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Review of *Preserving the Sacred: Historical Perspectives on Ojibwa Midewiwin* By Michael Angel

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Preserving the Sacred: Historical Perspectives on Ojibwa Midewiwin. By Michael Angel. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002. xiv + 274 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

This volume is a critical historiography of the nature and meaning of the Midewiwin as it was, and still is, practiced by southwestern, western, and northern Anishinaabeg (Ojibwa or Chippewa) in both Canada and the United States. A self-described “culturally sensitive outsider,” Angel has approached his subject from an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing heavily from religious studies and historic and ethnographic documentation. The origins and functions of the Midewiwin are examined within the contexts of Anishinaabeg religion and society. Angel takes issue with the classification of the Midewiwin as a “revitalization

movement” or a “crisis cult” by demonstrating that the “essential elements” of the Midewiwin were elaborations of traditional beliefs and practices. He argues that the roles of traditional healers, diviners, and healing ceremonies became more “complex” as the Anishinaabeg struggled with new challenges to their world following contact with European newcomers.

The first three chapters contextualize the Midewiwin within the Ojibwa perception of the relationship between humans and non-humans as it is defined by the concept of “the sacred” or “Manidoo.” Angel correctly argues that neither Anishinaabeg cosmology nor the Midewiwin can be understood without a thorough appreciation of this concept. “Manidoo” was generally not comprehended by non-Aboriginal recorders, whose observations of the Midewiwin were filtered through ethnocentric Western Christian perspectives. He makes critical use of ethnographic and historical accounts and published sacred narratives, including those of acculturated and mixed-blood Anishinaabeg observers such as Peter Jones, George Copway, and William Warren. Although he acknowledges discussions with contemporary Midewiwin followers, their voices are not included in either this section or in the final chapter, “A New Understanding.”

A detailed analysis of published descriptions of the Midewiwin is presented in chapters 4 and 5. Beginning with the earliest known description of the Midewiwin written by Antoine Denis Raudot in 1710, Angel proceeds to analyze eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts of the ceremony. Emphasis is placed on the works of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Joseph Nicollet, E. H. Day, and Johann Georg Kohl. Subtitled “Society Under Siege,” chapter 5 contains an overview of the changing world of the Anishinaabeg in the face of environmental and colonial challenges that led to the decline, but not necessarily the demise, of the Midewiwin. The ethnographic texts of professionally trained ethnologists such as Frances Densmore, Walter Hoffman, Ruth Landes, and James Howard are assessed. These observers were all privy to first-hand knowledge from Midewiwin leaders who feared that outside influences would result in the loss of traditional cultural knowledge. Published Anishinaabeg accounts are also included, and, as in the case of James Redsky, often reflect the impact of Christianity upon Midewiwin adherents.

An understanding of the history and role of the Midewiwin is essential to our understanding of Anishinaabeg society and history. I felt that new readers to this area of historiography would have benefitted by a more developed historical contextualization of Western attitudes towards the religions of colonized Indigenous peoples, especially with reference to the evolution of anthropological thought and its relationship to fieldwork methods. Nonetheless, this ambitious and well-researched work with its glossary of Anishinaabeg terms, copious

endnotes, and extensive bibliography, is an important contribution to our understanding of the Midewiwin. **Katherine Pettipas**, *Curator of Native Ethnology, Manitoba Museum, Winnipeg*.