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Research Note

The O-Keepa: A Reprinting Error From the Original Translation

A. E. Johnson, Jr.

Some of the most colorful pagentry of North American history was recorded by George Catlin in 1832 when he witnessed, wrote about and painted the O-Keepa Ceremony of the Mandan Indians of North Dakota. So graphic were Catlin's depictions of the O-Keepa that Schoolcraft (1851:254) suggested, "the scenes described by Catlin existed almost entirely in the fertile imagination of that gentleman." It is of course now widely acknowledged that it was Schoolcraft and not Catlin who was mistaken regarding the various aspects of this Ceremony.

Notwithstanding, shortly after Catlin's visit, Maximilian, Prince of Wied, spent the Fall and Winter of 1833 and 34 with the Mandans. He, like Catlin, also detailed the O-Keepa Ceremony in his journals, Maximilian (1841).

In a recent rereading of both the original German text of Maximilian and the first English translation (H. Evans Lloyd, 1843), I found the translation to be virtually without error. However, when Lloyd's translation was reprinted and redistributed as part of the *Early Western Travels* series edited by Reuben Thwaites (1906), an error was made regarding the torture activity on the fourth and final day of the Ceremony.

Those familiar with this Mandan festival will know that the final candidates for torture were attended to on the fourth day. The following passage is taken from the Thwaites edition: "The candidates for the torture are out about two-o'clock in the afternoon; and

when they have suffered to the utmost of their powers..." Thwaites, (1906:332). Taken literally, the reader is lead to believe that the remaining candidates are brought out of the lodge around two-o'clock for the "last race around the Ark" before the ending of the ceremony. The original translation done by Lloyd, however, says the following, "The candidates for the torture are cut about two-o'clock in the afternoon", Lloyd (1843:377) suggesting that the remaining penitents went through the same torture phase as their predecessors had done. To confirm that the candidates were "cut" and not "out" at two-o'clock I examined Maximilian's actual account of the fourth day activities. His sentence reads as follows, "Die Marten-Candidaten werden gegen 2 Uhr am Nachmittage geschnitten. . .", Maximilian (1841:180). It is more than clear that Maximilian meant to say they were cut (werden geschnitten) at approximately two in the afternoon.

This typesetting error which appears in the Thwaites reprint of the original Lloyd translation is a bit misleading and slightly alters the actual chronology of events on the fourth day of the O-Keepa as both Maximilian (1841) and George Catlin (1841) recorded them.

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