or

hook, it was impossible for it to slip into the bowl when the hook

rested on the outside of the rim of the bowl.

Food was served in bowls of a very wide and simple form and of various

sizes, generally carved out of large knots of wood. These served as

drinking cups (ni′i¢átaⁿ), but now cups of tin or earthenware are used

for that purpose.

Water Vessels

When pottery was made, they used bowls and kettles. Some used wooden

bowls of different sizes, the largest being about 2 feet in diameter.

When they went on the hunt, they used the ínijeha (or sack made of the

muscular coating of the buffalo paunch, by filling with, grass to make

it stand out and keep its shape until dried). When the ínijeha was

filled with water the mouth was tied, and it was kept covered and in the

shade that it might remain cool. After being used for a few days it

became strong smelling, and was thrown away, another taking its place.

Some preferred the "ʇenăn′de uq¢a′ha ¢aⁿ" or pericardium(?) of the

buffalo, which is like sinew. This does not smell unpleasant, even when

used for seven or ten days. But at the expiration of that time it is

unfit for further service.

Jugs have been introduced by the traders.

Other Vessels.

Provision sacks or parflèche cases were made of dried buffalo hide. When

used for carrying the dried meat, they were called weábastá. After two

or three years' use they became soft and were fit only for making

moccasin soles. These sacks had the hair taken off, and were sometimes

made in trunk fashion.

Fruit baskets were of three kinds. The Ponka made them of the bark of a

tree, called tawáߵaⁿhe, which is found on the old Ponka reservation in

Dakota. Northern Indians make boats of this bark. The Omaha do not find

the tree on their land, so they make the fruit baskets of other kinds of

bark. The three kinds of baskets are as follows: Naⁿ′pa ú¢isĕ, used for

chokecherries; ag¢añ′kamañge ú¢isĕ, used for raspberries; and bact

ú¢isĕ, used for strawberries. When the Ponka wished to make the baskets,

they stripped off the bark in horizontal sections, not pulling upward or

downward.

In modern times the Omaha have learned to make sacks of thread of

different colors drawn from black, red, blue, and white blankets.

Different figures are woven. Each sack is about a foot deep, 16 inches

from the mouth to the opposite side, and from 2 to 2-1/2 feet long. The

opening is on one of the long sides, and when the articles are put in a

gathering string is drawn and tied.

Hoes and Axes.

For hoes, the Omaha used the shoulder blades of the buffalo. Axes and

hatchets are now made of iron, hence, the Omaha name, maⁿ′ze-pe, sharp

iron. But the Kansa have the ancient name, maⁿ′hi-spe, answering to the

Dakota, waⁿhiⁿ′-kpe, sharp flint. The hatchet is distinguished from the

ax by adding "jiñga," small. Some of the stone axes and hatchets have

been found on the Omaha reservation, but they could hardly have been

used for cutting. It is not known what tools were used for felling

trees.

Knives.

Knives were made of stone. A prominent butte, near the old Ponka agency,

Nebraska, is known as "Máhiⁿ-ʇu," signifying blue knife, from the

character of the stone with which its surface is covered. It is several

miles from the mouth of Ponka creek and nearly opposite the month of

Choteau creek, South Dakota.

Implements Connected with Fire.

In former ages, the Ȼegiha made fire by rubbing or turning a stick round

and round between the hands. On the present Omaha reservation, and in

that region, the Omaha use elm roots for that purpose. In the country

called [P]izábahéhe, near the source of Elkhorn river, there is a grass

known as "duáduáhi," which has about a hundred fine shoots from each

root, which is half the size of the head. The stalk was used for hand

drills and fire sticks. One stalk was cut almost flat, and the man puts

his feet on the ends to steady them. Then, holding the other stick in

his hands, with one end touching the stalk on the ground, he turned it

round and round till the friction produced fire. Sometimes a small

quantity of dry sand was placed on the flat stick. The same flat stick

answered for several occasions. When the cavity made by turning the hand

drill became too large, the point of contact was shifted to another part

of the flat stick, and so on until the whole of that stick was used,

when it was thrown away and another was obtained. Duáduáhi, according to

Mr. Francis La Flesche, may be found in Judiciary square, Washington,

District of Columbia. After the coming of the white man, but before the

introduction of friction matches, which are now used by the whole tribe,

the Omaha used flints and tinder for making fire.

Spits for roasting, etc., náqpe, or wébasnaⁿ, were made of any kind of

wood.

For tongs they used the [p]edi¢a¢isande ("fire-holder"), made by

slitting one end of a stick. This implement was also called, jaⁿ jiñga

nini ibista ("the stick that presses the fire against the tobacco"),

because it was used for lighting pipes.

Smoking Paraphernalia.

[Illustration: Fig. 315.--Omaha calumet]

The pipes in use among the Omaha are of three kinds: the sacred pipe

(niniba waqube, mysterious pipe), including the war pipes and those used

by the chiefs in making peace; the niniba weawaⁿ or calumet (illustrated

in figure 315), used in the calumet dance or dance of adoption,[1] and

the hatchet pipe or maⁿzepe niniba, introduced since the coming of the

white man. One form of the pipe used on ordinary Tobacco pouches

(niniújiha) were made of deer or antelope skin, and were ornamented with

porcupine quills or a fringe of deerskin. Sometimes buffalo bladders

were used for this purpose. The women used them as receptacles for their

porcupine quills.

[Footnote 1: See "Omaha Sociology," Third Ann. Rept. Bur. Ethnology,

chap. vi.]

occasions is shown in figure 316. This pipe has a bowl of catlinite, and

the stem is decorated with horsehair.

[Illustration: Fig. 316.--Omaha pipe used on ordinary occasions.]

Equipage for Horses.

Saddles (cánakág¢e) were in use before the coming of the whites. They

were made of wood, around which was wrapped hide, while still

"ʇaha-nuʞa" (green or soft). According to Joseph La Flèche these saddles

did not rub sores on the backs of the native horses (Indian ponies), but

Dougherty[1] said, in 1819, "The Indians are generally cruel

horse-masters, perhaps in a great measure through necessity; the backs

of their horses are very often sore and ulcerated, from the friction of

the rude saddle, which is fashioned after the Spanish manner, being

elevated at the pummel and croup, and resting on skin saddle cloths

without padding." They ride very well, and make frequent use of the whip

and their heels, the latter being employed instead of spurs.

For bridles and halters they used strips of hide, out of which material

they made also lariats. The bridle used consisted of a withe, one end of

which was wrapped two or three times around the animal's lower jaw,

while the other was held in the hand, forming but a single rein. This

did not hinder the rider from guiding his horse, as he was able to turn

him to the left by pressing the single rein against the animal's neck,

as well as by the use of the right heel against its side. When he wished

to turn to the right, he pulled the rein and pressed his left heel

against the horse's side.

Whips were of three kinds. The wahí wégasapi was attached to a bone

handle. The handle of a ja^{u}′uke¢iⁿ wégasapi was made of common wood.

That of a zaⁿzí wégasapi was made of Osage orange wood, which is very

hard. The whip was attached to the wrist by a broad band, which passed

through a hole near the end of the handle. The handle was about 15

inches long and was very stout. A specimen that has been deposited in

the National Museum (a gift to the author from an Omaha) has a lash 2

feet long, composed of 8 thongs one-fifth of an inch wide. These are

plaited together in one rounded plait for 18 inches, the rest of the

lash being in 2 plaits of 4 thongs each, knotted near the ends.

The lasso was called maⁿ′tanah-í¢ize, i.e., "that by which (a) wild

(horse) is taken." It was made by taking the hair from the head of a

buffalo and plaiting it into a very strong rope as thick as one's thumb.

This rope was called "ʇaha-¢isaⁿ," and was utilized by the Omaha and

Ponka instead of the common lasso for catching wild horses in

northwestern Nebraska. One end of the rope was formed into a noose large

enough to slip over a horse's head, and the ends of this noose were

secured to a long pole by small cords. The other end of the rope,

arranged in a coil, was fastened to the belt or waist of the man. He

rode with the pole held in one hand and tried to thrust the noose in

front of a horse. When he succeeded in passing the noose over the head

of an animal, he threw away the stick, which had become separated from

the noose, and held the rope alone, which he pulled toward him. When the

horse was caught, the man made an ĭndú¢iciⁿ. (bridle or face cover),

being careful to place some buffalo hair over the nose and under the

chin, to guard against paining the horse, whose eyes remained uncovered.

[Footnote 1: Long, S. H.; Exp. Rocky Mts., vol. 1, p. 291, Phila., 1822]

Trappings for the saddle (sĭn′de-ehé¢ĕ) were used. Some years ago a

specimen of Omaha trapping was presented by the writer to the

Anthropological Society of Washington, and subsequently was deposited in

the National Museum.

Traveling Gear.

Snow-shoes (sé-hiⁿbe) were worn by the Omaha and Ponka when they

traversed a region, north of their modern, habitat.

For traveling on foot a staff (hí-mañg¢e) was used when it was necessary

to pass over mountains; also when, heavy loads had to be carried. This

staff differed from the crutch (í-mañg¢e).

The women had mácaʞa^n, or straps, for aiding them in carrying loads of

wood, etc.

Boats.

When they wished to cross streams they made hide boats, or mandéha.

These were manufactured from dried buffalo hides, which were sewed

together with sinew, and so tightly that no water could penetrate the

seams. Ten branches of red willow were placed within, the ends being

bent upward and fastened by withes to two other saplings, which extended

the whole length of the boat at the inside of the gunwale. The ten

pieces were the ʇíci-íki[p]ádaⁿ. The rudder or steering oar (í¢isaⁿ′¢ĕ)

was fashioned like the oars (mandú¢ugáhi), with the blade flat and of

the breadth of two hands. The rowers (u¢úgahi aká) sat near the bow, and

the steersman (¢isaⁿ′¢a aká) took his seat at the stern.

Musical Instruments.

Battles were of five kinds, [P]exe were generally gourds; wataⁿ′ [p]exe,

gourd rattles, were always round, and were partially filled with seed,

fine shot, or gravel, [T]ahánuʞa [p]éxe, green-hide rattles, were of two

sorts, one of which is "¢igúje," bent a little. Specimens of this form

are in the National Museum.

Two kinds of rattles were called ʇa-cáge, i.e., "deers-claws," from the

composition of one variety, though the other was made of molars of the

elk.

[Illustration: Fig. 317--Skin drum.]

[Illustration: Fig. 318--Box drum.]

The Omaha used three styles of drums. The ¢éxe-gaʞú b¢áska, or flat

drum, is illustrated by a specimen (no. 21675) in the National Museum.

The ¢éxe-gaʞú gadáje is made of buffalo hide, cowhide, or the skin of a

horse. An example of this drum (no. 24682) is also in the National

Museum, and is illustrated by the accompanying figure 317. The jaⁿ′

¢éxe-gaʞú, or ʞúge ¢éxe-gaʞú, is a wooden or box drum, represented by

the accompanying figure 318, also from a specimen (no. 58610) in the

National Museum.

Whistles were made of elder (baʇúci-hi, or popgun wood) by pushing out

the pith. No holes were made in the sides of the tube.

Nisúde ʇañ′ga, or large flutes, were made of red cedar. A branch was cut

off, rounded, split open with a knife, and hollowed out; then six holes

were made in the side of one of them, and the halves were stuck together

again. When one of these instruments is blown it produces quavering

notes. The best specimens were made by [P]á¢iⁿ-ʇañ′ga, Big Pawnee.

The large flute is illustrated in figure 319.[1] Wahí nisúde, or bone

flutes, were made of the long bones from the eagle wing. These small

flutes have only one hole. Reed flutes, ¢íq¢e nisúde, were made of a

kind of reed which grows south of the Omaha territory, probably in

Kansas. The Omaha obtained the reeds from some of the southern tribes

and made them into flutes having but one hole each.

[Footnote 1: Compare Ree fife, "AMM 129-8429, Gray and Matthews," in the

National Museum.]

[Illustration: Fig. 319.--Omaha large flute.]

WEAPONS.

Clubs.

[Illustration: Fig. 320.--Omaha club (jaⁿ-[p]áᴐna).]

The jaⁿ-wétiⁿ, "striking-wood," is a four-sided club. It is made of ash,

and is as long as from the elbow to the tips of the fingers. The

ja^n-dáona, "wood with a smooth head," is a club made of ironwood, which

is very hard. According to the late Joseph La Flèche, the Omaha form of

this weapon had a steel point projecting from the ball.

[Illustration: Fig. 321.--Omaha club (jaⁿ-dáᴐna).]

[Illustration: Fig. 322.--Omaha club (weaq¢ade).]

Figures 320 and 321 are forms of the jaⁿ-[p]áᴐna which may be seen in

the National Museum (nos. 2649 and 22419). The weaq¢ade, another kind of

war club, is made of some kind of hard wood. There are two varieties,

one of which is shown in figure 322 (National Museum no. 23729). The

other has a ball carved at the end of a straight handle, with a wooden

point (of one piece with the ball and handle) projecting from the ball,

making an angle of about 130° with one side of the handle. There is a

steel point inserted in the ball, forming an angle of about 110° with

the other side of the handle. The iⁿ′-wate-jiñ′ga is something like a

slung shot. A round stone is wrapped in a piece of hide which is

fastened to a wooden handle about 2 feet long.

Tomahawks.

The heads of tomahawks as well as of battle-axes were at first made of

stone; but within the last century and a half they have been fashioned

of iron.

Spears.

Lances, darts, or spears are designated by the general term man′dĕhi.

The jaⁿ′-man'dĕhi are made of ash, and are from 6 to 8 feet long. There

are two kinds, of one of which the handle is round, and about an inch in

diameter, and the point is flat and about the width of three fingers at

its juncture with the handle.

Besides these there are the lances, called waq¢exe-¢áze, of which there

are two varieties. One consists of a straight pole, which has been

thrust through a piece of buffalo hide that has its long end sewed

together, forming a sort of covering. To this hide are fastened feathers

of the crow and miⁿ′xa-saⁿ, or swan, in alternate rows or bunches.

Between the feathers are fastened square pieces of blanket. About the

middle of the pole a space of nearly 6 inches is left without feathers,

and this is the place where the spear is grasped. When the pole was not

set into a metal point the lower end was cut very sharp.[1] The other

variety, or mandĕhi ¢iguje, "bent spear," is the weapon which the Dakota

call "wahukeza." It is ornamented with eagle feathers placed at

intevals, one being at the end of the curved part; and it generally

terminates at the bottom in an iron point. It is possible for one of

these waq¢exe¢aze to reach a man about 6 feet distant; and even mounted

men have been killed by them. Spears are used also in some of the

dances. Around the shaft is wrapped the skin of a swan or brant. The end

feather at the top is white; the other feathers are white or spotted.

The bent spear is no longer employed by the Omaha, though the Osage,

Pawnee, and other tribes still use it to a greater or lesser extent.

Bows.

[Illustration: Fig. 323.--Omaha bow (zaⁿzi-mandĕ).]

[Illustration: Fig. 324.--Omaha bow (ʇaʞaⁿ-mandĕ)]

Bows (man-dĕ) are of two kinds. One is the man-dĕ or zaⁿzi-mandĕ

(bow-wood bow), having an unbroken curve past the grip to within an inch

or two of each nock.[2] The other kind is the ʇaʞaⁿ-mandĕ, so called

because it has deer sinew glued on its back.[3] Bows were made of

hickory, ash, ironwood, or zaⁿzi, the last being greatly preferred. It

is a wood resembling that of the Osage orange, with which some persons

confound it; but it is black and much harder than the former, the Osage

orange wood being yellow, soft, and easily cut. The zaⁿzi is probably

that which Dougherty[4] called "bow-wood (<i>Maclura aurantiaca</i> of

Nuttall)."

[Footnote 1: See First Annual Report of Bureau of Ethnology, 1879-'80;

1881, Pl. X, "Tolkotin cremation."]

[Footnote 2: This may be the "self-bow" mentioned in the American

Naturalist for July, 1886, p. 675.]

[Footnote 3: This is the sinew-backed bow above mentioned.]

[Footnote 4: Long's Expedition, op. cit., vol. I, p. 290.]

Bowstrings were made of the twisted sinew of the elk and buffalo, as

among other tribes.

Arrows.

[Illustration: Fig. 325.--Omaha hunting arrow.]

The arrows (maⁿ) used in former days were of several kinds. The hunting

arrow, used for killing the buffalo, was generally about 2 feet long, of

the usual cylindric form, and armed with an elongate triangular point,

made at first of flint, afterward of sheet iron. The shoulders of the

arrow were rounded instead of angular, as in the ordinary barbed form.

The point, or head, was firmly secured to the shaft by deer sinew

wrapped around the neck of the point, and over that was spread some

cement, made in a manner to be afterward explained. The flight of the

arrow was equalized by three half-webs of feathers, neatly fastened near

its base in the usual manner.

Another kind of hunting arrow was the hidé nazí¢ĕ, which was altogether

of wood. About 6 inches from the point the shaft was triangular or

quadrangular; and the point was made by holding the shaft close to a

fire and turning it round and round till the heat had reduced it to the

proper shape and had hardened it. This was used for killing fish, deer,

and small game.

[Illustration: Fig. 326.--Omaha war arrow.]

The war arrow (<i>b</i>) differed from that used in hunting in having a

barbed point, which was very slightly attached to the shaft, so that if

it penetrated the body of an enemy it could not be withdrawn without

leaving the point in the wound.

[Illustration: Fig. 327.--Omaha style of hidé-ʇáce]

Children used the hidé-ʇáce, or target arrow, when they began to learn

the use of the bow. With this a boy could kill small birds and animals.

The Ponka used to make arrowshafts (maⁿsa) of jaⁿ-′qude-hí, "gray wood,"

juneberry wood, which grew in their country, but is not found among the

Omaha. Most of the Omaha made their shafts of the ma^n'saqtihí, or "real

arrow-wood," (<i>Viburnum</i>) as that was the wood best suited for the

purpose. Sometimes they were made of chokecherry wood; and Joseph

LaFlèche informs me that he has made them of ash and hickory.

Arrowshafts were held lengthwise directly in a line with the eyes of the

workman, who sighted along them to see if they were straight. If one was

bent, he held one end of it between his teeth, while he pressed against

the rest of it with his hands. They were polished by means of the

polishers, or maⁿ′-¢iq¢áde, two pieces of sandstone, each of which had

a groove in the middle of one side. These grooves were brought together,

and the arrow was drawn between them.

War arrows had crooked lines drawn along the shafts from the points to

the other ends, down which, so I was informed by the Indians, it was

intended that the blood of a wounded foe should trickle.

Arrowheads (máhiⁿ-sí), when made of flint, as at the first, were called

"iⁿ′ߵĕ mahiⁿsí," stone arrowheads. In more recent times, they were

manufactured of pieces of sheet iron; as, for example, hoops of pails

and barrels.

Arrow cement (hiⁿ′pa), for attaching the heads to the shafts, was

usually made from the skin taken off a buffalo or elk head. This was

boiled a long time, till ready to fall to pieces. When the gelatinous

matter forming the cement rose to the top of the water, a stick (called

hiⁿpá-jaⁿjiñ′ga) was thrust in and turned round and round, causing the

material to be wrapped around it. When cooled it was smoothed with the

hand. Then the act was repeated till a large quantity was collected on

the stick. When needed for use, it was warmed by placing either in the

mouth or in hot water. The skin of the big turtle was also used for

making cement.

A set of arrows were called, collectively, "maⁿwiⁿ′daⁿ." A set generally

consisted of ten arrows, but the number varied; sometimes there were

two, four, or even twenty. When a man had arrows left in his quiver, he

compared them with that which was in the slain animal. When he had none

left, he appealed to some one who knew his style of arrow.

There were no clan or gentile marks on arrows. One set was distinguished

from another by the order of the paint stripes on them, by the kind of

feathers used, by the mode in which the arrowheads were made, etc. The

Oto made bad arrows; those of the Pawnee were better, but they were

inferior to those made by the Dakota, Ponka, and Omaha.

The feathers, half-webs generally, put on arrows were those of the

eagle, buzzard, wild turkey, great owl, and goose. Sometimes hawk or

crow feathers were employed.

Quivers.

Quivers (maⁿ′jiha) for men were made of buffalo hide; but boys' quivers

were made either of otter skins or of the skins of cougars, with the

tail of the animal hanging down from the upper extremity. A skin case

was attached to the quiver for carrying the bow when not in use. The

wrist was defended from the percussion of the bowstring by the leather

wristguard or áqande-[p]a.

Shields and Armor.

Shields (ʇaháwag¢e) were made of the hides of buffalo bulls. They were

round and very thick, reaching to the waist of the bearer. Arrows did

not penetrate them. Joseph La Flèche never heard of the use of defensive

armor, such as helmet and mail, among the Omaha and Ponka.

He had heard of a Pawnee who made a coat from four elk skins, two

forming the front and two the back. Between each pair of skins was

placed sand. A helmet was made in like manner. It covered the back of

the head and extended over the forehead, coming down as far as the eyes.

When the Pawnee noticed an arrow coming toward him, he bowed his head

forward.

Firearms.

Firearms were introduced among the Omaha prior to 1819, when Dougherty

says that they preferred those called "Mackinaw guns."

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