



Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationships

Robert Brightman

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The interaction between religious beliefs and hunting practices among the Asiniskawidiniwak or Rock Crees of northern Manitoba is the focus of Robert Brightman's detailed study. This foraging society, he says, bases aspects of its hunting and trapping largely on what we call "religious" conceptions.

Seeking an ideology, however, that incorporates Cree beliefs about human-animal differences and the relationships that should exist between them as hunter and prey, Brightman finds these beliefs to be disordered and unstable rather than systematic. Animals are represented as simultaneously more and less powerful than humans. The hunter-prey relationship is talked about as both collaborative and adversarial. Exploring the influence of these religious representations on technical aspects of subsistence historically, Brightman finds that Crees' attitudes and actions toward animals were, and are, relatively arbitrary with respect to biological and environmental forces. Anthropologists will see in his well-researched discussion a challenge to prevailing ecological and Marxist approaches to foraging societies.

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