



BOOK REVIEWS

Getting to the Root of it The Plateau's Contribution to the Archaeological Study of Hunter-Gatherer Complexity

Complex Hunter-Gatherers: Evolution and Organization of Prehistoric Communities on the Plateau of Northwestern North America.

William C. Prentiss and Ian Kuijt, editors.

The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 2004.

219+xvii pp. Hardcover, \$64.10. ISBN 0-87480-793-X.

The idea of complex hunter-gatherers – that is, non-food-producing societies characterized by permanent social inequality and sustained control over non-kin labour (Arnold 1996) – probably doesn't need much introducing to people interested in the prehistory of the British Columbia. Suffice it to say that, traditionally, complexity was believed to be attainable only by agricultural societies, and conversely all hunter-gatherers were believed to be egalitarian. That the First Nations of coastal BC are non-egalitarian hunter-gatherers has long been known. On the other hand, the idea that the indigenous peoples of BC's Interior Plateau may also have achieved similar levels of sociopolitical complexity is relatively more recent (e.g., Hayden et al. 1985). In this respect, the major goal of William Prentiss and Ian Kuijt's edited volume, *Complex Hunter-Gatherers: Evolution and Organization of Prehistoric Communities on the Plateau of Northwestern North America*, is precisely to remind us that the Plateau (which extends south through Washington and Oregon states) has a lot to contribute to the archaeological study of hunter-gatherer complexity. Beyond showing the Plateau's relevance to complex hunter-gatherer archaeology, another aim of this book is to present a vocabulary that would allow us to conceive hunter-gatherer complexity while avoiding the neo-evolutionary and progressivist assumptions that often accompany such classifications. As will be shown, the authors largely succeed in their first goal, while the second goal remains broadly elusive.

The present volume consists of an introduction and eleven chapters divided into four sections. Prentiss and Kuijt introduce the Plateau region, its significance to CHG studies, and the current state of Plateau research in "The Archaeology of the Plateau Region of Northwestern North America — Approaches to the Evolution of Complex Hunter-Gatherers." Oddly, this introduction does not really introduce the remaining chapters in any detailed, systematic way, nor does it explain how the book came to be (if it's the proceedings of a session a Society for

American Archaeology conference, this is not at all clear). The first section of the book, "Chronology and Materials in Plateau Archaeology," comprises four chapters dealing with culture history. The second section, "Households, Social Complexity, and the Formation of Aggregate Hunter-Gatherer Communities," consists of three chapters about the roles of violence, ritual, and trade (respectively) in cultural complexity as evidenced by large villages. "Social Organization, Plant Resources, and the Abandonment of Pithouse Villages" also consists of three chapters, innovative in their use of archaeobotanical data as evidence for changes in social organization. The last section, "Discussion and Implications," consists of a single chapter that puts the preceding contributions into an interregional perspective.

The first four, culture historical chapters are envisioned to provide the reader with a "foundation of previous knowledge," to use William Andrefsky's phrase, that is necessary for the more stimulating chapters that follow. This is all the more necessary due to the proliferation of local chronologies that have not yet been synthesized into coherent, regional sequences. In the first chapter, Mike Rousseau provides such a culture history for the Northern (BC) Plateau, while Andrefsky does the same for the Southern (U.S.) plateau in chapter two. Chapter three, by Nathan Goodale, Prentiss and Kuijt, then shifts back to the local scale, as a new terminology is proposed for the culture history of the Upper Columbia area. This contribution relies heavily on Lewis Binford's (1980) famous distinction between foragers and collectors, but goes beyond it by indicating that the more complex, collector-based cultures do not necessarily have to be characterized by large aggregated villages. This idea is further explored by Prentiss and Kuijt in the next chapter, in which they propose that the collector-like socioeconomic lifeway did not develop autochthonously on the Northern Plateau, but rather was brought in by migrants from the Coast (contra Rousseau). Overall, these four chapters not only provide a basic, culture-historical stepping stone for the next sections of the book, but are in themselves stimulating in their recommendations for regional chronologies more attuned to what the editors call "adaptive behaviour" (i.e., socioeconomics). I would point out, however, that Prentiss and his colleagues have subsequently produced even more sophisticated "adaptive behavioural" chronologies (Prentiss et al. 2005, Chatters and Prentiss 2005), and anyone interested in their more recent views should consult these articles. Of course, how the coupling of a refined forager-collector dichotomy with a regional culture history avoids neo-evolutionism (the subtitle of the book and the title of chapter four explicitly mention "evolution") is not entirely clear: there still appears to be a progressivist assumption about increasing socioeconomic complexity through time.

In chapter five, James Chatters continues with the insistence on refining Binford's forager-collector dichotomy. Unlike Goodale et al., who differentiated between high mobility foragers, dispersed generalized collectors, aggregated complex collectors, and dispersed complex collectors, Chatters discusses mobile foraging, sedentary foraging, tethered collecting, and networked collecting. Again, such terminology is easily confused for neo-evolutionism. However, Chatters' main contribution is the suggestion that the introduction of the bow and arrow, by making interpersonal conflict more lethal, caused people to aggregate into large villages for safety. The evidence for this comes from physical documentation of a proliferation of arrow wounds after 2000 BP and the appearance of villages at easily defended locations along with hidden food caches away from villages. This is an exciting proposition, though much more information will be needed to satisfactorily test Chatters' model. At present, radiocarbon dates indicate that large villages appear significantly earlier than the first skeletons with lethal arrow wounds, so violence may have become more rampant as a result of aggregation. Cohen (1985) has argued that living together in close quarters clashes with humans' psychological needs, thus creating tensions as people fail to get along with each other. Inside the village, I would presume, this tension would build up within people, but they couldn't go at each other, because witnesses would hold them accountable for their actions. However, outside the village, as populations dispersed during the warmer months, one might get away with ambushing one's neighbour. This is congruent with the observed pattern of skeletons with arrow wounds generally occurring in remote locations away from villages.

Moving away from a consideration of conflict, Brian Hayden and Ron Adams develop a method for archaeologically distinguishing ritual from domestic structures in chapter six. They then use the Keatley Creek site to test their predictions. While some feasting may have gone on in the largest pithouses at the site core, the authors argue that feasting and ritual activity associated with secret societies — important in maintaining intervillage relations among the elites — likely occurred in secluded structures at the site's periphery. At least two such secluded locations occur at Keatley (see also Morin 2006), each containing at least two contemporaneous structures, one interpreted as a meeting place of secret society leaders and the other as a feasting area for general members. However, it was pointed out during a public lecture of the ASBC that the purported ritual structures dating to the main village occupation were in plain view of the village, while it was only a later pair of structures, dating to after the village had been abandoned as a residential site, that was (unnecessarily) secluded. Hayden's interpretation continues to stir debate, and renewed excavation at Keatley Creek will doubtlessly contribute to resolving this controversy.

In chapter six, Michael Blake provides evidence for inter-regional exchange networks that linked *Qithyil* (the Scowlitz site) in the Fraser Valley with areas further afield both on the Coast and on the Plateau. Interestingly enough, most of this evidence comes from a single burial, dating to after *Qithyil* had been abandoned as a residential site. Located in the largest burial mound at the site, this burial contained basically all prestige items made of exotic material (dentalium shell, abalone, and copper) found at the site. Blake proposes that, even after this large pithouse village site had

been abandoned (perhaps indicating a change in settlement patterns, as has been suggested for the Plateau), social complexity is indicated by the continued use of the site as a cemetery. The potential implications this has for understanding past cognition, particularly as it concerns territoriality and ties to ancestral places, has not gone unnoticed. I would point out, too, that similar scenarios are being considered for the complex hunter-gatherer Lepenski Vir site in south-eastern Europe, and reconstructions of people's spiritual relationship with the landscape are another exciting direction complex hunter-gatherer archaeology can take not only on the Plateau but throughout the world.

Finally, the third section of the book includes possibly its most original contributions. Whereas on the Northwest Coast salmon was likely the major food resource that provided the economic base necessary for more complex forms of sociopolitical organization, on the Plateau it may have been plant foods (and particularly root crops) that were as important as salmon. In chapter eight, Dana Lepofsky and Sandra Peacock provide a very detailed discussion of plant foods on the Plateau and calculate the usefulness of intensifying reliance on certain plant species or groups. Balsamroot taproots and spring beauty corms, as well as saskatoon berries, as these calculations show, are particularly suitable for intensive harvesting. In the next chapter, Brian Hayden and Sara Mossop Cousins explore the ritual importance of root foods, again by looking at Keatley Creek. All root-roasting pits are located at the periphery of the site, in association with the structures previously postulated to have served for ritual and feasting purposes. If these were not ritual structures, however, the argument for the ritual importance of root foods would have to be reassessed.

In chapter ten, Kuijt and Prentiss get to the root of this book. They argue that the abandonment of large pithouse villages, such as Keatley Creek, after 1000 BP was likely due to climatic change that affected the availability of root foods. This is plausible, they contend, because people were experiencing dietary stress by late winter and early spring, due to a carbohydrate-poor diet of stored salmon. Carbohydrate-rich plant foods, which included not just roots but green vegetables and berries as well, were crucial in the early spring. If their availability started declining relative to increased human populations or due to climatic change, it would make more economic sense, Kuijt and Prentiss assert, for people to disperse into smaller villages. Smaller foraging ranges would support smaller numbers of people better than larger foraging ranges would support larger numbers of people, probably as a result of decreased transportation costs. Of course, some outstanding controversy remains, and Hayden and Cousins have argued that climatic change would not have affected the availability of root foods. As an alternate explanation, I would suggest, it may have been a decrease in the availability of saskatoon berries that may have been important. Saskatoons were stored for the winter, and a decrease in availability would have entailed a successively earlier start to the early spring dietary stress. Because saskatoons are the most often encountered plant remains at Plateau sites, this idea could perhaps be archaeologically tested.

In the concluding chapter, Jeanne Arnold provides an assessment of the other chapters intertwined with a comparison of the Plateau with the Chumash complex hunter-gatherers of southern California. The most important conclusion she arrives

at, in my mind, is that the archaeology of hunter-gatherer complexity is itself much more complex than we originally thought. And this is, in effect, a big achievement of Prentiss and Kuijt's book as a whole. The eleven contributions in this volume have shown that there is much exciting research being done on the Plateau, that this research will undoubtedly contribute to a general archaeology of hunter-gatherer complexity, and that there remain several open-ended debates that should keep Plateau archaeologists busy for some time to come. These debates include the origin of a collector subsistence (whether it arrived from the Coast or developed autochthonously), the identification of ritual activity and its association with root foods, and the social consequences and/or causes of initial aggregation into and subsequent abandonment of large pithouse villages. Full of interesting ideas that will continue to be a source of testable models for other scholars, this book is worth its money. I would recommend it to any student (broadly defined) of both Plateau and Northwest Coast prehistory, and to those interested in (yes, you guessed it) the "evolution" of complex hunter-gatherers.

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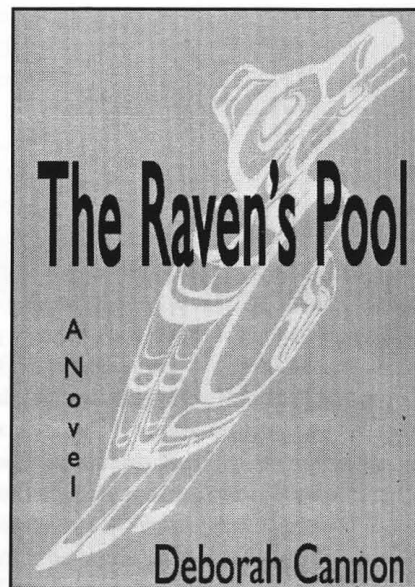
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The Raven's Pool

by
Deborah Cannon

Trafford Publishing,
Victoria, 2006.
244 pp.

ISBN-10: 141203504X; ISBN-13: 978-1412035040



Cannon's book is a refreshing change for archaeologists, anthropologists or cultural resource specialists who are looking for a relevant novel to read in their spare time. The book is a blend of current issues in archaeology, Northwest Coast mythology, and a little romance. The novel begins with the main character, Dr. Jake Lalonde, an archaeologist who is accompanied by a graduate student Angeline Lisbon to investigate the discovery of a Raven's rattle. The setting is the west coast, Cedar Island in the San Juan Islands, which P. Clifford Radisson wants to develop into a tourist theme park called "Ravensworld". Jake's distaste for Radisson's mega-developments, destruction of nature and purchase of Haida artifacts is clear from the beginning and he had good reason to be concerned. Josie Davis, Jake's co-director does not seem to share his dislike of Radisson and the Regional Archaeologist, Tom Jelna, offers little support to Jake's opposition to the theme park. From Jelna's perspective, the island is government property and is scheduled for development. This is exactly what Jake LaLonde is trying to avoid but Radisson is a man who gets what he wants. Jake faces political obstacles and personal challenges in his efforts to save the archaeological heritage of Cedar Island and investigate the myth of the Raven. For most of the novel, he's seen as acting like a renegade with few supporters. Jake's crew are tempted by Radisson's offers for employment in the theme park and seem to support the development. This crew is an interesting mix and any reader who has spent time in the field, has spent time with one of these characters.

Although the setting of Cedar Island and the specific events are fictional, there is an authenticity to Jake's passion for archaeology and his struggles with developers that makes this novel a must read. Once you read *The Raven's Pool*, you will want to read the sequel — *White Raven*.

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