PART FIVE

ORAL HISTORY AND

TRADITION
KING OF THE WATERS:  
THE LEGEND OF THE HORNED WATER SERPENT

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A rich variety of legends spreads throughout the vast native population of North America. The similarities in these legends may suggest validity beyond simple "folk lore." Consistency in philosophies, taboos, traditions, and beliefs yield a representation of certain legends which lend acceptance to such validity. I have found that a Creek town in Oklahoma may have a story parallel to that of a separate and distant tribe. There are some legends which are present in all tribes. For instance, the importance of the sun as a great entity, the stories of a "trickster," and the existence of a fourth world. One belief consistent among all tribes also correlates with almost all modern religions: the story of the Flood.

For the skeptical, these common threads running throughout most Native American nations could very well be coincidental. Certain beliefs have been well-known and could easily have been passed from person to person, tribe to tribe, generation to generation through oral traditions—also considered to be an art form. Word of mouth is a powerful medium of communication. I believe because of this inevitable skepticism, these legends deserve a closer look. A concentrated study of one tribe’s rare legend might give a better understanding to an overall tapestry, spread over many tribes. The legend in question—an obscure story of a snake-man—is my focus for these common threads.

The Legend

My interview with members of a Creek band in Oklahoma located on Eufaula Lake reveals a unique twist on the story of the Loch Ness Monster. As told by Tony Mitchell, Sr., a Creek elder, their belief is of a great creature which lives at the bottom of a whirlpool. The whirlpool and the creatures are believed to be located near Fountain Head Resort, near a sight called "Standing Rock." This water serpent is believed to live in the whirlpool, sleeping at the bottom, waiting for unsuspecting fishermen, swimmers, or skiers to pass through his waters. It is when the creature feasts that these water recreationists are never seen again.
"When I was much younger," said Mitchell, "I had a job working on the Eufaula damn. One early morning I saw a deer walking across the top of the water. I was always told that when the 'King of the Waters' needed to move his home, he would change into a deer and walk on the waters to a place where he would not be disturbed."

The creature is called "The King of the Waters." In Creek he is known as Owv Pohovey'h (pronounced wee-wah-jah-zee), or King of the Waters. He is believed to be one of two twin brothers. As it was explained to me, one brother was taken by the land to rule the earth. He controlled plants which were used to make medicine. The other brother was taken by the lake to rule the waters. Upon entering, the second twin became a snake from the waist down. If the Earth Brother needed help from Owv Pohovey'h, he would step to the edge of the lake and call to him. However, if anyone else were to wake the King of the Waters, they would be killed and most probably eaten.

Although the story left me with many questions (Why were the twins chosen? Which was more powerful? How did the snake transformation take place?--all of which was not explained to me), it gave me a starting point for seeking similar legends from other tribes. Not only did I find other stories about this obscure snake-man, but the taboos and beliefs were amazingly parallel.

Jean Reynolds, an Otoe and Delaware elder, told me a story of a Quapah legend in Spring Lake (Oklahoma). She said giant snake tracks are often found stretching across the mud and earth, leading from the lake in several directions. The snake indentions are a popular topic in Quapah and are often linked to with the disappearance of surrounding farm animals. The snake creature living in Spring Lake is said to be still present and very active to this day; however, I could not find a member of any the Quapah tribe or surrounding tribes who could describe the snake creature. They only spoke of the giant tracks. Reynolds added, "I suppose if anyone was to see a snake that big, they wouldn't live to tell about it."

Most interesting to me is my finding through interviews and literary research, that approximately thirty separate tribes in the Eastern Woodlands, Upper Plains, Lower Plains, and the Southwest had tales including a giant snake-man, horned serpent, tie-snake, serpent-fish or water serpent. Most of the tribes had only a few stories of such a creature; some had only one. However, I found the Creek tribe had ten separate legends on the snake-man published in various books. I learned through research about other snake-men in Native American legends, which include the Olobit (Natchez, meaning "walking terrapin"). The Chickasaws had a monster called Nickin-Fitcik (eye-
star), who had a single eye in the middle of his forehead. Meanwhile, the Koasatis told of a snake-crawfish-man with horns. If anything were to pass in front of the lairs of any of these monsters, it is agreed, the snake-man would catch and eat the person (Brown and Owens 77).

Not all tribes tell the story of how the snake-man came to his serpentine form. Those stories which do explain the reasons behind the metamorphoses from men to snake-men almost always include five aspects: Two men, a warning, the eating of some food, a tree, and a flood (Lankford 84). For example, two men are fishing, returning from a journey, or hunting. They come to a body of water (lake, pond, stream, etc.), and they find some kind of food in a mysterious place. One Creek story depicts fish in a hollow tree, or swimming in branches (Swanton 80). As John Swanton explains, one man decides to eat the food they found, which could include fish, brains, meat, snake, or eggs. The other man will then warn the first not to eat the food, for it was not achieved in a normal manner. The first man will eat the food anyway and turn into the snake-man. He will then request the second man to gather his family to the lake. When his family arrives, he creates a flood and kills them all (Lankford 101). The stories differ in what is eaten and where the food is found, but the taboo is basically the same: don’t eat the food you don’t hunt and kill yourself, or that which is not normal to eat (101).

The Creeks and a confederacy town (talwas) with different customs, traditions, and languages were in disagreement on the details. The changes in the story demonstrate the creation of local variants by the different talwas.

Tie Snakes

Swanton collected many stories in the early 1900’s, which were published in many magazines and ethnology bulletins. His stories were attained through tales recounted to him by narrators of the time. One of the stories he collected was of a Creek man who lived three miles from Eufaula Lake:

Ogwe hili imathla, now dead, once owned a mare which had a colt. He often missed the horse and found her by means of the colt. One day when finding his horse, he saw that a large tree had been uprooted, leaving quite a hole where its roots had been. The hole was partially filled with water. His mare had her hindquarters caught in the hole. He gathered his neighbors to help him get her out, but their efforts were at first fruitless. When they finally pulled her out, the hole filled up with water. The mare wasn’t hurt much, with the exception of numb hindquarters. Upon them was a spot about an inch and a half across from which the hair had been rubbed. The skin there became black and finally scaled off. When the hair
grew back, it was black. The horse was considered curious because of its black ring. Ogue hili imathla was satisfied that it was a tie snake which drew his horse into the hole. (74)

The horned water serpent is described differently from the tie snake. It appears to be a completely different character, even though the behavior is the same (Lankford 90). The tie snake lives in the water and has horns. It is not a bad snake. It crawls out and suns itself near its hole, and if any small animal comes near the place where he is lying, it is drawn irresistibly into the water and destroyed. "It eats only the ends of the noses of the animals it has killed" (90).

Another common element to the stories of the snake creatures are the red horns. The old Creeks believed if they got hold of the horns of this snake, they could grind them into a red powder. The powder would then be distributed to the hunters of the Creek Nation. I also found that the Koasatis have stories of the hunting medicine power of the crushed horn similar to that of their neighboring Creek tribes.

Uktena

In turn, the Cherokee tribe translates the red horn into a red jewel. In my research I learned the bejeweled snake creature in the Cherokee legend is named Uktena. Uktena, the fearsomest of all monsters, is considered one of the most important in all of Cherokee lore (Brown 77).

Uktena has characteristics of three creatures: The body of the snake (associated with the Under World), the head of a deer (a creature of This World), and the wings of the bird (from the Upper World) (Brown 77). Originally a man, Uktena was changed into a snake after he was given the job of killing the sun, who was causing problems for Man. When Uktena failed, he became jealous and resentful of humans. Brown found that the belief is "whoever has possession of the red jewel from the horn of Uktena is the most powerful medicine man" (78). Medicine men who possess such crystals refuse to show them to white men in case they should then lose their power (78).

Human Snakes

Although my research spoke of these snake creatures as being male, I found an interesting twist from the Seminoles. The Seminole tribe has a story of "human snakes," which serves a different purpose. The snakes in the Seminole story were the only of the serpent creatures to be female. The snake-woman could assume either the form of a snake or a beautiful woman (Howard and Lena 216). The Seminoles tell of an unattractive young man lured from a stomp dance by a beautiful woman. She took him to a hollowed tree and into
a cave beneath the tree. When he entered the cave, he couldn't see, so he lit a match and saw a "tangled mass of giant snakes" (217). He escaped and returned home, but fell very ill. He told the medicine man of the story, but he did not believe him. Before the ugly man died, he gave them as many details as he could remember. After his death, many men gathered to prove or disprove the story. Once the men found the den of snakes, the medicine man said, "These are not ordinary snakes, but a source of great evil. They must be destroyed" (218).

The Seminole tribe returned to their village and, under the direction of the medicine man, prepared a medicine bundle strong enough to counteract the evil power of the human-snakes. Rags and clothing used by menstruating women, soaked in their blood, were burned. The ashes were gathered and tied to a deerskin. A menstruating woman was told to carry the bundle to the den of snakes and lower it among the tangled mass of serpents. As she did, the human snakes hissed in agony, and assumed human to semi-human forms in their death throes. When all were thought to be dead, the den was carefully fielled with stones. This was believed to have taken place in Perkins, Oklahoma (218).

The Sumu also have tales of a snake creature discovered by two brothers, one turning into a snake-man from eating a giant fish (Lankford 99). He then called for his family and flooded the "whole country." This story melds the story of the twins (Ovv Pohocvse’h) to the stories of the food and flood. I observed that the Creek tie snake is an unusual adaption of the horned water serpent. By examining the vast distribution of these legends, we can confirm that they are somehow related.

The Story Unfolds

The snake man seems to be localized in three distinctive areas: the Eastern Woodlands, Upper Plains, and Lower Plains (Lankford 102). The stories of the snake creatures can become threaded and followed as such:

Upper Plains. While the horned water serpent is incorporated in this same cycle, I found the snake-man in the Mandan and Hidatsa texts is described as being red and blue striped and having the power to flash lightening from his single eye. In the Arikara texts the serpent shares these characteristics, but the snake carries on his head dirt from which trees grow (Lankford 103). The northern plains group features a water serpent that is mostly associated with the Missouri River. The Winnebago know of the Wakthexi, a miraculous beast of the waters, which had the power of imparting wonderful qualities to people who had been fasting for religious purposes (104).
Lower Plains. This small group featured land snakes. The snake man is recognized by the Pawnee as a giant rattlesnake. As Lankford states, "all the lower plains are consistent with moving the legend from the water orientation to a terrestrial one" (103).

Although the snake man legend is not found in the Southwest, I discovered one tradition in relation to it by both Hopi and Zuni. They tell a story of destruction by flood and earthquake:

The people of a town had forgotten the moral system, so the priest sent his son in divine garb on four successive nights. He was then killed by the people and buried in the plaza with his hand above ground. Each day, one finger dropped. On the fourth day, the sky went black and the ground shook. The plaza then collapsed into a pond, as water rose everywhere. The corpse rose as the one-horned water serpent. The people fled to the mountains and abandoned their town. (Lankford 114)

The one-horned water serpent was described as "a monster with bulging eyes and a horn, to say nothing of a fan of feathers or fur" (112). He is also acknowledged as the "God of Waters," which among the Hopis, Zunis and Keres, is not associated with disastrous floods, but with fertility and longevity. Hence, the horned water serpent is found as a kindly and often comic god (112).

Legend or Myth

As tribes grow older, legends are often added to myths. Other legends have some basis in historical fact. Many legends I researched are tied to geographical locations. Legends grow and change. However, the similarities of the most obscure legends among different tribes are enough to make even the most skeptical person second guess a desire to swim in a large body of water. I would have to ask those skeptics, how could these stories be so closely related without having a shred of truth? Why are the serpent creatures so widely feared among Native Americans? If this legend is just a myth, made up to scare children around a camp fire, then how is it that all the stories share particular and common details? Did all the Nations come together to decide on how the stories will be told? The latter is highly improbably, and the remaining questions may never be answered. One skeptic answered that the passing of traders throughout many Native American tribes helped to circulate the legends. What I have found, however, is that stories from tribal members were not (and are not) commonly shared with strangers. When it comes to sharing traditions with those deemed trustworthy, many Native American are skeptics themselves.
Many of the legends I found can be traced back in literature to the turn of the century. Prior to that, the stories were a product of oral traditions of each individual tribe. Although this and other legends tend to be obscured over time, they are again, consistent. These legends show a kinship among the Native American tribes. All have similar stories with distinctive tribal differences. Although truly believed among many North American nations, the story of the tie-snake-man-creature-serpent may just be a misunderstood myth. Please remember, as all beliefs go, they are deserving of respect. Even if the stories are without any truth, they serve as a means of continuing tradition of the Native American spirit, by passing the lore from generation to generation, and if skeptics are lucky, race to race. The purpose of these stories it to provide insight into the human history of tribal heritage, and they are certainly beyond reproach.

APPENDIX

Comparing Legend Similarities

Eastern Woodlands:

Creek -- Two men, often brothers (twins), eat fish from a tree; one becomes the Horned Water Serpent, and floods town.

Yuchi -- The story of two men who eat fish found in a tree; one becomes a Water Serpent and floods the town.

Sumu -- Two men eat fish (not found in a tree); one turns into a Horned Water Serpent and floods a town.

Hitchiti -- Two men eat fish found in a tree; one turns into a Water Serpent without a flood.

Alabama -- One man eats an egg found on a rock and turns into a Water Serpent; no flood.

Cherokee -- Two men eat meat not found in a tree, and one turns into a Water Serpent; no flood.

Menomini -- One man eats meat and turns into a fish man and floods an expanse.

Seneca -- Two men eat fish, with one turning into a fish-man and flooding an expanse.

Seminole -- One man is lured to a tree, finds the snake-women. The tribe burns them.

Muskogee -- Two men eat brains; one turns into a Tie-Snake and floods the expanse.
Koasati -- Two men eat eggs, and one is turned into a Tie-Snake with a flooded expanse.
Kelechi -- Two men eat fish; one becomes a Horned Water Serpent and drowns a person.
Mikosuki -- Two men eat fish; one becomes a Water Serpent and floods a town.
Sac and Fox -- Two twins eat a snake; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.

Upper Plains:

Mandan -- Two men eat a water snake; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.
Hidatsa -- Two men eat a snake; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.
Gros Ventre -- Two men eat a snake; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.
Blackfoot -- Two men eat a snake; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.
Assiniboine -- Two men eat a snake; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.
Crow -- Two men eat a Water Serpent; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.
Sioux -- Two men eat a snake; one turns into a Water Serpent, the other is drowned.

Lower Plains:

Apache -- Two men eat meat; one turns into a Water Serpent, but there is no flood.
Arapaho -- Two men eat eggs; one turns into an Alligator Creature, but there is no flood.
Ponca -- Two men eat a river snake; one turns into a Snake-Man, feeding on horses.
Skidi P. -- Two men eat meat; one turns into a River Serpent and drowns the other.
Caddo -- Two men eat a snake; one becomes a Water Serpent; no flood.
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CHAHTA-IMMATAHA AND THE CHOCTAW BIBLE

Jerry Bryan Lincecum
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In this paper, Dr. Jerry Lincecum assumes the persona of his great-great-great grandfather and draws upon the elder Lincecum's writings to explain how he obtained a Choctaw oral tradition in Mississippi by interviewing a tribal sage over an extended period.

My name is Gideon Lincecum, and I was born more than two hundred years ago, on the frontiers of Georgia. My father Hezekiah loved the bordering life and our family continually moved into new territories as small treaties opened up Muskogee Indian lands to settlers. Thus my brother Garland and I grew up with Muskogee boys as our playmates, and we were always favorably disposed toward Indians. Because Garland dressed and conducted himself like an Indian, many people thought that he was one. Eventually we moved into the Choctaw Nation of Mississippi in the early 1800s and through my father's kinship with John Pitchlynn Sr., we became friendly with a number of prominent Choctaws, including the great Chief Pushmataha. He was my particular friend, and I was present at the treaty of Doak's Stand, when he and Andrew Jackson argued back and forth about the merits of the new territory where the Choctaws were being asked to relocate. I also wrote an early biography of Pushmataha that was based on interviews with the chief and other first-hand knowledge; it proved to be a major source for Anna Lewis's book on this key leader and the politics of Choctaw removal to Oklahoma.

But today I would like to tell you about a different set of experiences I had in the Choctaw Nation in the 1820s. These were recorded in my autobiography, which was published in 1994 by Texas A&M University Press under the title, Adventures of a Frontier Naturalist.

From my first hunting excursion in this new country on the Tombigbee River near present-day Columbus, Mississippi and up to the time I went to live in the Choctaw Nation, I noticed many earth mounds. They were commonly about forty feet wide at the base, conic in form, and seven to eight feet in
height. I entered into partnership with John Pitchlynn Jr.\textsuperscript{1} to operate a trading post in the Choctaw Nation, and from some African slaves who had formerly belonged to Choctaws, I learned to speak the Choctaw language. Since I grew up with Muskogee boys as my playmates and learned their language, it was not too difficult to master Choctaw, which is closely related. I then inquired of the middle-aged men among the Indians who it was that had built up the numerous mounds that embossed the country. The reply was: "They were always here."

But these men told me that on a creek called Bogue Tuculo, forty miles distant, there lived the oldest man in the world, a man that knew everything. If I would go and see him, he could tell me all about the mounds and everything else I might desire to know about the traditional history of the Choctaw people.

So many of them told of this man that I concluded to go and see him. I arranged my business so I could leave it a few days and set out to see the wise old man. Sure enough, I found him as they said, but such a man as he was, I have never seen before nor since.

He dwelt in a very comfortable, though small, circular dirt house, with a small hole in the apex through which the smoke from his fire made its escape. He used as a handrail a small, smooth, round pole that extended from its attachment on one side of the doorway over to his cane bunk, the front side of which rested on two posts that were planted in the earth. The other side of the bunk rested on fastenings in the dirt wall. The bottom of the bunk was neatly filled with selected straight cane, cut to fit the framework.

This was his sleeping place, and his bedding consisted of a variety of dry skins with the hair still on them—buffalo, bear, panther, deer, wildcat, and some blankets. Here he slept, and by the aid of the handrail he could make his way to the door where, in pleasant weather, he spent most of his time in sitting on a bench that had been prepared for the purpose.

There he could look out upon the little village and its surrounding scenery, see the play of the numerous village children, the running to and fro

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\textsuperscript{1} The father of John Pitchlynn Jr. was a second cousin to Gideon's mother. Pitchlynn Sr. married into the prominent Folsom family of Choctaws, and one of his sons was Peter P. Pitchlynn, who became principal chief of the tribe in 1864. Peter's brother John Jr. was a true prodigal who never repented, and the partnership between him and Gideon, after prospering for a time, ended in bankruptcy. See \textit{Adventures of a Frontier Naturalist} particularly 72-74 and 122-23.
of the women, who were busy beating meal for bread and dressing the skins which had been supplied by the hunters.

Such was the visible aspect and condition of things in the little Indian town at the time I arrived on my first visit to the old man Chahta-Immataha. There he sat on his time-polished pine bench by the side of the door, his unclad lower extremities extending at full length in front, his feet dry and scaly, toes contracted and crumpled up, and his relaxed muscles swung in pendant bags of shrivelled skin beneath his bony legs.

His long, bony fingers were wrapped around a neat, smooth rod six or seven feet in length, with a hook at one end, which he used to drag up his things that might lie out of reach. He also used this rod to hook by their garments and pull into captivity the little children when he was playing with them. His upper extremities and his body were covered with an ordinary cotton shirt, which constituted his entire clothing.

At the time I rode up he was sitting still, except for the motion of his large head, covered with a heavy coat of iron-gray hair that was not very long. He also had brilliant, smiling eyes. Every other part of his person seemed to be worn out and powerless.

I spoke to him in the Choctaw tongue, inquiring if he was Chahta-Immataha. He replied in plain English, "That's my name, sir." Still addressing him in his own language, I informed him that I had long desired, and had now come a great way, to see and have a talk with him. I stated my interest in the traditional history of the Chahta people and the origin of the monumental remains which are found so extensively distributed over the country.

He smiled and bid me welcome, remarking that he was not only willing, but that he felt proud of having an opportunity to communicate the traditional history of his people to a man whom he felt sure after hearing it would feel sufficient interest to write it on paper and take care of it. He said he based this opinion on the fact that I had traveled so far to hear it. He would not only repeat the traditional account of the origin, progress, manners, customs, wars, etc., of the Chahtas, but he would certainly satisfy me as to the cause and by whom the mounds were built.

After a short pause he resumed and said, "If it is to make a book you are seeking this information, I shall be still more highly pleased and will take great pains to narrate the whole of our traditional history." I told him frankly that to collect material of which to make a book was the object of my visit. For
I had been told by a great number of his people that he was the only man now living who could inform me, and on that account alone I had called on him.

"You have," said he, "been correctly informed. I am, and I regret that it is true, the only man left who can repeat correctly the Shukha-Anumpula. Because you will write my talk in a book that shall speak for me a long time after I have passed away to the good hunting ground, I am proud of you and glad that you have come." Let me explain here that Shukha-Anumpula translates as "hog talk," and is the Choctaw word for their traditional history. The traditions are referred to as "hog talk" because the advent of swine, brought over by early European explorers, marks a dividing line in Choctaw history. The Shukha-Anumpula or "hog talk" is that part of their history which predates the arrival of "the palefaces."²

Speaking now in the Choctaw language, the old man then rehearsed a part of his own personal history, concluding with, "I have always advocated honesty and fairness. Have never been drunk, have never swallowed a drop of the strong water; have always been sober, speaking to the people in earnest, telling truth."

Then for the purpose of starting him on the subject of the traditions, I inquired of him in Choctaw how the notion had originated and obtained with so many of the people, that the Chahtas came out of Nanih-waya hill? He replied, "They have been drunk ever since the white people came amongst us and they have lost the truth."

He continued: "Long time ago, before the white man came, it was a custom with the old men, when they had from age and decrepitude become too inactive to pursue the chase, for them to remain at home with the women and children. They assisted the women in the cultivation of their little farm patches and carefully taught the traditions to the children. Then everyone who had sense enough to learn it knew it and could teach it correctly, and everybody knew it in the same words."

"But when the white people came and brought with them the maddening drinks--the fire-water--old men as well as the young could get drunk and the traditional teaching ceased. That pure, truthful, sacred account of the origin and

² In her dissertation, Native American historian Dr. Cheri Wolfe has pointed out that the Choctaw phrase Shukha Anumpula (loosely translated as "hog talk") also has a less honorific meaning than the one Lincecum attributes to it: namely, "fables," in a derisive sense.
progress of the Chahta people--the hog talk--was heard no more. And now, there are none, not even the old men amongst them, who can state anything that is reliable on the subject."

He continued: "While I am narrating my traditional account of the occurrences, the customs of the people, and historical facts belonging to ages long gone, you will find them supported by no testimony except traditional assertion. They sustain themselves within the bounds of probability and by the completeness of their connections. You will also find in my narrative many other facts, incidents and adventures that carry on their face the evidence of undeniable truthfulness."

"In the beginning of my narrative, however, I shall not attempt to establish or defend its account of the origin of red men. But I have heard the strange account of the origin of the race of white men, interpreted by John Pitchlynn, United States Interpreter. He held in his lap a very large book from which he said he read while he translated the singular account of the creation of the first white man."

"It was very curious, and I may here state with much confidence, that our traditional account of the origin of the red man is at least as feasible a story as that is. And I feel assured that when the truthful traditional history which I shall deliver to you, containing the origin of the Chahta race, their religion, their laws, societies, customs, journeyings, great leaders and warlike actions, shall be written in a book, it will be like the white man's big book, preserved, esteemed, venerated, as the Sacred Holisso Holitopa for the coming generations of enlightened Chahtas!"

Let me interject here that Holisso Holitopa is the Chahta appellation for the Bible, taught them by the missionaries. Holisso is "paper, writing or book"; Holitopa means "sacred." The above is an account of my first visit to the old Choctaw sage's home in 1822.

During the ensuing four years I visited him about ten times and took down his narrative in the Choctaw language. Unfortunately, during the Civil War my original manuscript of this traditional history was destroyed, along with some of other papers. But not before I had made a translation of it into English, which amounts to 650 closely written pages on large letter paper. The oral tradition I took down from Chahta Immataha contains an account of the origin of the Chahtas in what is today Mexico or Central America and their increase to a very great multitude. First a farming people, they later built stone houses
and congregated in immense cities with very large stone temples dedicated to the
sun, the perpetual fire, and tended by lazy, wicked priests.

Ruled by a great Inka and Ishca, they were a very numerous and very
happy people many ages ago, till the palefaces came one stormy night in their
big canoes, having wings and carrying the thunder. These strange men in their
sailing ships alighted in the sea at the Indians’ fishery.

The people thought the Great Spirit sent them and they rejoiced, called
them Nahullo (beloved) and gave them valuable gifts. But soon the palefaces
behaved so badly that the Indians killed some of them, and that brought on war,
which lasted twenty years. Alas, the Indians were conquered.

At this point three tribes, who later became known as the Choctaws,
Muskogees and Chickasaws, fled from the murderous palefaces and travelled
together only a few days before they were compelled to separate on account of
their numbers and the difficulty of procuring food in the wilderness.

The Chahtas took the middle route, and the old man’s traditional history
tells of all their encampments, travels, buffalo hunts, crossing of water courses;
how they crossed the Mississippi on cane-rafts; and finally at the end of forty-
three winters landed at Nanih-waya in present Mississippi. They had cleaned
and packed the bones of all their dead from the start, until the bundles of bones
had accumulated in numbers to more than the living, so that continuing to carry
them was a great burden.

They planted these bones at Nanih-waya in Mississippi and raised there
a huge mound eighty feet high and six hundred feet at the base. I have been on
it and measured it. Chahta-Immataha’s account of the tradition goes on and tells
more about what they did at Nanih-waya, though in an incomplete fashion, up
to the time of the treaties of peace between the Americans and Chahtas in the
early 19th century, when the war-hatchet was buried forever.

Dr. Cheri Wolfe spent several years studying my translation of the
manuscript of Chahta-Immataha’s traditional history, which is stored in the
Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin. Written in
my own handwriting, this document amounts to more than 650 pages, and is
available on microfilm. In her doctoral dissertation completed in 1993 she
confirmed its value as one of the most extensive archives of Southeastern Native
American lore collected before 1830. It is my hope that eventually the full text
of Chahta-Immataha’s oral tradition will be published in a form that is widely
accessible.
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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Clifford Crane Bear is from the Siksika Nation, just east of Calgary, Alberta. His Blackfoot name is Namikiyaye, or Fast Runner. Raised by his grandparents, Clifford was fortunate to grow up hearing the stories and speaking the language of his people. He brings his rich background in oral history to his position as First Nations Liaison at the Glenbow Museum.

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