

Remarks Regarding the Pictographs of the Walum Olum

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As you know, the *Walum Olum* was the mythological and historic record of the Lenape Indians obtained by Rafinesque in the early eighteen hundreds. It consisted of a series of sticks, painted with red pictographs serving to remind the Lenape of the wording of the songs describing their tribal history.

The outstanding authority on the *Walum Olum*, Dr. Daniel G. Brinton, says on page 161 of his great book, *The Lenape and Their Legends*: "There is generally a distinct, obvious connection between the symbol and the sense of the text sufficient to recall the latter to one who has made himself thoroughly familiar with it." Careful study and observation soon bring out the fact that there are certain symbols which recur as the matter in the text recurs, and it may be of interest to mention a few of the more obvious.

Certain incongruities and differences between the text and the symbols in Brinton's book suggested that a careful comparison should be made between the Rafinesque figures in a photostatic copy of his notebooks and the Brinton pictographs. Fifty-eight mistakes in the Brinton symbols were found, many of them no doubt due to the carelessness of the printer and to the injury of plates during the printing process. This leads to a suggestion that there may be differences between Rafinesque's figures and those of the *Walum Olum* itself, which, sad to state, have disappeared.

There are, of course, certain very obvious meanings where crude drawings are made of the objects mentioned, such as birds, canoes, human figures, the moon, the beaver, spruce and sassafras trees, and the well-known sun symbol.

The human figure is often depicted by the usual vertical oval body with a small circle for the head and straight lines for the legs. In one instance, conversation is indicated by a line drawn between the heads of two figures. Walking or a journey is pictured by the legs being drawn far apart as in the act of walking.

As might be expected, in twenty cases the East is shown as being at the right side of the drawing; North, above the base line or toward the top of the figure in five places; South, below the line in eleven drawings; and West, the left in four instances.

Death or absence is suggested in three figures by the symbol of the object being drawn below the base line.

The various tribes are depicted by several styles of head-dress on the small pictographs of the human figure. For instance, two lines, looking like snake fangs rising from the top of the head, represent the Snake Indians in eleven examples, reptiles in ten cases, and merely evil in fifteen places.

The Lenape Indians are usually pictured by one straight line rising diagonally to the right from the top of the head; sometimes, however,

there are three lines, one vertical and one rising diagonally on each side. Occasionally there is no head-dress at all. A chief generally is shown by the same number of larger and more decorated lines. The Ottawa sign is a short vertical mark and a curved line swinging off to the right from the top of the head; the Talligewi, a straight horizontal line drawn to the right from the middle of the top of the head; and the Talmations—Huron, Iroquois, or Wyandots—a horizontal mark across the top of the head with a vertical line running up from the center of it. Northerners are suggested by a vertical line from the head with a horizontal stroke across the top of it. The symbol of the white man is a circle or a square with a dot in the center with a cross rising from the top.

In five cases, the pictograph for food is a group of small circles or a single small circle, probably representing corn.

Eight times, houses or villages are suggested by parallelograms or a group of parallelograms; in ten instances, such groups of parallelograms seem to tell of favorable circumstances and perhaps indicate many houses.

Land or islands are depicted by several modifications of a semicircle resting on a flat base line.

Nineteen times, the symbol of immortality or divinity is the usual circle with a dot in the center.

Each river has its own symbol, such as the Yellow River, the Fish River, the White River (the Wabash, according to Rafinesque), and the Straight River.

War, fights, battles, enmity, or hatred are shown in twenty-one instances as diagonal crosses.

Bodies of water are pictured by inverted semicircles with a horizontal line showing the level of the water.

Ice is symbolized by the same figure with a double horizontal line.

Extreme cold or snow is shown as an inverted semicircle below which is suspended small tangential lines, possibly representing the aurora or a snowfall.

In four instances, the eastern seashore is indicated by two figures which are easily understood.

Single or double connecting lines seem to show love, relationship, or friendship in ten cases.

An isosceles triangle is the glyph standing for chieftainship in nine instances; in five earlier pictographs, it seems to mean rather the headquarters of the tribe, which is, after all, a related idea.

Doubtless, a thorough study of this subject would reveal many relationships between the pictographs and the subject matter, and the above superficial report should pique our interest and lead to an exhaustive study of this feature of the famous Hoosier Odyssey—the *Walum Olum*.