



The Archaeology of Large-Scale Manipulation of Prey: The Economic and Social Dynamics of Mass Hunting

Edited by Kristen Carlson and Leland C. Bement. 291 pp. The University Press of Colorado, Louisville. 2018. US\$73.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-60732-681-6

Spencer R. Pelton

To cite this article: Spencer R. Pelton (2020) The Archaeology of Large-Scale Manipulation of Prey: The Economic and Social Dynamics of Mass Hunting, Plains Anthropologist, 65:253, 77-79, DOI: [10.1080/00320447.2018.1551109](https://doi.org/10.1080/00320447.2018.1551109)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00320447.2018.1551109>



Published online: 05 Dec 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 79



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

BOOK REVIEWS

The Archaeology of Large-Scale Manipulation of Prey: The Economic and Social Dynamics of Mass Hunting. Edited by Kristen Carlson and Leland C. Bement. 291 pp. The University Press of Colorado, Louisville. 2018. US\$73.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-60732-681-6

The Archaeology of Large-Scale Manipulation of Prey: The Economic and Social Dynamics of Mass Hunting is a collection of eight studies, including an introductory chapter, regarding the social implications of communal hunting. The book's primary argument is that communal hunting is not just an economic exercise in calorie counting, but an outgrowth of the necessity for periodic group aggregation to exchange knowledge, find marriage partners, and other social phenomena necessary for human society to flourish. The book is primarily focused on the North American Great Plains, but draws examples from Australia, Greenland, and even brief mentions of the Old World Paleolithic and non-human primates.

In Chapter 1, Bement begins by introducing a central idea of this book, that large-scale hunts were undertaken primarily to provision large social aggregation events. In Chapter 2, Zedeño extends Bement's argument further by suggesting that the practice of aggregating around large-scale hunts, which resulted in engineering the landscape with hunting facilities, may have contributed to the formation of territoriality among Late Prehistoric Northern Plains hunters. Zedeño cites and describes several indicators of territory formation, concluding that Old Women's phase sites of the Two Medicine River represent the archaeological legacy of a Blackfoot territorial core.

Chapters 3 and 4 take the reader further afield with studies from Australia and Greenland, respectively. In Chapter 3, Balme provides an overview of large scale hunting among Australian Aborigines, finding that the use of fish traps and hunting nets in the ethnographic record is often cited as a means of provisioning large group aggregations. Balme suspects that communal hunting practices may have begun in Australia as early as 30,000 years ago, the evidence for which is based primarily on large middens of fish bones of uniform size, suggesting that they were culled via netting. In Chapter 4, Odgaard evaluates a seeming contradiction inherent to Native Greenlandic tradition, that modern Greenlandic hunters hold to a strict conservation ethic but that archaeological evidence attests to large-scale reindeer hunting in seemingly wasteful ways. I appreciate the large geographic scope that these Chapters contribute, but feel as though they are theoretically and thematically out of place in a volume that is otherwise focused on bison hunting in the North American Great Plains.

In Chapter 5, Maxwell and Driver address why there so few calves and yearlings in Great Plains bison kills by evaluating the annual range of herd structure variation present in living populations of African wildebeest. They find that virtually no prehistoric kills compare to living herd structures, an enigma if one assumes they represent catastrophic death assemblages. Although Chapter 5 makes no attempt to tie into the dominant themes of this book, I found it to be one of the more thought-provoking chapters.

In Chapters 6 and 7, two studies of bison isotopes from Great Plains Paleoindian sites return to Bement's central thesis that large-scale hunting was a means of provisioning group aggregations. In Chapter 6, Graves uses isotopes from serially sampled bison teeth to argue that Folsom hunters may have aggregated from places across the Southern Plains for bison hunts on the Llano Estacado staged around predictable migration patterns. In

Chapter 7, Carlson and Bement use isotopic analyses from Folsom-aged Plains bison kills to reconstruct herd mobility and grassland composition. Group aggregation is mentioned in the beginning of Chapter 7, but I was left wondering how bison herd mobility might impact the efficacy of planning aggregations around hunts. In general, I find the central idea of this book compelling because it forces archaeologists to view communal hunting as an outgrowth of an existing social practice—group aggregation—rather than the cause of aggregation in the first place.

The final chapter, Speth's "A New Look at Old Assumptions," will likely be the most widely cited study in this book, and at 124 pages long including citations it is certainly the longest, comprising nearly half the page count. Although Speth goes on some self-admittedly prolonged diversions throughout the chapter, it is ultimately a great contribution to the study of prehistoric hunting generally and Paleoindian studies specifically, and here I will discuss it in more detail.

Speth thinks that archaeologists have for several decades taken for granted a number of flawed assumptions regarding the Paleoindian record. First, Speth argues that Paleoindian use of high quality, non-local raw materials is likely a reflection of those materials' status as exotica rather than a result of functional necessity or a direct reflection of Paleoindian mobility. Second, Speth argues that the widespread use of bifaces by Paleoindians was likely not a technological response to creating lightweight, efficient chipped stone toolkits to facilitate a highly mobile lifestyle because a) stone toolkits comprise a relatively tiny portion of overall toolkit mass and are thus not a mobility constraint and b) foragers for the majority of world prehistory coped with mobile lifeways without the use of bifaces. Finally, Speth ties directly into the dominant theme of this book by suggesting that Paleoindian bison kills were undertaken as a means of provisioning group aggregation events rather than primarily a means of subsistence. Throughout, Speth interjects sidetracks regarding Neanderthal gender, military pack loads, Christian sacraments, traditional clothing, and Inuit dogsleds that make this an entertaining, if meandering read.

I agree with Speth's first two arguments, which together argue (in greatly reduced essence) that bifaces made on high quality raw materials are really pretty and Paleoindians probably thought so too. However, Speth misses out on an opportunity to ground these ideas in simple theories based on population density and time budgeting. In my view, Paleoindians procured exotic raw materials and spent time fashioning large bifaces because there existed few territories excluding them from the raw materials they wanted and they possessed ample amounts of downtime that could be spent knapping beautiful chipped stone tools (Pelton et al. 2016, *Paleoamerica* 2:169–178.). The models traditionally used to explain Paleoindian lithic technology may no longer suffice, but other models might.

I do not completely agree with Speth's third point. Paleoindian foragers likely lived at an extremely low population density, and orchestrating a large-scale hunt between such widely dispersed groups, no matter how predictable bison herd movements were, seems like an extraordinarily difficult and risky task. I remain skeptical that large aggregations of residential groups occurred at this early time in North American prehistory, at least ones organized around bison hunting.

Ultimately, this book serves as a source of theories and quotable passages more than it does a source of primary data. This is by no means a critique, since this book is full of valuable insights and fodder for discussion. My primary critique of this book is not substantive, but aesthetic: many of the figures in this book look bad. I think we can all agree that Excel figures, grainy maps pulled straight from Google Earth, dark photos, and the pixelation of the digital age have got to go. Archaeologists are doing really interesting science pertaining to this topic, and I think our publications should reflect that.

ORCID

Spencer R. Pelton  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7429-8741>

SPENCER R. PELTON

Department of Anthropology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming, USA

spencerpelton@gmail.com

DOI 10.1080/00320447.2018.1551109



Monsters of Contact: Historical Trauma in Caddoan Oral Traditions. By MARK VAN DE LOGT, 252 pp. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. 2018. US \$65.00 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-8061-6014-6

Monsters of Contact by Mark van de Logt asks whether or not the Historical period folklore of the four different Caddoan-speaking tribes in the Plains and the Southeastern US is situated in the historical fact of their decline amid contact with colonial powers. The author specifically examines the oral traditions of monsters from the Wichita, Pawnee, Arikara, and Caddo. Van de Logt argues that the trauma of contact with Europeans and the conflicts, diseases, and cultural loss that ensued were recorded in Caddoan oral traditions.

The book has a separate introduction, conclusion, a detailed background chapter, and two sections of case studies. The introduction captivates the reader with the fictional portrayals of monsters. Van de Logt then argues that monsters in Caddoan folk traditions were more than fictional representations; that they may have represented historical events. The introduction also delves into how previous scholars have approached both oral traditions and monsters. Van de Logt provides a convincing defense for his use of oral traditions as containing historical facts. The introduction and conclusion sections preempt possible critiques to his approach.

Part I contains one chapter, “Caddoan Storytellers and Storytelling Traditions,” which provides important information on Caddoan oral traditions, including how they are performed and the ways they are classified by scholars. The chapter contains the history of the Caddoan interpreters and story-tellers for whom the oral traditions used in the text were originally recorded. The author includes an important acknowledgement to the book’s potential critics by framing the difficulty of satisfying the particular expertise of its likely audience:

... Anthropologists, archaeologists, and folklorists will find much to criticize in this book. Anthropologists will decry the lack of emic or tribal perspectives. Archaeologists may question my tendency for speculation. And although I often borrow from their work, folklorists will be frustrated by my lack of attention to theory (36).

Part II contains four chapters, each one with a case study of a Caddoan monster myth that Van de Logt attempts to historicize. In Chapter 2, the author makes the argument that the monstrous Whirlwind in Arikara oral traditions actually represent a smallpox epidemic that devastated the tribe between 1780 and 1781. Van de Logt uses the informants’ statements, which described the Whirlwind as leaving behind diseases and destruction, as supporting evidence for his theory.

Chapter 3 focuses on a Wichita oral tradition about Coyote rescuing a kidnapped boy from an evil witch-woman with the help of a magical Spider-Man. In this particular case, Van de Logt goes through each element of the narrative and infers that the story represents the