

Omaha

Data source: eHRAF

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**Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

Entry tags: Native American (North American) Religions, Religious Group

This entry focuses on the Omaha living in what is now Northeastern Nebraska, around the time of 1860, prior to significant American influence, Christianization efforts, and subjection to the law of the United States. This entry relies primarily on the principal ethnographic authority (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911), which provides a reconstruction of Omaha life prior to significant cultural changes. As Fletcher and La Flesche (1911) state, "tribal organization of the Omaha was based on certain fundamental religious ideas, cosmic in significance; these had reference to conceptions as to how the visible universe came into being and how it is maintained" (p.134). The prominent religious idea that the authors refer to is Wakónda, which is the invisible and continuous life force that pervades all things both seen and unseen. Wakónda manifests itself in duality: of motion and permanency, of male and female. It is the sense of oneness of the universe. Wakónda is relevant to all aspects of Omaha life, from social and political structure to religious beliefs and practices. Representing the duality of Wakónda, the Omaha were organized into two grand divisions: Inshtacunda, representing the Sky People, and Hongashenu, representing the Earth People. Within each division were five gentes; each gens was an exogamous kin group with distinct rites, tabu, and symbolic characteristics. Each of the two grand divisions had a principal chief; these two chiefs, together with five other chiefs from across the grand divisions, comprised the Council of Seven. The Council of Seven was tasked with the political leadership of the Omaha and duties such as the maintenance of order and decision-making responsibility. Chiefs were favored by Wakónda; chiefs had a special relationship and connection to its unseen powers. In every gens, a particular family held the hereditary right to fill the position of keeper or "priest" who was charged with the gens' sacred object and associated rites and rituals. As religious leader, the keeper was responsible for conducting ceremonies and rites for his gens. All ceremonies were connected to Wakónda, including both individual and communal practices. Because religious beliefs permeate almost all aspects of Omaha life, this entry considers the Omaha religious group to be coterminous with Omaha society itself.



Date Range: 1840 CE - 1880 CE

Region: Omaha Lands ca. 1860

Region tags: North America, United States of America

Area occupied by the Omaha, around 1860. (located in what is now Nebraska, USA).

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Murdock, G.P. (1967). *Ethnographic Atlas*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Source 2: Divale, W. (2004). *Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample*. World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research.

- Source 3: Murdock, G.P. & Wilson, S.F. (Jul., 1972). Settlement patterns and community organization: Cross-Cultural Codes 3. *Ethnology*, 11(3), 254-295.
- Source 1: Tuden, A. & Marshall, C. (Oct., 1972). Political organization: Cross-cultural codes 4. *Ethnology*, 11(4), 436-464.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nq21-000>
- Source 1 Description: Awakuni-Swetland, M. J. (2011). Culture summary: Omaha. Human Relations Area Files.
- Source 2 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nq21-001>
- Source 2 Description: Fletcher, A. C. (Alice C., & La Flesche, F. (1911). The Omaha tribe. In Twenty-seventh annual report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1905-06 (pp. 17-672 , 65 plates). Government Printing Office.

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

— Yes

Notes: For a description of the groups known to the Omaha, see Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:81-82, 101-103, 114.



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

— Yes

Notes: For SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (resolved rating), the Omaha are coded 11 (original code 3.5) which lies between 9 (internal warfare seems to occur once every 2 years) and 13 (internal warfare seems to occur every year, but usually only during a particular season). Source of information: Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004.



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

— Yes

Notes: For SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (resolved rating), the Omaha are coded 12 (original code 3.75) which lies between 9 (external warfare seems to occur once every 2 years) and 13 (external warfare seems to occur every year, but usually only during a particular season). Source of information: Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004.

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

— Yes

Notes: "When a child was born it was not regarded as a member of its gens or of the tribe but simply as a living being coming forth into the universe, whose advent must be ceremonially announced in

order to assure it an accepted place among the already existing forms. This ceremonial announcement took the form of an expression of the Omaha belief in the oneness of the universe through the bond of a common life-power that pervaded all things in nature animate and inanimate" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:115).



Assigned by participation in a particular ritual:

— Yes

Notes: "This ceremony of introduction took place on the eighth day after birth. Unfortunately the full details of the ceremony have been lost through the death of the priests who had charge of it" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:115).

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the Omaha would actively proselytize and recruit new members.

Does the religion have official political support

— Yes

Notes: "Keepers [religious leader] sometimes became chiefs; this was true of the last keeper of the Sacred Pole, he who transferred this ancient object to the writers for safe-keeping (p. 223) and narrated the Sacred Legend of the tribe" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:595). See questions below for more detail.



Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:

— Yes

Notes: "Chiefs were respected not only because of their authority, but as having been favored by the unseen powers, who had granted them help and had strengthened their ability to be steadfast in purpose during the years wherein they struggled to perform the acts required (p. 202) to enter the rank of chief. Because of this relation to the unseen powers, a chief had to be deliberate in speech and in movement, for all his words and acts were more or less connected with the welfare of the people, and by the authority vested in his office the chief was allied to the all-ruling and mysterious Wakon'da" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:601).

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

— Estimated population, numeric: 1179

Notes: "In June, 1884, the Omaha tribe numbered 1,179" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:33).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 1883 CE - 1884 CE

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: "...the tribe was composed of two grand divisions, one representing the Sky people, or the Inshta'çunda; the other, the Earth people, or the Hon'gashenu" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:134). Each division had a principal chief, and these two chiefs, together with five other chiefs from across the grand division, comprised a Council of Seven. The Council of Seven was not necessarily religious in nature, but: "In every gens or subgens there was a particular family to which belonged the hereditary right to furnish the keeper, who had charge of the sacred object of the gens together with its rituals and rites. This man held no title apart from the name of the object or rite of which he had charge; he was the keeper (athin, 'to possess' or 'keep') of the White Buffalo Hide or of the Sacred Pole, or of the rite of Turning the Child, etc. He alone possessed the authority to perform the ceremony, recite the rituals, and conduct the rites committed to his care; it was also his duty to instruct his son and successor, and to transmit this knowledge and right to him" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:595).

↳ Is there a hierarchy among these leaders:

— I don't know

↳ Are religious leaders chosen:

— No

Notes: "...it was also [the keeper's] duty to instruct his son and successor, and to transmit this knowledge and right to him" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:595).

— Yes

Notes: "In the event of the death of all the male members of the family of a keeper, the Seven Chiefs were required to select another family in the same subgens to take up the duties of keeper" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:595).

↳ Other leaders in the religious group choose that leader:

— Yes

Notes: "In the event of the death of all the male members of the family of a keeper, the Seven Chiefs were required to select another family in the same subgens to take up the duties of keeper" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:595).

↳ Are leaders considered fallible:

— I don't know

↳ Are close followers or disciples of a religious leader required to obediently and unquestionably accept the leader's pronouncements on all matters:

— I don't know

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also “oral scriptures” (e.g. the Vedas of India).

— No

Notes: The Omaha do not have formal scriptures. However, ethnographic evidence describes sacred legends which contain sacred stories and tribal historical accounts. These legends are oral traditions. "This Legend was in the custody of those who had charge of that ceremonial object [the Sacred Pole] and was considered sacred" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:70).

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

— No

Notes: According to Murdock and Wilson (1972), Column 6, Large or Impressive Structures, "there are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings." Presumably, monumental religious architecture is absent.

Are pilgrimages present:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of pilgrimages.

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer “no” only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

— Yes

Notes: "There was no belief among the Omaha in a multiplicity of souls—'man has but one spirit' the old men declared—nor has any trace of belief in metempsychosis or in metamorphosis been discovered among this people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:589).

Belief in afterlife:

— Yes

Notes: "The Milky Way was regarded as a path made by the spirits of men as they passed to the realm of the dead. While the mystery of dissolution seems to have demanded that the abode of the dead should be removed from the earth, there were other thoughts and feelings that inclined the Omaha to conceive of its being possible for the dead to come near and act as helpers of the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:588).

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "By virtue of this bond of a continuous life the dead, though dwelling in a distant, undiscernible region, are able to come near their kindred on the earth and to lend their assistance in the avocations with which they have been familiar" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:588).

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "above" space:

– Yes

Notes: "It was said that there are seven spirit worlds, each higher than the one next preceding, and that after people have lived for a time in one world they die to that world and pass on to the one next above" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:589).

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating a belief in reincarnation among the Omaha.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: "In olden times the body was borne on a rude litter and placed in the grave in a sitting posture, facing the east" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

↳ Cremation:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of cremation.

↳ Mummification:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of mummification.

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: "In olden times the body was borne on a rude litter and placed in the grave in a sitting posture, facing the east" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):

– Yes

Notes: "In olden times the body was borne on a rude litter and placed in the grave in a sitting posture, facing the east" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):

– No

Notes: "In olden times the body was borne on a rude litter and placed in the grave in a sitting posture, facing the east" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):

– No

Notes: Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of cannibalism.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating that the dead were exposed to elements.

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating that the dead were fed to animals.

↳ Secondary burial:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 1850, Secondary bone/body treatment (original scale), "secondary contact with the body or bones of the deceased does not occur" (Schroeder, 2001; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Re-treatment of corpse:

– I don't know

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: "After the acquisition of horses, one of these animals was sometimes strangled at the grave but it was never buried with the man" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

Notes: "The personal belongings of men, women, and children were usually deposited in the grave" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

↳ Personal effects:

– Yes

Notes: "The personal belongings of men, women, and children were usually deposited in the grave" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

↳ Valuable items:

– I don't know

↳ Other grave goods:

– Yes

Notes: "The placing of food on the grave has been explained as an act of remembrance and has been likened to the offering of food when a bit was dropped ceremonially into the fire in token of the remembrance of Wakon'da's [spirit, life force] gift of food to man" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: For a full description of Omaha burial practices, see Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911, pages 592-595.

↳ As cenotaphs:

– I don't know

↳ In cemetery:

– Yes

Notes: "Graves were usually made on a hilltop. A shallow hole was dug and the body placed in it, and poles were arranged over the opening upon which earth was heaped into a mound. Mound burial was the common practice of the Omaha" (Fletcher and LaFlesche, 1911:592).

↳ Family tomb-crypt:

– I don't know

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating domestic burials occurred among the Omaha.

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

— Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information regarding supernatural beings. Note: the concept of Wakóna is important to Omaha religious beliefs and practices; Wakóna is best described as an energy or life force, rather than supernatural being. In the time after which this entry focuses on, the influence of Christianity became evident and, "the conception of Wakóna has acquired many of the anthropomorphic characteristics associated with the Christian God, including becoming the father of Jesus Christ" (Awakuni-Swetland, 2011). However, this entry focuses on the time prior to Christian influence.

↳ A supreme high god is present:

— No

Notes: Ethnographic Atlas Column 34 (High Gods) indicates that among the Omaha, "a high god is absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs" (Murdock, 1967).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

— Yes

Notes: "While the mystery of dissolution seems to have demanded that the abode of the dead should be removed from the earth, there were other thoughts and feelings that inclined the Omaha to conceive of its being possible for the dead to come near and act as helpers of the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:588).

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

— I don't know

Notes: "In only one instance was it claimed that these visitors [ghosts] became partially visible. In that case the narrator [informant] said: 'Only the feet and the legs as high as the knees could be seen;' and then added: 'If I had been alone a little while longer I think I should have finally been able to see the entire figure and recognize the people, for at first I could see only their feet'" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:590-591). Because this singular instance is the only evidence of human spirits being visible, it is unclear whether or not human spirits can be seen.

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

— I don't know

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

— Yes

Notes: "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his village to punish the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).

↳ Human spirits can reward:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits can punish:

— Yes

Notes: "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his village to punish the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

— Yes

Notes: "Ghosts bent on mischief, as tampering with food after it was prepared for eating, could be thwarted by placing a knife across the open vessel containing the food. A ghost would not meddle with a knife" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:591).

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

— Yes

Notes: Based on the following ethnographic evidence, it is presumed that human spirits have memory of life: "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his village to punish the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

— I don't know

↳ Human spirits possess hunger:

— No

Notes: "Other similar acts of offering food [to the deceased at their gravesites], all of which partook of the character of remembrance, were instanced in explanation, none of which were done because of a belief that the dead needed or partook of the food" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

— Yes

Notes: Thunder, as the god of war, controlled the life and death of the warrior (for more information see Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:122).

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: Thunder, as the god of war, controlled the life and death of the warrior (for more information see Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:122).

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– I don't know

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: Both human spirits and non-human spirits are described (see questions above), demonstrating evidence for a variety of supernatural beings.

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information regarding supernatural monitoring.

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously "moral" or "ethical" norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "...the various We'waçpe rites emphasize man's dependence on a power greater than himself and the idea that supernatural punishments will follow disobedience to constituted authority" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597). "No untruthful report or evasion of responsibility was permitted to go unpunished, the penalty it was believed being inflicted supernaturally" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:

– Yes

Notes: "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his

village to punish the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:
– I don't know

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:
– I don't know

↳ Supernatural beings care about lying:
– Yes

Notes: "No untruthful report or evasion of responsibility was permitted to go unpunished, the penalty it was believed being inflicted supernaturally" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:
– Yes
Notes: "The instances related concerning the fate of the keepers of the Sacred Tent of War who shirked their responsibility and met their death by the lightning stroke were cited as proof of the watchfulness of Wakon'da [supreme energy, life force, unifying spirit and force] over truthfulness as applied to acts. For like reason, all vows had to be kept" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:
– Yes
Notes: "...the various We'waçpe rites emphasize man's dependence on a power greater than himself and the idea that supernatural punishments will follow disobedience to constituted authority" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:
– Yes
Notes: "A mistake in rendering a ritual [referring to We'waçpe rituals, which are communal/group rituals] had to be atoned in some cases by a ceremony of contrition in order to avert trouble from the entire people, as the interruption of the prescribed order in a religious ceremony was believed to be a subject for supernatural punishment" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:596).

↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:
– Yes
Notes: "A mistake in rendering a ritual [referring to We'waçpe rituals, which are communal/group rituals] had to be atoned in some cases by a ceremony of contrition in order to avert trouble from the entire people, as the interruption of the prescribed order in a religious ceremony was believed to be a subject for supernatural punishment" (Fletcher and La

Flesche, 1911:596).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

— Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information regarding supernatural punishment.

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

— Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information.

↳ Done only by high god:

— No

Notes: Ethnographic Atlas Column 34 (High Gods) indicates that among the Omaha, "a high god is absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs" (Murdock, 1967).

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

— Yes

Notes: "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his village to punish the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

— Yes

Notes: "Any violation of the tabu of a gens was regarded by the people as a sacrilegious act, the punishment of which took the form of the appearance of sores or white spots on the body of the offender or of the hair turning white" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:144). "As soon as a man determined to become one of a war party and gave notice of his determination, tribal custom obliged him to observe strict continence until his return to the tribe; disobedience of this requirement, it was believed, would bring disaster to him or to the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:408).

↳ Done by other entities or through other means [specify]

— Yes

Notes: "The instances related concerning the fate of the keepers of the Sacred Tent of War who shirked their responsibility and met their death by the lightning stroke were cited as proof of the watchfulness of Wakon'da [supreme energy, life force, unifying spirit and force] over truthfulness as applied to acts. For like reason, all vows had to be kept" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

— Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information regarding reasons for supernatural punishment.



Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

— Yes

Notes: "A mistake in rendering a ritual [referring to We'waçpe rituals, which are communal/group rituals] had to be atoned in some cases by a ceremony of contrition in order to avert trouble from the entire people, as the interruption of the prescribed order in a religious ceremony was believed to be a subject for supernatural punishment" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:596).



Done to enforce group norms:

— Yes

Notes: "No untruthful report or evasion of responsibility was permitted to go unpunished, the penalty it was believed being inflicted supernaturally" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597). "...the various We'waçpe rites emphasize man's dependence on a power greater than himself and the idea that supernatural punishments will follow disobedience to constituted authority" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).



Done randomly:

— No

Notes: Based on ethnographic accounts, it does not appear that supernatural punishment occurs randomly. All descriptions of supernatural punishment are in connection to an explanation.



Other [specify]

— Yes

Notes: "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his village to punish the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).



Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:

— No

Notes: "There does not seem to have been any conception among the Omaha of supernatural rewards or punishments after death. The same conditions which make for good conduct here were believed to exist in the realm of the dead" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:590).



Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

— Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information on supernatural punishments during this lifetime.



↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:

— Yes

Notes: Based on the information below, the spirit of a murdered man could return to his village and bring famine. If this famine resulted from a crop failure, it can be said that punishment in this life consists of crop failure. "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his village to punish the people...The return of a spirit to haunt people was called wathi'hide, 'disturbance.' Such a haunting spirit was supposed to bring famine" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).

↳ Other [specify]

— Yes

Notes: "It was believed that the spirit of a murdered man was inclined to come back to his village to punish the people...The return of a spirit to haunt people was called wathi'hide, 'disturbance.' Such a haunting spirit was supposed to bring famine" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:215).

— Yes

Notes: Death. "The instances related concerning the fate of the keepers of the Sacred Tent of War who shirked their responsibility and met their death by the lightning stroke were cited as proof of the watchfulness of Wakon'da over truthfulness as applied to acts. For like reason, all vows had to be kept" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

— I don't know

Notes: "There does not seem to have been any conception among the Omaha of supernatural rewards or punishments after death. The same conditions which make for good conduct here were believed to exist in the realm of the dead" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:590).

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Norms and Moral Realism

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: "Truthfulness in word and in action was fundamental to the scheme of ethics taught among the Omaha" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Honesty / trustworthiness / integrity:

— Yes

Notes: "No untruthful report or evasion of responsibility was permitted to go unpunished, the penalty it was believed being inflicted supernaturally" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Compassion / empathy / kindness / benevolence:

— Yes

Notes: "Besides the insistence on truthfulness in word and deed already mentioned, there were other qualities involving pity and compassion, as shown in the account given in the Sacred Legend concerning the institution of the rite of Non'zhinzhon (p. 128) and in the rite itself and its accompanying prayer (p. 130)" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:598).

↳ Ritual purity / ritual adherence / abstention from sources of impurity:

— Yes

Notes: "The instances related concerning the fate of the keepers of the Sacred Tent of War who shirked their responsibility and met their death by the lightning stroke were cited as proof of the watchfulness of Wakon'da over truthfulness as applied to acts. For like reason, all vows had to be kept" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ Other important virtues advocated by the religious group:

— Yes [specify]: Obedience to constituted authority

Notes: "...the various We'waçpe rites emphasize man's dependence on a power greater than himself and the idea that supernatural punishments will follow disobedience to constituted authority" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of required celibacy.

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

— No

Notes: The only evidence of partial sexual abstinence (described below) occurs while a man is off at war. "As soon as a man determined to become one of a war party and gave notice of his determination, tribal custom obliged him to observe strict continence until his return to the tribe; disobedience of this requirement, it was believed, would bring disaster to him or to the people" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:408).

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of required castration.

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

— No

Notes: "Young males would maintain a solitary fast for four days on a hilltop while praying to Wakóna [life force/great spirit] for help throughout life" (Awakuni-Swetland, 2011). Although fasting was required or recommended in connection with certain activities or ceremonies, it does not appear to have been required for membership in the Omaha society itself. For more information see Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911, pp 128-133.

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

— Yes

Notes: "No member of the We'zhinshte gens would eat the flesh of the male elk or wear moccasins made of its skin, such acts being considered sacrilegious on account of the service believed to have been rendered the people by that animal...Any violation of the tabu of a gens was regarded by the people as a sacrilegious act, the punishment of which took the form of the appearance of sores or white spots on the body of the offender or of the hair turning white" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:144). "The tabu of the Waça'be subgens was the black bear. Its flesh could not be eaten nor its skin touched" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:160). Each gen possessed unique tabus, the above are two examples.

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of required permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations.

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the Omaha practiced human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular

Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the Omaha practiced human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the Omaha practiced human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required sacrifice of property/valuable items.

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required physical risk taking.

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of required marginalization by out-group members.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

— Yes

Notes: Although not explicitly required, small-scale rituals (such as those pertaining to life-cycle events, individual rituals, or private rituals of secret societies) are present and significant. For example: at puberty, males participated in an individual rite (Non'zhinzhonto) to mark the "ceremonial introduction to individual life and to the supernatural" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:128). "The next stage in the life of the Omaha youth was marked by the rite known by the name of Non'zhinzhon...At the period when the youth is at the verge of his conscious individual life, is 'old enough to know sorrow,' it was considered time that through the rite Non'zhinzhon he should enter into personal relations with the mysterious power that permeates and controls all nature as well as his own existence" (ibid.).



What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to small-scale rituals.

— I don't know

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

i.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

— Yes

Notes: "We'waçpe rites [tribal religious rites] were institutional in character and were so regarded by the tribe. They were distinct from individual rites, as, for example, the rite wherein the youth sought to come into relation with the supernatural" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:596). Although not explicitly stated as required, the We'waçpe religious rites were a significant, communal set of rituals that occurred in connection with tribal ceremonial objects and activities such as maize growing and the annual buffalo hunt. For more details see Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:596. "The He'dewachi, the only ceremony in which all the people—men, women, and children—took part and were led by the two Sacred Pipes, borne by their hereditary keepers, in the rhythmic advance by gentes toward the symbolically decorated pole standing in the center of the large circle made by the assembled tribe. The teaching of this joyous and picturesque ceremony, it may be recalled, was that the tribe must be a living unit, even as the tree and its branches are one" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:597).

↳ On average, for large-scale rituals how many participants gather in one location:
— I don't know

↳ What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):
Performances here refers to large-scale rituals.
— I don't know

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:
Orthopraxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are performed in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper procedure, etc.
— Yes

Notes: "The rites termed We'waçpe partook of the nature of prayer and were believed to open a way between the people and the mysterious Wakon'da (p. 597); therefore they had to be accurately given in order that the path might be straight for the return of the desired benefit. A mistake in rendering a ritual had to be atoned in some cases by a ceremony of contrition in order to avert trouble from the entire people, as the interruption of the prescribed order in a religious ceremony was believed to be a subject for supernatural punishment" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:596).

↳ Is there use of intoxicants:
— I don't know

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

— Yes

Notes: See questions below for more details on extra-ritual in-group markers.

↳ Circumcision:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of circumcision.



Food taboos:

– Yes

Notes: "No member of the We'zhinshte gens would eat the flesh of the male elk or wear moccasins made of its skin, such acts being considered sacrilegious on account of the service believed to have been rendered the people by that animal...Any violation of the tabu of a gens was regarded by the people as a sacrilegious act, the punishment of which took the form of the appearance of sores or white spots on the body of the offender or of the hair turning white" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:144). "The tabu of the Waça'be subgens was the black bear. Its flesh could not be eaten nor its skin touched" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:160). Each gens possessed unique tabus, the above are two examples.



Hair:

– Yes

Notes: All men, as warriors, were consecrated to Thunder (god of war) in a rite that takes place during childhood. A lock of hair is cut from the boy's head and given to Thunder for protection on the battlefield and in life. Afterward, the hair is braided. "...the hair, under certain conditions, might be said to typify life. Because of the belief in the continuity of life a part could stand for the whole, so in this rite by the cutting off of a lock of the boy's hair and giving it to the Thunder the life of the child was given into the keeping of the god. It is to be noted that later, when the hair was suffered to grow on the boy's head, a lock on the crown of the head was parted in a circle from the rest of the hair and kept constantly distinct and neatly braided. Upon this lock the war honors of the warrior were worn, and it was this lock that was cut from the head of a slain enemy and formed the central object in the triumph ceremonies..." (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:124).

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A chiefdom

Notes: The Omaha have one level of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community, which is reflective of petty chiefdoms (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– No

Notes: "There was no class or group among the Omaha whose distinctive duty was to teach either

religion or ethics. Religious and ethical teachings were embedded in the rites of the gentes and of the tribe, but there were no succinct, practical commandments as to beliefs or actions expressed in them" (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911:592).

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, indicates that food is stored in individual houses (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

— No

Notes: SCCS Variable 14, Routes of Land Transport, indicates that the Omaha utilized unimproved trails (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004). Transportation infrastructure is presumed to be absent.

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

— No

Notes: Tuden and Marshall (1972) column 10, Police (note, equivalent to SCCS variable 90, Police) indicates that "there is only incipient specialization, as when groups with other functions are assigned police functions in emergencies, e.g., military societies at a Plains Indian annual sun dance and buffalo hunt."

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

— No

Notes: Tuden and Marshall (1972) column 9, Judiciary (note, equivalent to SCCS variable 89, Judiciary) indicates that "supreme judicial authority is lacking at any level above that of the local community."

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

— Yes

Notes: Hunting and agriculture (extensive or shifting agriculture) are the primary modes of subsistence. Gathering and fishing supplement the diet. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232. "Prereservation Omaha developed an annual cycle of spring planting, summer hunting, fall harvesting, and winter hunting" (Awakuni-Swetland, 2011).



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Gathering
- Hunting (including marine animals)
- Fishing
- Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards