



Paleoindian Lifeways of the Cody Complex

EDITED BY

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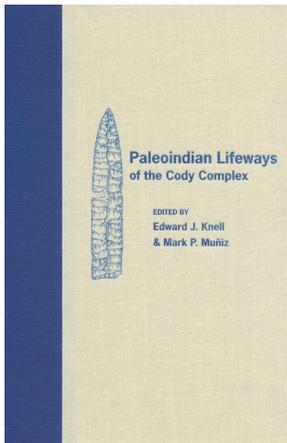
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Paleoindian Lifeways of the Cody Complex

Edited by Edward J. Knell and Mark P. Muniz. 2013. University of Utah Press. xii + 340 pp., 72 figures, 55 tables, references. \$60.00 (Cloth).

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I'm often hesitant to buy edited volumes—I never know what I'm going to get, and afterwards I feel like I just sat through the Clint Eastwood movie *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*. This edited volume is typical; its chapters span the range of expectations. That said, did I enjoy reading it? Yes.

Would I make room for it on an already overcrowded bookshelf? Yes. And lastly, why should readers of MCJA bother with a subject that historically is associated with late Paleoindian adaptations on the Plains? Stick with me for a few paragraphs and I'll tell you why.

This collection of papers represents the first attempt at a synthesis of a cultural tradition that ranges from the Great Basin to the Great Lakes and from the Canadian Plains south to the Gulf of Mexico. The geographic extent of this archaeological phenomenon alone, second perhaps only to that of Clovis, should make it of interest to a wide range of North American archaeologists.

I've seen bits and pieces of much of this before, but then again, because I have a research interest in this sort of stuff, I've already dug around (no pun intended) in the dissertations and thesis that produced much of this data. While some of this is updated rehash from previous work, many of the chapters provide fresh data and attempts at regional-level synthesis of information that is sorely needed. That's one of the merits of edited volumes; they bring together the work of a diverse number of researchers and put it all under one "hood," making it accessible to others. As such, this volume represents the most current and comprehensive compilation of data on a historically well-known, but poorly understood archaeological tradition.

The volume is organized into five parts containing a total of 12 chapters which discuss the Cody Complex at both the site and regional level, examine environmental and faunal evidence, and three chapters which attempt to model Cody Complex lifeways. An introductory chapter by the volume editors, Ed Knell and Mark Muniz, and an overview chapter by Doug Bamforth round out the offerings. The chapters within range from descriptive (but useful) regional overviews to occasionally new and insightful studies. On the whole, this work represents an ambitious attempt at a nearly continent-wide synthesis of an archaeological culture that to date has been investigated almost exclusively at the site level.

Much of the history of Paleoindian studies on the Plains has centered on bison kills and projectile points. As Bamforth points out in his overview, the near-total focus on these two limited aspects of early Holocene hunter-gatherer adaptations has led to a rather myopic view of Paleoindian lifeways that has tended to downplay all but the most obvious variation

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in the cultural adaptations of early Holocene groups. Archaeological investigations into the “Cody complex” exemplify this problematic approach, with most attention focused on highly visible bison-kill sites and bone beds like Horner, Olsen-Chubbuck, Scottsbluff, and Hudson-Meng. Compounding this problem is the unusual amount of typologically diverse and often co-occurring projectile points that these sites have yielded—including Alberta, Alberta/Cody, Scottsbluff type I and II, Eden, and Cody knives. Sorting out the chronological relationships between these point types has been difficult, consumed much of the historical effort devoted to understanding the Cody complex, and has added to the confusion and academic debate in attempts to define the “Cody complex.” The chapters in this volume go a long way in shifting the emphasis from points and bison to people, and to a behaviorally oriented approach to understanding these highly dynamic early Holocene hunters and gatherers.

An introductory chapter by Knell and Muniz provides a comprehensive overview of the state of the “problem,” and is followed by chapters by Muniz and Widga which provide data on the environment, climate, and landscape that Cody peoples faced across the vast expanse of their geographic expansion. Widga’s examination of small-mammalian fauna is interesting in that it highlights the dynamic climatic changes taking place between 21,000 and 8000 years ago and provides a proxy for how the shifting biotic structure would have affected the adaptations of terminal Pleistocene/early Holocene peoples. Following is a chapter by Matthew E. Hill, Jr. which examines the organization of bison procurement by Cody hunters as either systematic specialists or encounter opportunists. This background sets the stage for the following chapters, which provide data that ultimately leads one to ask “are Cody complex populations really Bison-hunting specialists or perhaps the ultimate opportunists?”

The next set of chapters by Matt Root, Robert Dawe, Hill and Knell, and Dan Amick provide fresh data and regional evidence for and overviews of Cody complex archaeology in the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, Canadian Plains, and Great Basin, and in doing so they reveal the stunning scope and flexibility in adaptation that Cody populations displayed as they occupied and adapted to a tremendously wide diversity of environments. These chapters provide both baseline and descriptive data on the presence of Cody in various areas, but also attempt to provide regional frameworks of land-use and technological organization, providing much needed behavior-oriented approaches. To this bunch of chapters I would add Ruthann Knudsen’s interesting overview of the Scottsbluff Bison Quarry site and its role in the development of the concept of the Cody complex. These chapters are by-and-large well-illustrated and provide excellent examples of the variation in Cody-complex projectile points at the site and regional level. Amick’s chapter on Cody in Great Basin is particularly interesting in that it is the sole contribution in the volume that examines the Cody archaeological record outside of the historical homeland of the Great Plains/Rockies. This highlights a minor shortcoming of the volume: a contribution for areas east of the Great Plains is missing. The exclusion of data from Illinois and Wisconsin, where the Cody Complex is also well expressed, is typical of the history of Paleoindian studies which have been focused on Great Plains kill sites and bone beds. Areas where this evidence

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is scarce due to preservation issues have seen little research, and thus lag behind, leading to the omission of data from these regions. This historical bias often gives researchers the false impression that the early archaeological record is absent from these upper midwestern regions. This has contributed to downplaying variation in early lifeways, and has added to the historically myopic view of Paleoindian adaptations.

The final chapters develop and test various models to explore technological organization and land-use at both the local and regional level and the archaeological signatures and expectations that may be derived from such optimal-foraging and risk-management derived approaches. Finally, Doug Bamforth provides thoughts on “A Cody Future” where he rightfully hammers on the historical obsession with projectile points and bison bones, and challenges researchers to think in new directions as future work on Cody archeology continues.

All in all, I commend the editors for rounding up this group of researchers and putting this work together. Compiling an edited volume is pretty much the academic equivalent of trying to herd cats. This attempt to focus on the behavioral aspects of the Cody archaeological record is a step in the right direction toward a better understanding of this highly dynamic, flexible, and wide-ranging culture.