



Annikadel: The History of the Universe as Told by the Achumawi Indians of California

Istet Woiche

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"The World was made by the World's Heart, Tikado Hedache. He was Annikadel's grandfather. Annikadel was the greatest man; he knew everything. "At first there was nothing but water; no land anywhere, and no light. The world was dark." So begins the creation myth of the Modesse (Madesiwi) Indians, an Achumawi people living along the Pit River in northern California. Their mythology embraces not only archetypal tales of primeval darkness and battles between good and evil, but also the doings of the First People—Animal People, who are neither animal nor human—who immediately before the appearance of Real People were transformed into animals, trees, and rocks. Stories told to Merriam by Istet Woiche, Speaker and Keeper of the Laws for his tribe. In them we meet Annikadel, who with his grandfather Tikado was a supreme deity existing before the world, and also such divinities as Coyote-man, Silver Fox-man, and Frog-woman, all magicians who existed before the ocean foam was condensed into earth. In tales of these gods and of the First People they created, we read of travels to the roundhouse of the sun and moon, the search for Another World, the coming of a Great Flood, and are introduced to a literature that reflects the sensibilities of a people whose lives were intertwined with nature for millennia, and who recognized in animals a kinship of activities, relationships, and powers. At the last meeting of the Animal People, before they were transformed into the creatures we know today, Coyote-man was asked how the people who were to come would know the history of the world. "If the Real People will dream," he said, "I will tell them the history of my people, and how long we were in making the world."

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