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Book Review: *Plains Village Archaeology: Bison-hunting Farmers in the Central and Northern Plains*
Edited by Stanley A. Ahler and Marvin Kay

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Plains Village Archaeology: Bison-hunting Farmers in the Central and Northern Plains. Edited by Stanley A. Ahler and Marvin Kay. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007. xxi + 321 pp. Maps, tables, figures, references, index. \$50.00 cloth.

Roughly a millennium ago people in the Great Plains grafted the gardening of domesticated plants to the far older bison-hunting subsistence pattern. This necessitated more sedentary ways of life centered in more permanent dwellings. The specific, distinctive archeological expressions reflect strong geographic clines (and perhaps multiple points of origin), but a characterization as “bison-hunting farmers” is apt, and populations grew. By around 1300 CE variations of such mixed adaptations apparently dominated the Plains and left a prodigious archaeological record to unravel. Around 1300-1400 CE such earlier manifestations collapsed, perhaps as a result of disruptive climate changes, part of a continent-wide diminishment and resorting of populations. In the Plains the result was population movement and debilitating, interethnic warfare. The archaeological cultures that reemerged in about 1500 CE (perhaps earlier) were markedly different from the earlier villagers, and some were new immigrants to the region. Still, they too were, or became, “bison-hunting farmers,” though the bison-hunting component was likely greater than in earlier centuries. Settlements were fewer, but larger and more complex. Whatever the status of warfare before 1300 CE, it was endemic after 1400 CE. After 1500 CE colonial Europeans began to disrupt the centuries-old Plains Village pattern, which persisted until the mid-1800s, when replaced by the reservation period.

This volume, edited by Stanley A. Ahler and Marvin Kay, consists of 19 contributions by 21 authors (for contents see: <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0714/2007012964.html>). It is not a synthetic overview of the Plains Villages, but an eclectic sampling of the breadth and depth of recent archaeological research and interpretations—case studies focus on topics including origins, warfare, trade and interaction, symbolism, settlement and social organization, subsistence and risk, and others. Such studies are daunting undertakings as the ruins of a single house, indeed the contents of a single refuse pit, may produce thousands of specimens to interpret. Plains village archaeological sites, fragile and vulnerable, have been destroyed by dam building, agriculture, strip mining, roads, and suburban sprawl to an extent unanticipated fifty years ago. Funding for investigation in the same interval has dwindled, to the extent that one contributor self-funded the research he reports.

The book is based on a 2004 symposium honoring W. Raymond Wood, and was brought to press expeditiously. Well edited and adequately illustrated, each contribution is worthy of consideration and critical evaluation of its arguments and evidence. This celebration of Plains Village archeology is tempered by the death of Stanley A. Ahler in February, 2007. Ahler was a legendary archeologist in his own right. The volume is a fitting tribute to Wood and a substantial memorial to Ahler. **John Ludwickson**, *Nebraska State Historical Society*.