

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Sioun, Mississippi Valley, Dhegiha → Osage

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): 639-3 Osa

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): The location of the Osage starts at the headwaters of Osage County, Kansas. As the river flows into Central Missouri it combines with the Missouri River, which pours into the Mississippi and then into the Gulf of Mexico. In the Central part of Missouri, the Osage River forms a boundary between Cole and Osage county. In one of the various bends, on the south side of the river (In Osage County) a band of hunter-gatherers made their winter camp in the late autumn. On the west, north, and east side of the campground was the river and on the south there was a bluff that served as a barrier for any seeking invaders. The bluff was overgrown with dense woods, and all around the camp were dried trees which made it convenient to find wood. The dense forests protected the tepees of this hunter-gatherer clan from the north winter winds and the river and bluffs protected the camp from molestation (1). Physically, what is now the state of Missouri consists of river lowlands in the southeast, Ozark highlands in the central area, and prairies making up the western portion (2, P.4-5).

1.4 Brief history: Most believe that the Osage hunter-gatherers stemmed from the Oneota culture. The Osage belief is that their people originally inhabited the Ohio Valley along with neighboring Dhegiha Siouan speaking tribes, although their seminomadic behaviors ultimately make their origin difficult to trace. There is no evidence of the Osage dating before 1700 and the French and Spanish explorers have some record however they did not attempt to learn much about the native culture.

Legend traces an account of a time of torrential rainfall which left the river camps flooded and forced the Osage to flee into five groups. One group climbed the bluffs by the river and ventured into the woods beyond the bluffs ("Top-of-the-Tree-Sitters"). The Second group stopped on top the bluffs and built fires ("Upper-Forest Sitters") while the third group ran up the valley of the stream that fed into the river and where locust were abundant ("Sitters-in-the-Locust"). The fourth group remained in the flooded village (Heart-Stays People), and the fifth fled the village into the bluffs and waited for the floodwater to recede ("Down-Below People"). Sometime after, the five groups combined into two ("Upper-Forest Sitters" and "Down Below People"), and much later after that, through a French missionary's misinterpretation, the two groups became known as Little Osage (Down Below) and Big Osage (Upper-Forest). Until 1720 when the Little Osage were offered trading opportunities to break away from the Big, they camped below the Big Osage. (2, P. 5-7)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The Christian invasion from 1673- 1906 left the Osage unaffected by the missionaries that came to the plains in order to convert the Osage. The American goal to "civilize" the Osage was left unattained while the Protestant missionaries failed throughout the nineteenth century. If there was any influence on the Osage it would be the European and Spanish traders, who introduced them to European manufactured goods such as guns, and horses.

1.6 Ecology: The Osage occupied a region that included prairies, forests, and high plains. The homeland was rich in natural resources including trees such as pine and oak in the forests, and cotton wood, walnut, willow, ash, hickory, and pecan growing along the river banks. The fertile soils along the prairie river bottom supported corn, bean, squash, and melon (3, P. 16).

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: In 1780 the population was noted to be 6,200. The Osage ultimately divided into two tribes due to a time of torrential rainfall which caused the river camps to flood. The villages were organized in a camp circle, with each tribe arranged by internal rank. The chief's residence was in the center of the circle and was somewhat larger than the surrounding homes. The Osage dwellings were rectangular, oval, or circular. They were typically fifteen feet wide and thirty to forty-five feet in length. Bent poles formed the roofing of the home and anchored to the ground and fastened to the roof were wall posts, at least five feet in height with cross bars at all right angles. Woven mats or buffalo hides covered the frame and each dwelling contained one or more fireplaces with smoke holes in the roof. The only other opening to the home was a doorway on the long end, which faced east so as the Osage awoke in the morning they were able to say their prayers to the rising sun. (2, P.11) The Osage longhouse usually housed around ten to fifteen kin people and was only used when the people were at their private villages in the spring and fall. By late May the Osage left their village and traveled to the treeless plains to hunt bison where they would construct their hunting lodge from the mats and lodge poles of their longhouses. The hunting lodge was about fifteen feet long and seven feet wide, with a low ceiling. The Osage lived in these plains lodges until around early August when they reconstructed their longhouses (the wooden frame was left intact in the private village). When winter arrived the Osage returned to the familiar prairies where they constructed a smaller version of the oblong longhouse into more of a wigwam type shelter. The circular wigwams were about ten to fifteen feet in diameter, where the Osage spend their winters in a small family community, and in March they would return back to their longhouses. (3, P. 20)

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): From May until July, the villages were left vacant in order to hunt for bear, buffalo, and deer. Only a few elders were left behind to tend to the gardens. Again in the fall, through September until December, the men hunted buffalo. When European trade became more prominent, beaver also became a primary fall hunting target (2, P.15). Osage hunters took antelope, buffalo, elk, deer, bear, mountain lion, wolf, otter, turkey, dove, quail, duck, prairie chicken, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, muskrat, and bobcat. (3, P.14)
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Hickory, Pecan, Walnuts, Persimmon, Grapes, Paw Paws (In the Wintertime) (1). The foods that women and children gathered included persimmons, various nuts, and lily roots. Outside the circle of dwellings, each garden connected with one another, where the individual family garden was most half an acre. The women in each of the families planted corn, squash, and beans during the month of April. In May the plants were cultivated, and the gardens were left alone until harvest time in August (2, P.15). Osage women gathered acorns, walnuts, pecans, hickory nuts, and chinquapin roots. (3, P.14).
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Bow and arrows were typically used for hunting as well as wartime in the late seventeenth century. The bows of Osage men were made from flexible wood such as ash wood. Guns became relevant when the Osage came into European contact (2, P. 15)
- 2.4 Food storage: The Osage stored their food in their longhouse by hanging from the wooden framework (3, P.19)
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Men and women had specific gender roles which were passed down from elders. Typically the men hunted and went to war, while the women built the home, tended to the children, manufactured important household items, made clothing, gathered and gardened edible plants. Women also made pottery and wooden tools and containers. Osage women composed flint, bone, or antler awls, along with needles and scrapers for tools. (2, P.14-15)
- 2.6 Land tenure: Conquered various land through raids (See 4.17)
- 2.7 Ceramics: N/A
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: N/A
- 2.9 Food taboos: None
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?: Canoes were widely used, with the Osage being by multiple waterways. The watercraft were made from the pine, oak, cotton wood, walnut, willow, hickory, and pecan trees growing along the river bottom. (3, P. 16)

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): Males were typically six feet or more and very well proportioned (2, P.12)
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): N/A

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): N/A
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): N/A
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): Around 10-15
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): N/A
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Osage men and women who had reached puberty were called "tse ga non" (Nearly Grown) were eligible for marriage. Men usually married in their late teens or early twenties, while women married shortly after puberty (3, P.27)
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: N/A
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Osage men practiced polygamy as some would marry younger sisters of their first bride (3, P.28).
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, and dowry?: Osage marriage is tied with the exchange of gifts between both the man and woman's family. (3, P.28)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Osage men acquired status as a result of their hunting powers and their courage in battle. Men who protected their people and kept their kin fed were respected, however individuals who enjoyed increased status and economic success often had no access to political power within the traditional political system. Heredity was often more important than ability and unless one possessed the correct family ties he could never become an Osage leader (3, P.8)
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: N/A
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: No evidence of homosexual activity
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Exogamy; Clans provided the framework for marriage in that Osage men and women chose their partners from the opposite moiety: Tsi-zhu men and women could only marry Hon-ga and vice versa (3, P. 27)
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?: No
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows"): N/A
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: N/A
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Spouses are regimented to be from opposite moieties in order to complete the universe. (3, P. 27)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? N/A
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: N/A
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?: Aunts and Grandmothers
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: N/A
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: No

- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): N/A
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?: N/A
- 4.24 Joking relationships?: N/A
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Patrilineal for Inheritance Rights
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: N/A
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? The marriage ceremony is a simple affair organized around the exchange of gifts between the man and woman's family (3, P.28)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?: Osage parents solicited the blessings from Wa-kon-da for their children. Until newborn babies were ceremonially named they were not considered to be real people and held no place in the clan structure. During the ceremony the clan elders gave children specific names according to their sex and order of birth. The naming lodge was not specially constructed, it was usually a lodge of either an Isolated Earth member or a clan member who had obtained the degree that included the naming ceremony. The ceremony required the mother of the child to plant seven hills of maize and after it ripened, host a feast for the participating clans. (3, P.32)
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?): Osage men and women chose partners from opposite moiety (Tsi-zhu men and women could only marry Hon-ga and vice versa). This insured tribal unity as both halves of the tribe were continually linked by marriage. The Sky People joining the Earth people to symbolically recreate the universe and the Osage people. (3, P.27)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?: Osage marriages were arranged by the parents of the male, and neither of the couple would know each other beforehand. When a male's parents came across a suitable wife for their son, they would then ask four good men (ni-ka-don-he) to negotiate with the woman's family. The good men would then establish that both families were from different moieties and clans and would confer a proper gift exchange between the families. (3, P.27)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: None

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: N/A
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Osage hunter-gatherer group had a reputation of being a warlike tribe. Men strived to earn honor through stealing horses and killing enemies with bows and arrows, lances, wooden clubs, tomahawks, and knives. However, the bravest deed was to touch the enemy, alive or deceased. To touch an enemy would be means of receiving a "coup" feather. Osage warfare consisted of raids and their primary purpose was to kill or injure the enemy, and then to steal the horses and goods of the village. After the French made contact in the late seventeenth century, the Osage obtained muskets, sabers, and tomahawks. They then came to prefer arrow heads made of brass, copper, or iron whereas before the men constructed their bows and quivers from flexible wood such as ash. (2, P.15-16)
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: During the eighteenth century the Osage were at war with practically all of their surrounding neighbors. They were at war with the plains tribes and many of the woodland tribes as well. The Osage believed that the most honorable way to die was in battle and that those who were killed while fighting would spend their afterlives in a village of abundance (2, P.15-16). The combination of patrilineal decent and matrilineal residence led to dealing with new situations that were created by increasing hunting and warfare. Individual clan raiding parties became part of Osage warfare activity. Brothers and fellow clan members typically went to war together and hunted together, and if clan raiding parties were unsuccessful and members ended up killed, entire households could be destroyed. (3, P.43)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Main enemies were the Paniouassa (Black Pawnee) of the southwest and the Padoucas (Plains Apaches) (2, P. 23). While being challenged in the North and the East by the European- armed tribes, the Osage expanded south and west where there was little access to European weapons. By limiting the flow of arms and ammunition to the west by expanding into Wichita, Caddo, Pawnee, Kansa, and Quapaw country, the Osage maintained advantage over their western rivals. They pushed the Pawnee, Caddo, and Wichita nations from their prairie lands and their raids on the Caddo forced the group from the Ouachita Mountain forests down the Red River. The Osage drove the Pawnee out of the central plains into the Smoky Hill River and the Wichita tribes went south into the Arkansas Valley. The Osage conquered the land between the Missouri and the Red River where they were abundant in deer, buffalo herds, and villages filled with horses and potential Wichita and Caddoan slaves. The Osage controlled the prairie plains for most of the eighteenth century. (3, P.6-7)

4.18 Cannibalism?: None

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Twenty -Four Clans→ Subclan, clan, phratry and moiety

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Living along the prairies of the present day Western Missouri and the eastern forests, the Osage established a way of life that retained some of the forest cultural traits but yet incorporated new elements of the prairie life. The Osage continued to live in their wood-frame longhouses in kin groups that were established in the eastern forests, but they also began to establish new family groups as they left the forests to hunt buffalo on the short grass plains. In time the Osage became semi sedentary hunter-gatherers who planted crops in the spring in their private villages and spent summers and falls hunting buffalo on the plains. (3, P.5).

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Very much like the structured format of the villages, the tribal culture was also strictly regulated and organized. A select group of elder warriors (Little Old Men) served as tradition keepers and set standards of conduct. The Little Old Men were the actual governing body of the Osage. Each tribe had one or two chiefs, who were not necessarily the rulers, but the leaders. They inherited their position from their fathers, but had little authority as the Little Old Men were able to remove them if they were said to be unworthy of the position. (2, P.12)

5.4 Post marital residence: A newly married Osage couple will settle among the husband's family, usually within the same dwelling. However, after some time, the Osage couples abandoned the partilocal residence pattern and began living with the bride's family. (3, P. 28)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Clans were not organized into economic or political, they did possess social significance within the tribal structure (3, P. 27).

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex): N/A

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: N/A

5.8 Village and house organization: The Osage organized their society with elaborate kinship networks (See 5.11)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): There were no permanent ceremonial buildings in the villages, although a ceremonial structure known as the House of Mysteries (Tsi-Wa-kon-da-gi) was erected from time to time. No lodges were exclusively used for religious or political functions. Religious and political leaders usually met in one of the leader's lodges.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?: Babies were tied to boards (Their only means of a cradle) (1).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: The Osage organized their society with an elaborate kinship system. Every member of the tribe belonged to one of the larger kin groups and membership was determined by birth as every child was born into the clan of his or her father. Clan members believed that they shared a common ancestor and considered united as a clan family. The Osage grouped their clans into two major tribal divisions (Tsizhu and the Hon-ga). The Tsizhu represented the sky and peace and the Hon-ga represented earth and war (Sky People and Earth People). Originally the Osage were made up of fourteen clans, divided equally between the Sky and the Earth people but through time the number increased to twenty-one. The Osage then divided those twenty one tribes into subgroups, and then further divided into subclans which each possessed a distinct name, symbolic totem similar to the larger clan, and a specific ceremonial function. (3, P. 23-26)

5.12 Trade: The first historically documented case of white men venturing into the Osage nation was in 1673- The Marquette and Jolliet voyage down the Mississippi River, where on their way they discovered the Missouri River. Later, in 1682, a group of twenty-three Frenchmen and thirty-one hunter-gathers, was headed by La Salle and ended up in the Mississippi River. La Salle and his troop camped on the west bank of the Mississippi River near the Missouri River's mouth. During the 1690's, several French traders made contact with the Osage and other Natives along the Missouri River. The trappers and traders were called by the Osage, "Those who reached the mouth of the river". The first Frenchman to come in contact with the Osage was by the name of Claude-Charles DuTinsne. DuTinsne planned explore the Missouri River and make treaties with the Osage and their neighboring enemies (Black Pawnee and plans Apaches). In May of 1693 two French traders and a band of Kaskaskia hunter-gatherers proposed an alliance and an open trading relationship. Typically the French would trade European-manufactured such as guns, ammunition, and textiles, for furs, horses, and slaves (2, P.24-25). The Osage engaged in trade with the French and acquired livestock indirectly from the Spanish. French iron tools and guns, and Spanish horses and mules were attractive to the Osage and changed the market economy subtly at first, however the Osage began to take the desire to acquire these goods away from just materialism and nascent capitalism, and into an improved quality of life and means of survival (3, P.6) .

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?: Yes

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR: Every morning the Osage would rise from their lodges and go outside to pray to Wa-kon-da before dawn for an hour (3, P. 29)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants: During the Ritual story of the tribe, the land people offer the water people a symbolic pipe

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

6.4 Other rituals: Most if not all Osage ceremonies required the participation of all twenty-four clans. A significant portion of almost every ceremony included the recitation of lengthy clan ritual prayers (wi-gi-e). Found within these prayers were the clans origins, how they acquired the clan name and totems, and how they fit into the tribal structure. The wi-gi-e also stated the story of the Osage people, and a common thread was found through each of the individual clan's prayers in how the Osage were once separate and then came together become a united people.

6.5 Myths (Creation): The Osage traditionally call themselves "Ni-U-Ko'n-Ska" or "Children of the Middle Waters". They came from the sky where they had originally been children of the Grandfather Sun. The Osage fell to the Earth in three groups- The People of the Water, then the People of the Land, and finally the People of the Sky. The Earth and the Sky people divided into tribes in a place where the river forks and where the early Osage villages were located (Marsh of the Swans) (2, P.10).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Most known ceremonies are considered crisis rituals (Child naming, mourning, war, peace, initiating "Little Old Men"). (3) Historic crafts included leatherwork, beading, finger weaving, ribbon work, and some metalwork using silver.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Women played a significant role in religious ceremony. Osage women would acquire all seven degrees of clan knowledge (3, P.38)

6.8 Missionary effect: Upon examining the wi-gi-e, it is clear that the Osage were influenced by outside religion and sociopolitical institutions. The Osage call this transformation "a move to a new country". As they met new challenges they made subtle alterations to their beliefs and incorporated them within their traditional framework. (3, P.28)

6.9 RCR revival: None

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Osage focused on the living portion of life and not death; There was no well-developed concept of what happened after death (2, P.5)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?: No, however there is a naming ceremony for the children of the Osage. Osage parents solicited the blessings from Wa-kon-da for their children. Until newborn babies were ceremonially named they were not considered to be real people and held no place in the clan structure. During the ceremony the clan elders gave children specific names according to their sex and order of birth. The naming lodge was not specially constructed, it was usually a lodge of either an Isolated Earth member or a clan member who had obtained the degree that included the naming ceremony. The ceremony required the mother of the child to plant seven hills of maize and after it ripened, host a feast for the participating clans. (3, P 32)

6.12 Is there tekonymy?: No

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): The Osage believed that all things of the universe were manifestations omnipotent, mysterious, and invisible life-force of Wa-kon-da. Wa-kon-da was everywhere and brought to life all things created by the Osage. The life-force linked the Sky people with the Land and Water people. It can be seen even beyond the Earth- in the sun, moon, stars, thunder, and wind. The Osage call to Wa-kon-da for understanding and support. (3, P.29)

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: Women powdered their bodies with a dark substance that came from a beanlike flowering plant. Women also wore pumpkin pulp on their faces to improve their complexion. Each morning the women and girls of the tribe would paint a portion of their hair red to symbolize the path of the sun across the sky. It was believed that red paint would grant a long life and allow bravery for each day (2, P.12-13). Men who won honor awards were permitted to have a "mark of honor" tattoo, which was a large symbolic design on his chest. Individuals that held clan positions were also entitled to a symbolic tattoo, and a warrior was able to have his wife or daughter tattooed of his accomplishments. Often a woman's entire body from her neck down was marked with symbolism. (3, P. 18)
- 7.2 Piercings: Osage hunter-gatherers of both male and female engaged in pierced ears, however no indication of further body piercings (2, P.12-13). The Osage pierced and wore jewelry in their ears, while they usually made a long slit along the earlobe and suspended strings of beads, beaded loops, and pieces of bone. (3, P. 17).
- 7.3 Haircut: Men wore their hair in a roach style, shaving their eyebrows, face, and head, with the exception of a scalp lock (Two inches high and three inches wide, that ran down the back of their heads to the nape of their neck. Their first encounter with the French was a shock to the Osage, and they called them "Heavy Eyebrows" (Which was not necessarily a compliment). Women wore their hair loosely flowing, and long down their backs, however there was a difference in technique among the single and married women (2, P.12-13).
- 7.4 Scarification: Men and women decorated themselves with elaborate tattoos using tattoo sticks to etch designs, however no indication of scarification (2, P.12-13) Each of the Osage clan had distinctive styles of cutting the children's hair, which usually involved shaving portions of the head and leaving tufts, notches, or circles that had symbolic meaning for the clans (3, P.17)
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Osage men dressed in loincloths, moccasins, and leggings that were typically made of deer or bearskin. In the winter, men wore robes made of buffalo fur. Osage women dressed in deerskin robes, as well as moccasins and leggings. Their robes were usually belted with woven hair from a buffalo calf, and after European trade, brightly colored woolen belts. Osage men wore ear ornaments along with bracelets, and like the men, women were fond of earrings and bracelets in regular dress (2, P.12-13)
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Osage babies were placed on cradleboards (about three feet long and one foot wide with square ends). The baby's head became flattened from being supported against the cradleboard which was an attractive physical feature to the Osage hunter-gatherers (2, P. 13)
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Hairstyles distinguished married from unmarried women. Unmarried women wore their long hair braided and either brought it together in two rolls on each side of the head or wore it in one long braid decorated with beads, silver rings, and brightly colored ribbons. Married women simply gathered their long hair together behind their head and tied it with a leather or cloth tie. Until about the age of ten, Osage children wore their hair in special kin group hair cuts. (3, P.17)
- 7.8 Missionary effect: None
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: None

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system:
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate : Son in law is head of household
- 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. Shinkah, the Osage Indian, . Barrett, S. M. (Stephen Melvil), b. 1865.
2. The Osage in Missouri, Wolferman, K. 1948
3. The Osage: An Ethnohistorical Study of Hegemony on the Prairie Plains, Rollings, W. 1992