

ya). *Narmakked* also means “to write” and *sobed*, “to build, to construct, to brew, to draw.” The opposition between writing and drawing confounds any invariant association of *sopalet* with internal forms and souls, and *narmakkalet* with externalities and bodies.

Mònica Martínez Mauri

**Gagnon, Gregory O.:** *Culture and Customs of the Sioux Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. 182 pp. ISBN 978-0-8032-4454-2. Price: £ 12.99

This volume presents a succinct introduction to the history and culture of the Sioux, embracing the three major divisions – Santee, Yankton/Yanktonai, and Teton. Their territory stretched from Minnesota to Montana and despite cultural differences among them, historically they shared common cultural fundamentals and spoke a single language (though regionally differentiated into distinct dialects). The author is careful to note that although the Santee and Yankton/Yanktonai called themselves “Dakota,” and the Teton dialectal form is “Lakota,” there is no term in the native language to embrace both, so to designate all the groups he uses the word “Sioux.” Gagnon is attuned to the importance of understanding culture through language and he, therefore, chooses to use a number of native language terms throughout, such as *Itancan* rather than “leader” or “chief,” and *Tiyospaye* rather than “community” (viii).

The book does not result from original research but rather represents a wide range of scholarly literature combined with the author’s own experiences. Trained as a historian, Gagnon, himself a Chippewa tribal member, was an administrator at Oglala Lakota College on Pine Ridge Reservation for nearly seventeen years; subsequently, until his recent retirement, he taught Indian Studies at the University of North Dakota.

Gagnon begins the book with a detailed chronology dated from 10,000 B.P. to 2009. In this we see refracted the work of archeologists and linguists whose tentative reconstructions are transformed into facts when forced into a timeline. So, for example, the assertions (xi–xii) that the ancestors of the Sioux were living in northern Minnesota by 1300 and evolved into the people we know as the Sioux by 1500 result from merging speculations based on linguistic reconstruction with the study of archeological remains. In fact, there is no way of connecting archeological sites with specific language groups nor is there any way to know what the ethnic or political identity of ancestral speakers of Siouan languages might have been.

What we do know is that the Sioux are first mentioned in the “Jesuit Relations” in 1640 and from then on there is a growing record of their history and culture, and that is the focus of the book. Gagnon writes in his introductory chapter: “‘Traditional’ is the descriptive term selected to describe the Sioux of the eighteenth through much of the nineteenth century. This is the period when Sioux culture reached its florescence” (7). The first half of the book presents a history of the Sioux up to the 1980s. The account is focused on relations between the Sioux and Europeans, and later with the United States, emphasizing

diplomatic and political issues. The second half of the book deals with wide-ranging social and cultural topics, including religion, politics, economics, music and dance, and oral traditions. A concluding chapter surveys a variety of significant contemporary social and political issues. An appendix lists religious ceremonies, social and political divisions, and population numbers. A glossary defines some basic concepts and terms and a brief annotated bibliography concludes the book.

This work was first published in hardback by Greenwood Press in 2011; this edition makes it available in paperback. The book is appropriate as an introduction to the Sioux for readers who are not already familiar with more scholarly literature and will make a useful text as assigned reading for classes in American Indian Studies.

Raymond J. DeMallie

**Gerrits, Godfried Johan Marie:** *The House Tambaran of Bongiora*. Ed. by Elisabetta Gneccchi Ruscone and Christian Kaufmann. Lugano: Museo delle Culture, 2012. 485 pp. ISBN 978-88-7795-215-8. Price: sfr 60.00

This lavishly illustrated volume provides rich ethnographic data on the male initiation ritual complex of the Abelam tribe of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Known for their artwork, towering men’s houses that once dominated village skylines, and for growing huge ceremonial yams, the Abelam people inhabit the Sepik plains and foothills of the Prince Alexander Mountains. From 1972–77 Fred Gerrits was a medical doctor living in Maprik, a town in the northern part of Abelam territory. He became interested in Abelam culture, and, encouraged by two key informants, recorded the wealth of ethnographic data reported in this volume. In particular, he arranged for the purchase of two initiation “display rooms” of sacred objects, today exhibited at the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart and the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. Thus this volume also provides comprehensive contextual data for those collections.

That nearly 40 years have elapsed between data collection and publication is no accident. In the early 1970s, the secret information reported herein was guarded by initiated men, most of whom felt that it should not be made accessible to the uninitiated. Comparable data collected at the same time from nearby Neligum Village was revealed to me only under the provision of secrecy. But Gerrits feels that now, due to the decline of traditional Abelam culture, this information should be freely available to both his informants’ descendants and to scholars.

Traditional Abelam religion and spiritual beliefs involve (here I employ the ethnographic present) a collection of mystical objects, plants, animals, spirit beings and, especially, ancestral spirits. Many of these supernatural beings are thought to be capable of influencing human affairs. Two of the most important are the *ngwaaIndu* (ancestor spirits thought to be especially powerful) and the *kutakwa* (evil female spirit-beings similar to the witches of Western folklore). Abelam males are introduced to these supernatural beings through a series of successive, fairly well-defined initiation ceremonies which vary from village to village. In the author’s main fieldsite, Bongiora