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Book Review: One Hundred Summers: A Kiowa Calendar Record By Candace S. Greene

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One Hundred Summers: A Kiowa Calendar Record.

In One Hundred Summers, Candace Greene examines a recently discovered bundle of heavily worn Kiowa calendar drawings by one of the great Kiowa calendar keepers, Silver Horn, now in the collections of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (SNOMNH). The loose drawings, once bound in a ledger book, document events from 1828 to 1929, a period that brought unprecedented change to the Kiowas.

Greene opens her study with an introduction to the Kiowa calendar tradition, followed by two shorter chapters dealing specifically with Silver Horn’s calendar at the SNOMNH. Chapter 4 presents the 64 surviving sheets that once formed the ledger book. Since almost all of the calendar versos are blank, only the drawings on the rectos are reproduced. The sheets measure 6”x15” and have been reproduced 50% of their original size and oriented top to bottom in order to provide the largest images possible within the book’s dimensions. The drawings are reproduced on the book’s versos with corresponding analysis set on the facing rectos. The volume closes with a Kiowa language glossary, courtesy of Gus Palmer, Jr., and three appendices: A and B provide the text of the Little Bluff and Hauvahte calendars respectively, functioning as a concordance to the Silver Horn calendar, and C lists other Kiowa calendars.

As Greene points out, Silver Horn divided each of the sheets of the ledger book evenly into thirds with a pair of blue lines, each third corresponding to winter or summer of a given year. Thus, each sheet presents one-and-a-half years of time. Each season is then identified by a glyph for winter or summer (bare tree or Medicine
Lodge, respectively) plus one or more additional images that call to mind a memorable event that occurred during the period in question. This system is employed through the year 1914, after which Silver Horn divides the sheets inconsistently into quarters, fifths, or halves. Through a close analysis of changes in page design, media, and artistic style, Greene argues convincingly that the consistent series of drawings for the first 49 pages of the book were made in the winter of 1905-6, copied from an existing calendar, and that drawings for the subsequent years to 1929 were entered periodically, in the year or years shortly after the season represented.

Greene’s interpretation of each glyph or representation draws on a variety of sources including historic records, published scholarship (particularly James Mooney’s seminal study on Kiowa calendars), personal interviews past and present, and the relationship to other calendar records—notably Silver Horn’s calendar in the National Anthropological Archives. Greene’s numerous references to other Kiowa calendars verify her readings of specific images while defining the relationship of the SNOMOH calendar to these other examples. In addition to such useful references and comparisons, Greene’s interpretation and analysis gradually reveals a Kiowa world in change, evident by references to the decline and near elimination of buffalo, reoccurring epidemics, reservation life, the arrival of the first train, land allotments and grazing income, Ghost Dances, the image of a biplane, Kiowa delegations sent to Washington, DC, and honors granted to the Kiowa men who served in World War I. Greene’s careful scholarship and subtle integration of numerous and different types of sources give a clear and resounding voice to a document made for use within an oral culture.

While some images are sufficiently simple or so frequently repeated that extended commentary is unnecessary, there are several instances where Greene’s commentary exceeds the space provided on the single recto and spills over onto the subsequent verso, which disturbs the book’s format and results in what amounts to blank double-page spreads. Given the richness and texture of Greene’s analysis, it might have been better to have organized the book around a more flexible format, one that would readily allow for extended text, additional comparative imagery, and expanded notes. Such matters, however, are minor quibbles in a well-written, insightful, and attractive volume.

*One Hundred Summers* brings to light a striking document by one of the most important calendar keepers among the Kiowas and is a welcome addition to a growing number of publications and on-line projects that provide complete photographic records and analyses of books of Plains Indian ledger drawings. It is a significant scholarly contribution to Native American studies and will stimulate further analysis and study of Kiowa calendars and related works.

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