

The Mescal Bean Cult of the Central and Southern Plains:  
An Ancestor of the Peyote Cult?

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INTRODUCTION

AN EARLY and once very important religious expression of certain Central and Southern Plains tribes was the mescal bean cult, also referred to in anthropological literature as the Wichita Dance, Deer Dance, Whistle Dance, and Red Medicine Society. This cult centered around the mescal bean (*Sophora secundiflora*), which was used as fetishes or "medicines," and often as an orally administered narcotic. In his study of peyotism, La Barre (1938: 105-109; 126-127) notes the presence of this cult and cites many of the principal references but, perhaps because his primary interest was in peyotism, he has overlooked many of the readily available sources.

In conjunction with Volney Jones of the University of Michigan, I have recently assembled a substantial amount of additional data on the subject; we hope in the near future to publish a comprehensive study of the ritual, medicinal, and decorative uses of the mescal bean. Present data indicate that the cult centering around the mescal bean is precontact and, in the Central and Southern Plains, pre-peyote. Further, so much of the mescal bean complex is similar to the present-day peyote rite as to suggest that the mescal bean ceremony may have been a direct ancestor of the peyote cult. Indeed, descriptions of what appear to be transitional ceremonies, involving the use of both peyote and the mescal bean, were secured for the Tonkawa and Oto tribes. It is with this particular problem, the possible relationships between the mescal bean cult and peyotism, that the present paper is chiefly concerned.

BOTANICAL DATA<sup>1</sup>

*Sophora secundiflora* (Orteg.) Lag. ex DC is the presently accepted name of the plant which was formerly described as *Broussonetia secundiflora* Orteg., and which has also been known as *Sophora speciosa* Benth. Its most common vernacular English names are "mescal bean," "mountain laurel," and "coral bean." Spanish (Mexican) vernacular names having some present or past vogue are *frijolito*, *frijolillo*, and *colorin*. The term "mescal bean" appears to be the most firmly established and widely accepted term, and is therefore the one used in this paper.

The mescal bean is a shrub or small tree with leathery evergreen leaves with seven to eleven leaflets. The violet-blue flowers grow in clusters, and the fruits (pods) are short, thick, woody, and deeply constricted between the seeds. They contain from one to eight (usually three or four) seeds which are maroon to scarlet (occasionally yellowish) in color. The pods are indehiscent, and those from an earlier season still containing the seeds can be found on a tree which is in bloom. The seeds are more or less ovate in shape, about 12 to

14 mm. in diameter, with a deeply impressed and roughly circular cicatrix or hilum (seed scar).

The natural range of the mescal bean is from southeastern New Mexico to central Texas and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and southward through Coahuila, Nueva Leon, and Tamaulipas into Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico. It occurs chiefly on dry limestone hills. In Texas it is often seen as an ornamental shrub.

Concerning the narcotic properties of the mescal bean, La Barre (1938:126) writes: "*Sophora secundiflora* contains the highly toxic narcotic alkaloid sophorine,  $C_{11}H_{14}ON_2$ , which is identical with cytosine (= ulexine, = baptitoxine)." Quoting T. A. Henry (1924:395), he states that the mescal bean resembles nicotine in physiological action, and that the contents of one bean are capable of producing nausea, convulsions, and even death by asphyxiation. Actually, reports concerning the physiological effects of the bean are very conflicting. William Chatfield, an Ojibwa Indian of Cass Lake, Minnesota (in a letter to the author dated Oct. 29, 1954), stated that John Carlson, another Ojibwa, had eaten 14 mescal beans "for experiment." Carlson is reported to have vomited and to have "seen red" all day, but apparently suffered no permanent ill effect. Clearly, there is a need for further pharmacological study of the mescal bean.

#### THE MESCAL BEAN CULT

A well-developed mescal bean cult was present in the Apache, Comanche, Delaware, Iowa, Kansa, Omaha, Oto, Osage, Pawnee, Ponca, Tonkawa, and Wichita tribes. A definite cult surrounding its use seems to have been lacking in several other groups, although the bean was regarded as a powerful fetish. Only the tribes possessing a cult will be considered here. Material is presented alphabetically according to tribal name.

##### *Apache*

In 1939 Willie Longbone, an Oklahoma Delaware of the Caney Creek band, told Erminie Voegelin about an Apache mescal bean cult meeting.<sup>2</sup> He had not attended this meeting himself, but Willie Thomas, a Delaware friend from Anadarko, Oklahoma, had given him an account of a ceremony held "twenty five or thirty years ago."

Thomas, described as "a peyote believer, strong," had gone to the Apache meeting under the impression that it was a peyote ceremony. When he arrived he discovered that the Apache were "eating the red beans" instead. An Apache friend told him, "Go ahead, eat that weed (the mescal bean). You can do miracles—jump right up and out the top of the tipi." He ate some of the red beans, got light, jumped up and went out through the smokehole, came down outside, and walked back into the meeting. One after another of the men did the same thing until all had done so. Some of the Apache men walked barefoot on live coals, but Thomas did not attempt this. The Apache leader of the ceremony was described as "talking all the time, like praying,"

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during the meeting. There was also singing, but Thomas could not join in because the mescal bean cult songs were different from peyote songs.

Other information from Thomas indicates that the Apache ceremony was not new, even at that time, but was practiced "years back." The time of the meetings was set by the council. Mescal beans were considered "great, powerful" by the Apache, and were said to grow "in Texas, close to Mexico." Individuals were reported to eat five to seven beans. The beans were prepared "same as peyote" by soaking them in water to soften them, and were eaten whole.<sup>3</sup> Any man might attend, but women were excluded.

### *Comanche*

Clark (1885:141) mentions a Comanche "Deer-dance," which he states "might be called the juggler's dance as the dancers pretend to swallow red beans and then draw them out through the breast." In connection with a myth in which the Coyote trickster makes some people drunk with mountain-laurel berries (mescal beans) and then cuts their hair and robs them, one of Opler's Lipan Apache informants told him, "The Comanche mix mountain-laurel berries with peyote we have heard" (Opler 1940:190, footnote 2).

Willie Longbone, Voegelin's Delaware informant on Apache mescalism, stated that he knew of a ceremony practiced by the Comanche in which mescal beans were taken internally as a narcotic.<sup>4</sup>

### *Delaware*

A curious and slightly garbled note in La Barre (1938:153) indicates that at least one mixed-blood Delaware, John Wilson,<sup>5</sup> used the mescal bean ritualistically:

"A curious mixture of Caddoan mescalism, Ghost dance, Delaware 'shooting' ceremonies, and early peyotism occurred among the Shawnee [Does La Barre mean Quapaw?] when Wilson came to them about 1889. The Quapaw were being taught the Ghost dance, in which a small water drum was used to accompany the circling of the dancers, alternately men and women. *Wilson showed them how to swallow mescal beans, and also how to 'shoot' them into a person so that he or she would fall down. Then he doctored the person with peyote to bring him back to consciousness.* A number of tribes were involved in these doings, according to Mrs. Voegelin, the Shawnee, Delaware, Mohawk [This should probably be Oklahoma Seneca], Peoria, Caddo, Quapaw, Iowa, and Oto. Gradually, however, Wilson turned from the Ghost dance to peyote" (italics mine).

This paragraph deserves some comment in the present context. For one thing, "mescalism" and "Delaware 'shooting' ceremonies" are parts of the same phenomenon, the mescal bean ceremony. The doctoring with peyote to revive persons "shot" with mescal beans is extremely interesting, as it provides evidence for a connection between the mescal bean ceremony and peyotism. The collection of tribes listed by Mrs. Voegelin may seem odd but it is actually quite typical of Quapaw gatherings, which are attended by individuals from many Oklahoma tribes.

*Iowa*

In comparison with the rather sparse accounts of the mescal bean cult in some tribes, the Iowa rites are quite extensively treated. Alanson Skinner has detailed descriptions in both his *Iowa Societies* (1915:718-720) and his *Ethnology of the Iowa Indians* (1926:245-247). In the earlier of the two accounts Skinner writes:

"This (The Red Bean Dance) is an ancient rite (Ma<sup>n</sup>kacutzi waci) far antedating the modern peyote practice but on the same principle. The society was founded by a faster who dreamed he received it from the deer, for red beans (mescal) are sometimes found in deer's stomachs. There are four assistant leaders besides the leader, and it is their duty to strike the drum and sing during ceremonies.

"In this society members were obliged to purchase admission from some one of the four assistant leaders. This was done in the regular ceremonial way. A candidate brought gifts and heaped them on the ground before the assistant leader and begged for the songs, etc., which he taught him and was then a member. There was no initiation ceremony. During performances the members painted themselves white and wore a bunch of split owl feathers on their heads. Small gourd rattles were used and the members while singing held a bow and arrow in the right hand which they waved back and forth in front of the body while they manipulated the rattle with the left.

"This ceremony was held in the spring (?) when the sunflowers were in blossom on the prairie, for then nearly all the vegetable foods given by Wakanda were ripe. The leader, who was the owner of a medicine and a war bundle called ma<sup>n</sup>kacutzi waruwahe connected with this society, had his men prepare by "killing" the beans by placing them before the fire until they turned yellow. Then they are taken and pounded up fine and made into a medicine brew. The members then danced all night, and just past midnight they commenced to drink the red bean decoction. They kept this up until about dawn when it began to work upon them so that they vomited and prayed repeatedly, and were thus cleansed ceremonially, the evil having been driven from their bodies. Then a feast of the new vegetable foods was given them and a prayer of thanks was made to wakanda for vegetable foods and tobacco.

"The connection of the ma<sup>n</sup>kacutzi waruwahe, or red bean war bundle with the society is not altogether clear to me, save that it was a sacred object possessed by the society which brought success in war, hunting, especially for the buffalo, and horse racing. Members of the society tied red beans around their belts when they went to war, deeming them a protection against injury. Cedar berries and sagebrush were also used with this medicine. Sage was boiled and used to medicate sweat baths on the war trail" (Skinner 1915:718-719).

The 1926 account contains much of the same information. In addition, it mentions that the Red Medicine bundle was derived from the Pawnee and that "Music was furnished by a number of singers, who kept time to the sound of drumming upon a tight bow-string, and the sound of small gourd rattles. During the ceremonies the singers seated themselves in four different places at the side of the lodge, corresponding to the four directions, and sang in each one the verses prescribed by tradition, the order being: east south, west, and north. The dance is said to have consisted of peculiar jumping movements" (Skinner 1926:245-246).

This publication also contains a fuller account of the preparation and effects of the narcotic drink:

"When morning put an end to the dances of the ceremony under discussion, a large number of the red beans were broken up or 'Killed' as the Indians say (regarding the beans as alive) and stirred up with water in a large kettle, together with certain herbs which are said to make the decoction milder in action. Then all of the participants drank a cup or two of the mixture. The only description given to the action of the drug was that everything looks red to the drinker for a while, then he vomits, and evacuates the bowels, which the Indians say, cleans out the system, and benefits the health, even in the case of children. The medicine drinking, and the stupor and purging consequent upon it end the ceremony" (Skinner 1926:246).

### *Kansa*

In a footnote on the Red Paint dance of the Omaha, James O. Dorsey writes:

"The Kansa have the Maka<sup>n</sup> judje, Red Medicine, and the Osages the Maka<sup>n</sup> oüise watsi, Red Medicine Dance. The leader of the latter is a man" (Dorsey 1884:351, footnote 21).

In view of the similarity of the native Kansa and Osage terms to the native name for the Iowa Red Bean dance (Ma<sup>n</sup>kacutzi waci), we may with some certainty identify them with the mescal bean cult. In a later publication Dorsey mentions that among the Omaha, Kansa, and Osage, red (mescal) beans were likely "fetiches, as they conferred wonderful powers on those who used them" (Dorsey 1894:416).

### *Omaha*

In his *Omaha Sociology*, James O. Dorsey describes the Omaha mescal bean cult, which was known as the *Padi<sup>n</sup> wasabe* or Wichita dance, probably because it had come from that tribe:

"The members of this society have a medicine which they use in three ways: they rub it on their bodies before going into battle; they rub it on bullets to make them kill the foe, and they administer it to horses, making them smell it when they are about to surround a buffalo herd. If the horses are weak they make them eat some of the medicine and smell the rest. Similar customs are found among the Pawnees and Ponkas. A man thinks, 'I will boil,' and he invites to a feast those who have the medicine of the Witcita society. On their arrival he says, 'On such a day we will dance.' Two or three men boil for the feast to be held in connection with the dance.

It takes three days to prepare the candidate, and this is done secretly. On the fourth day there is a public ceremony in an earth lodge, during which the candidate is shot with the red medicine. Frank La Fleche has witnessed this, and says it closely resembles the public ceremony of the Wacicka<sup>s</sup> society" (Dorsey 1884:349).

In describing the paint and dress of the Omaha Wichita dance society, Dorsey states:

"The breech-cloth is the only regular garment. Two Crows and La Fleche say that all whiten their bodies and legs all over, but *aa<sup>ti</sup>-na<sup>n</sup>paji* says that some draw white

lines over their limbs and bodies. Some paint as deer, putting white stripes on their limbs and bodies; others appear as bald eagles, with whitened faces. Some wear caps of the skin of the 'jikaqude' or gray fox. Some wear necklaces of the skin of ~~that~~ animal; and others have on necklaces of the tail of a black-tailed deer and that of an ordinary deer, fastened together. Some carry a 'jikaqude' skin on the arm, ~~and~~ the others carry the skin of the 'ma<sup>n</sup>'in'kaceha', or red fox, of which the hair is very red, and the legs and ankles are black. Some wear feathers of the great owl around the wrist; and others carry fans made of the feathers of that bird. 'Maka<sup>n</sup>-jide ha u<sup>f</sup>aha baqtaqta nusiaqca-hna<sup>i</sup>'—*The red medicine with the skin adhering to it* (being about three inches long) is tied up in a bundle, which is worn 'nusiaqca' like a coiled lariat, with one end over the left shoulder, and the other under the right arm.<sup>6</sup>

Each of the four singers has a gourd rattle, a bow, and an arrow. He holds the bow, which is whitened, in his left hand, and the rattle and arrow in his right. He strikes the arrow against the bow-string as he shakes the rattle.

All the members have whistles or flutes, some of which are a foot long, and others about a half a yard in length. The dancers blow theirs in imitation of the 'quya' " (Dorsey 1884:350; italics mine).

Dorsey lists the names of the members, sixteen men and one woman, and closes with the following account of the tabus of the society:

"The members of this society would eat no green corn, fruit, etc. till consecrated by the dance. A few ears of corn were divided among the dancers. Then they could eat as they pleased" (Dorsey 1884:350).

In 1954 an old Omaha man told me that the Omaha considered the mescal bean a powerful medicine for war, hunting, and horses. According to this informant, the mescal beans were sometimes called "horses" because of their efficacy in curing these animals.

The informant knew that the Omaha had once possessed a society centering around the mescal bean, but he had never heard of a drink being brewed from the beans. Rather he stated that the Omaha used the beans as an "amulet" type of medicine. Each member of the society had a bundle containing at least one mescal bean, while the leader of the group possessed a larger and more elaborate bundle.

This man denied that there were any carry-overs from the mescal bean cult in Omaha peyotism, but recalled attending a Tonkawa peyote meeting where both mescal beans and peyote buttons were brewed in a tea. He attributed the decline of the Tonkawa tribe to its excessive use of the mescal bean as a narcotic.

### Oto

The Oto apparently possessed the mescal bean cult as early as 1820. Say, a member of the Stephen H. Long expedition, makes the following remarks concerning some mescal beans which his party saw in an Arapaho medicine man's bundle:

"Julien (Stephen Julien, a French-Indian interpreter with the Long expedition) recognized it (the mescal bean medicine) immediately. He informed us that it is in such high request among the Oto Indians that a horse has been exchanged for eight or

ten of them. In that nation the intoxicating bean is only used by a particular society, who at their nocturnal orgies make a decoction of the bean, and, with much pomp and ceremony administer the delightful beverage to each member. The initiation fees of this society are rather extravagant, and the proceeds are devoted principally to the purchase of the bean . . . the bean is obtained in some circuitous manner from the Pawnee Piqua (Wichita) of the Red River, who probably receive it from the Mexican Indians" (James 1905:217).

Probably the most complete account of the Oto mescal bean cult is Whitman's. He quotes B.D., one of his informants:

"There was one lodge among the Oto tribe, the Red Bean Medicine Lodge. They were not allowed to eat buffalo meat until after the big hunt. 'We had better not eat meat or green corn until we return from the hunt.' When they came back from the hunt to the mud lodge village, everything, corn and pumpkins, were ripe. Then the lodge got together. 'All right, now we are going to eat meat and green corn, pumpkin and water melon.' One man talked about how the food came into this world, made by the Great Spirit above. Fat meat was brought to the lodge. They cooked corn and meat and had a dance. They painted themselves with white earth all over their bodies. They had fox hides wrapped round their waists, bodies, and hands. When singing, they blew a whistle. They danced one whole night. When they got through dancing, they began to cook the food. First they took four beans (red mescal), opened them, and got four big brass kettles, and put one bean in each kettle. They boiled them. When they got through, they let them cool until they were fit to taste. Then everybody began to drink as much as he wanted. Those beans made a fellow, whatever was bilious in him, come out. Everybody threw up. They brought in cold water to drink and wash themselves. 'We're going to open the door for meat'. Then everybody could eat what they could find. When they got through that (feast) they made the squaw corn" (Whitman 1937:120-121).

In a footnote to this account, Whitman writes:

"I could find nothing more about this lodge. From what we know of the Iowa Red Bean Dance it was undoubtedly associated with war and hunting as well as with first fruits" (ibid 120).

In July, 1954, I attended a Ponca peyote meeting at White Eagle, Oklahoma. The following morning, as the participants were discussing their previous experiences with peyote, an unidentified Oto peyotist told of attending a peyote meeting in which mescal beans had been boiled in a "tea" along with peyote buttons. "The old-timers liked to mix these medicines, but we don't do it anymore. They took the red beans off the fringes of their peyote gourds and dropped them into the tea. I drank two big cups, but it was too much for me. I saw red for a long time afterwards. It was a lot different from just plain peyote effect."

### *Osage*

As with the Kansa, our only information concerning the Osage mescal bean cult is in Dorsey's footnote, which mentions an Osage society called the *Maka* *niise wasi* or "red medicine dance." He states that the leader was a man (Dorsey 1884:351, footnote 21).

*Pawnee*

All four of the Pawnee bands possessed a society known as the "Deer Dance" or "Whistle Dance," which centered around the use of the mescal bean. An excellent description of the Pawnee Deer Dance, together with a diagram of the ceremonial lodge, is contained in Murie's *Pawnee Societies*. Murie writes:

"The raris ta, or deer society, is found among all divisions, but its ritual seems to be in keeping of the Skidi organizations. The fundamental elements of the ritual seem to be based upon the mescal bean, for this society teaches that all animal powers were learned through the power of the mescal bean. While the name of the society is taken from the generic term for deer (ta), the dancers imitate many kinds of animals, suggesting that we have a general animal cult instead of a specific one. That the mescal is fundamental is suggested in the initiation of members. Tea made from mescal beans by a definite formula is given the candidate and when he falls unconscious, the leader tests him by rasping down his spine with the toothed jaw of a garfish; if he moves or flinches in the least, he is rejected once for all.

"Again at the regular ceremonies shamanistic feats with mescal beans may be performed. If anyone in the village brings in a new red blanket for the leader, these must be demonstrated. The performing members then rise and dance, presently shaking mescal beans from bunches of sage and other unexpected places. The leader does not dance but industriously sweeps up beans from the bare ground. At the end all the beans magically produced are placed in a pile and later given to the donor of the blanket. Other shamanistic feats may occur, but seem to be individual and entirely optional.

"As in other societies of this class the members bring their professional bundles to the ceremony and display their contents. The regalia peculiar to the society are large whistles, to symbolize the elk, and foxskins carried by the neck when dancing. A few members wear braided buffalo hide ropes into which feathers are woven and some carry wings of birds.

"The order of seating is shown in Fig. 17. It differs slightly from the preceding for the leaders sit, not at the west of the door as is usual, but on the south side. The seats west of the door are occupied by chiefs who are paired according to the two sides of the lodge. In front of the permanent leaders are laid four bows and four gourd rattles, the latter painted white. These bows and rattles are shifted at intervals to the alternating groups of leaders as previously described [i.e. the musical instruments are passed around the lodge in a clockwise direction.]

"The regular ceremony is held once a year when the wild sage plant reaches a certain stage of maturity. This plant is spread thickly around the lodge and is used in incense offerings" (Murie 1914:605-608).

That the Pawnee had possessed the deer dance for a considerable length of time is attested by the fact that they were able to recount well-developed origin legends explaining its introduction. Three of these myths were collected by George A. Dorsey in 1904, and are found in his *The Pawnee, Mythology* (1906:382-383, 411-413, 537). Dorsey states that the whistle dance was still practiced by the Pawnee as late as 1904 (*ibid*:41).

*Ponca*

Seemingly the only mention of the Ponca mescal bean cult in the literature is one made by James O. Dorsey (1884:349) who, in discussing the Wichita dance of the Omaha and the use of the mescal bean by this group, states that "Similar customs are found among the Pawnees and Ponkas."

In 1954 Louis MacDonald, an elderly Southern Ponca, supplied me with additional information on the Ponca cult. He stated that the mescal bean cult had been a powerful organization in his father's time. He had heard a great deal about it since his father was one of the leaders of the group and kept the society's sacred bundle. MacDonald stated that the mescal bean cult was much older among the Ponca than was the peyote cult, which the Southern Ponca acquired from the Cheyenne in 1902.

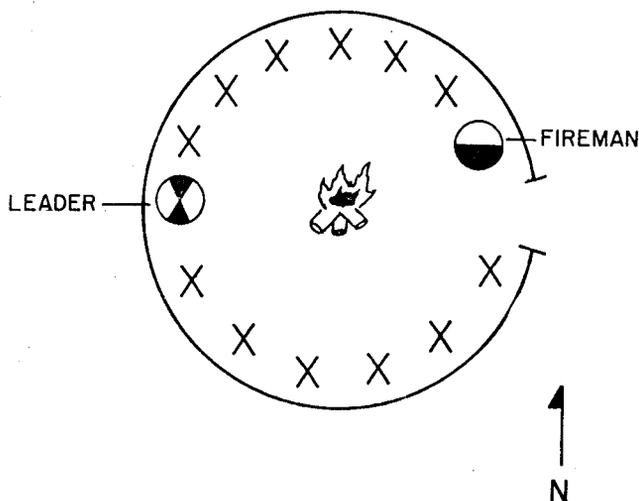


Diagram of a Ponca Mescal Bean Cult Ceremony

The mescal bean cult was secret and, even though his father was a leader, MacDonald had never been admitted to the ceremonies. By hearsay, however, he learned the form of the ritual. MacDonald stressed the similarity of mescal bean cult meetings to the later peyote meetings. They were customarily held in a tipi, the entrance of which faced the east. The leader of the rite sat opposite the door, in the place of honor. Another important officer, the fire man, sat across from him, just to the right of the entrance. Both of these officers have parallels in the peyote rite. The leader held a staff as his emblem of authority, another feature which also occurs in peyotism.

Each member of the society owned an individual sacred bundle, but the main bundle was kept by the leader. These bundles were opened during the ceremony and their contents displayed. The leader opened his bundle first, and then the members followed suit. A tea was brewed from mescal beans,

which the members drank. The participants sometimes secured visions of the future after drinking this tea. One sip of the decoction was said to be enough. Songs were sung to the accompaniment of a rawhide rattle which was struck upon a buckskin pillow. On occasion dancing accompanied the rattle.

"Yellow-hammer" (flicker, *Colaptes auratus* or *Colaptes cafer collaris*) feathers were worn by the members of the mescal bean cult. MacDonald explained that this bird was the "main one" of the mescal bean cult, just as the "waterbird" (water turkey, *Anhinga anhinga*) is now the "main bird" of the peyote cult.

### *Tonkawa*

Louis MacDonald, the Ponca informant cited above, commented that the Tonkawa had kept up their mescal bean rites much longer than had the other Oklahoma tribes. He stated that some Ponca youths once attended a Tonkawa mescal bean ceremony, held near Tonkawa, Oklahoma, in the 1920's. The leader of the ceremony, an old Tonkawa chief, had a "yellowhammer" (flicker) skin in his medicine bundle. During the ceremony this skin came to life, flew around the lodge, and finally perched on the leader's staff.

Another informant, an old Omaha whom I interviewed in 1954, recalled attending a Tonkawa peyote meeting where both mescal beans and peyote buttons were brewed into a tea. He stated: "By morning some of those Tonkawas were howling like wolves and running around the place like crazy men." He attributed the decline of the Tonkawa tribe, which now numbers about 25, to its excessive use of the mescal bean in this fashion.

### *Wichita*

The ceremonial use of the mescal bean by the Wichita is of particular interest since this tribe, together with the Pawnee, seems to have been responsible for the diffusion of the cult to tribes further north. An excellent description of the Wichita deer dance, which centered around the mescal bean, is given by G. A. Dorsey in the introduction to his *Mythology of the Wichita*:

"Standing at the head of the ceremonial societies was the deer-dance, or the ceremony of the medicine-men. According to my informant, the last ceremony was performed in 1871. From my scant knowledge of the ceremony, it seems not to have been unlike that of the Skidi. No one could participate in the ceremony except medicine-men, each of whom had his own song or songs, in which was set forth the story of the origin of his magic power. In addition there were certain rituals sung, in connection with the opening and closing rites of the ceremony. The dance was held generally three, occasionally four, times a year; the first occasion when the grass had just appeared, the second when the corn was ripe, the third when the corn was harvested. The ceremony was never held in the winter. One of the special features of the ceremony was the administering to the novitiate of a small red bean, which produced a violent spasm, and finally unconsciousness, this condition being indicated by the inability of the novitiate to suffer pain when the jaw of a gar-pike was drawn over his naked body. During the ceremony offerings were made to the different gods, and at the end of the ceremony and following the feast was a ceremonial foot race, in which all

members of the tribe, both male and female, were permitted to compete. This was followed on the part of those engaged in the ceremony by violent vomiting. The foot race was supposed to give the participants great endurance while on the warpath. The chief efficacy of the ceremony was the removal from the camp of all evil influences and the promoting of good health, long life, and general prosperity" (G. A. Dorsey 1904:16-17).

Later in the same source, Dorsey adds a further note on the ceremony:

"... offerings and prayers are made to the animals, especially to those which are supposed to have magic power, and which are the guardians of the medicine-men. Thus, in the ceremony of the medicine-men, after the novice has been placed in a trance, he usually holds a speech with some fierce wild animal, who visits him and instructs him—should he prove brave and not become scared. Thus he obtains power which he uses in doctoring, and in his songs, sung during the medicine-men's ceremony, he tells of his experience with the animal" (G. A. Dorsey 1904:20).

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The above accounts indicate the presence and describe some of the features of a mescal bean cult in twelve tribes of the Plains and Southwest (Apache, Comanche, Delaware, Iowa, Kansa, Omaha, Oto, Osage, Pawnee, Ponca, Tonkawa, and Wichita). Although our information is quite incomplete, and will probably remain so, there seem to have been two principal forms of the cult.

The first, practiced by the Iowa, Omaha, Oto, Pawnee, Wichita, and probably the Comanche and Delaware, seems in many respects to have resembled the Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Lodge of the Central Algonquin tribes. A magical "shooting" of mescal beans with the aid of animal skins often occurred, and deer symbolism was prominent. A second form, practiced by the Apache, Ponca, and Tonkawa, more closely resembled the modern peyote ritual. Both forms utilized the mescal bean in a narcotic drink, and both featured magical performances by shamans.

La Barre (1938:40-43) derives the Plains peyote ritual from Mexico, treating the Mescalero Apache rite as a transitional form. Slotkin (1955) maintains a similar view. However, there are many reasons for regarding this theory with skepticism. A comparison of Mexican Indian peyote rituals with the Plains ceremony reveals little in common except for the ritualized consumption of peyote (La Barre 1938:37-40). Even such important elements of the Plains rite as the ceremonial fire, leader's staff, and drum, are often absent from the Mexican ceremonies (ibid:38). On the other hand, all of these elements were present in the mescal bean rite.

Some of the many other resemblances between the peyote ritual and the mescal bean cults of the various tribes are indicated on the chart. On the basis of these resemblances, it is suggested that the mescal bean cult, in addition to paving the way for the later peyote cult, may also have provided a good deal of the ritual content of the later ceremony.

The mixing of peyote and mescal beans in a narcotic drink is reported for

the Comanche, Oto, and Tonkawa. The ceremonies in which this occurred were very likely of a transitional nature, the milder peyote later completely replacing the mescal bean narcotic. It was probably during this transition period that the musical bow of the mescal bean cult developed into the bow-like staff of modern peyote practice.

If we accept this theory, many long-standing enigmas can be explained, including the frequent confusion of the terms "mescal bean" and "peyote"

DISTRIBUTION OF CERTAIN TRAITS IN THE KIOWA-COMANCHE "BASIC PLAINS"  
PEYOTE RITUAL AND THE MESCAL BEAN CULT

	Plains Peyote Rite	Apache	Comanche	Delaware	Iowa	Omaha	Oto	Pawnee	Ponca	Tonkawa	Wichita
Use of narcotic	X	X	X	—	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Use of gourd and bow or staff	X	—	—	—	X	X	—	X	X	X	X
Use of drum	X	—	—	—	X	—	—	—	—	—	—
Movement of musicians	X	—	—	—	X	—	—	X	—	—	X
Meeting held in tipi	X	X	—	—	—	O	—	—	X	X	O
Central fire	X	X	—	—	—	—	—	—	X	X	X
All men admitted	X	X	—	—	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Only shamans admitted	O	O	—	—	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
First fruits ceremony	O	—	—	—	X	—	X	—	—	—	X
Magical performances	R	X	X	X	—	X	—	X	X	X	X
"Shooting" of mescal bean	O	—	X	X	—	X	—	—	—	—	O
Dancing	R	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Deer symbolism	O	—	X	—	X	X	—	X	—	—	X
Use of fox skins	O	—	—	—	—	X	X	X	—	—	—
Use of owl feathers	R	—	—	—	X	X	—	—	—	—	—
Use of flickers	X	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	X	X	—
Use of white paint	O	—	—	—	X	X	X	—	—	—	—
Use of mescal bean bandoliers	X	—	—	—	X	X	—	—	—	—	—

Key: —=No information. O=Trait absent. X=Trait present. R=Trait present, but rare.

in the early literature. The derivation of the modern Plains peyote cult from the mescal bean cult would also account for the extensive use of mescal beans in old Plains peyote regalia (i.e. in bandoliers, necklaces, and attached to the fringes of peyote gourds and "feathers").<sup>7</sup>

The problem of determining the relationships between the old mescal bean cult and modern Plains peyotism reflects the difficulty of determining the exact origins of any very old culture complex. The stream of culture flows on, and various traits are combined and recombined in ever different patterns. In this process today's sacred rites often become tomorrow's anathema or, no longer feared or taken seriously, become harmless folk customs and superstitions, their former meaning and symbolism forgotten.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information in this section, with the exception of the paragraph on narcotic properties of of the mescal bean, was taken from the notes of Volney H. Jones.

<sup>2</sup> Erminie Voegelin, notes sent to Volney H. Jones, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> The informant seems to be rationalizing from peyote practice. The hard outer shell of the beans was undoubtedly removed prior to this soaking. I performed the following simple experiment to see if unshelled mescal beans would soften: Two jars of water were placed on a table and a shelled bean put in one, an unshelled bean in the other. After 48 hours the unshelled bean was as hard as ever and the water in its jar fresh and clear. The shelled bean, however, was quite soggy, and the water in which it had been placed was a murky white color.

<sup>4</sup> Erminie Voegelin, notes sent to Volney H. Jones, 1939.

<sup>5</sup> The Shell society, one of the three Omaha parallels to the Midewiwin of the Ojibwa and other Central Algonquin tribes.

<sup>6</sup> This "bundle" sounds very much like a bandolier of mescal beans.

<sup>7</sup> Most present day peyotists deny this, insisting that the beans are used merely because they are "pretty."

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