

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The King Site: Continuity and Contact in Sixteenth Century Georgia.
Edited by Robert L. Blakely.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7rh056k3>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 13(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Grinde, Donald A., Jr.

Publication Date

1989-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

discouragement of mixed unions was a factor in fostering the appearance of distinguishably Métis communities has much to recommend it. All that marriage records at Michilimackinac and St. Joseph "prove" is that Canadians entered into sacramental marriages, while the majority of Natives and Métis did not. Jennifer Brown's appraisal of Métis life after 1885 requires some revision, too, in the light of Diane Payment's pertinent research on Batoche and environs. The Métis proved to be successful farmers and merchants for a decade after the Northwest Rebellion.

Finally, we remain somewhat puzzled about the choice of the title of this collection of essays. We have not been able to suggest a better one for such a wide-ranging choice of papers. The continued use of the term "Indians," especially by anglophone anthropologists, is also surprising in the Canadian context. There seems to be a wish to perpetuate Columbus' misnomer, as well as to ignore the fact that in an officially multicultural Canada, the Canadian Indians do come from the Indian subcontinent!

Cornelius J. Jaenen
University of Ottawa

The King Site: Continuity and Contact in Sixteenth Century Georgia. Edited by Robert L. Blakely. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988. 170 pages. \$22.50 Cloth. \$11.50 Paper.

As the Columbian Quincentenary approaches in 1992, the number of studies about the early contact period between Europeans and American Indians increases. This collection of essays allegedly focuses on the "biocultural adaptation of Native Americans from the King site at the time of European contact" (page xiii). Moreover, the introduction also asserts that the story of "these people is so compelling . . . that it demands to be told" (page xiii). Basically, this work explores the historical and archaeological data surrounding Hernando De Soto's visit to Northwest Georgia in the fall of 1540. Specifically, the essays center on the excavations at an archaeological site (King site) located on the bank of a large meander loop of the Coosa River known as Foster Bend in Floyd County, Georgia. By studying the archaeological and historical record, the researchers hope to shed new light on

the a) social life, b) stress, diet and disease, and c) the Spanish encounter with the Creek Indians of the region.

As with any book of such essays the quality of each essay varies, and the technical character of the work makes it difficult for the reader to integrate much of the research in a meaningful manner.

This book takes a traditional anthropological approach to the study of Indian burial sites. As such it deals with mortality rates, deaths from natural causes and death by metal weapons as evidenced in the excavation site. Although it professes to be interested in the cultural adaptation of the Creek Indians to the Spanish encounter, it is laden with ethnocentric assumptions. First, the Creeks had a "warrior class" (page 460), while De Soto had "men" and an "army" (page 112-114). Second, there is no attempt to deal with existing Creek Indians in this study, while there is exhaustive research on the behavior of the Spanish. Unfortunately, the approach is too clinical to facilitate an exploration of the dynamics of intercultural reactions between the Creek and De Soto's men. Also, there is little constructive use of the historical and ecological record to substantiate many of the conclusions that are drawn.

Many American Indian people, and especially Creek people, will probably be dismayed by the way in which the burials are excavated and interpreted. For instance, red ocher associated with hunting and war among the Creeks is used to prove that Creeks were constantly warring, although there is archaeological evidence that the Creek men were constantly hunting as well. Often, the conclusions are too facile and reinforce conventional wisdom about American Indians with alacrity. This is a pity, since the King site yielded the first direct material and biological evidence in the interior Southeastern United States of violence between an American Indian community and the Spanish interlopers.

However, the whole study is marred by the inequities that are apparent in the emerging studies on the Spanish encounter. There is no American Indian input. Furthermore, there is no real interest in studying the stories and ecological interactions of American Indian people to set the research in a more meaningful context. Instead, this study reflects the Eurocentric biases inherent in the anthropological approach to American Indians. It is odd that American Indians are dealt with clinically, while De

Soto's men have sex drives, conduct diplomacy and war. De Soto and his scribes related their personal experiences with American Indians as did other Spanish explorers.

Creation stories, folk tales and other oral traditions of the Creeks give us a great deal of insight into the nature of South-eastern American Indian life, but there is no use of such material in this work. One can appreciate the fact that physical anthropology is a discrete area and that the bioarchaeological approach has great merit, but it is apparent that physical manifestations on human skeletal remains become more meaningful when they are set in a broader and more diverse cross section of data.

This collection of essays distances us more from American Indian people by creating a purely physical body of evidence that has limited abilities in developing a cogent conception of what American Indian people were about at the point of contact.

In the final analysis, the studies are ponderous, lack cohesion (other than that they relate to the same archaeological site), and produce little in the way of new knowledge. There are ethical considerations as well. There is no record that these bones were respectfully reinterred or that surviving American Indian groups were consulted during the process of excavation. Thus, there are fundamental questions about the transgressions that might have been done to the anthropologists' own code of ethics during this study. If, in fact, there are ethical violations, then the sins of the Spanish conqueror and the modern day anthropologist have been visited upon these 450-year-old burials twice. Moreover, this could mean that, in this instance, Indian-white relations have not changed in character but only in kind in the last five hundred years. More's the pity for that eventuality, because it means that there is still very little intercultural communication after 500 years of contact. Taken as a whole, the work is a good collection of archaeological research papers that ask and answer very limited questions about the presence of De Soto among the Creek Indians in October of 1540. It is clear that the research findings are culturally biased in their approach to the study of human remains and that different words are used to describe essentially the same behavior by American Indians and the Spanish. Perhaps the researchers could take some advice from Shakespeare. When Hamlet dug up Yorick, at least he knew him!

Donald A. Grinde, Jr.
University of California, Riverside