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Review of *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West: History. Excavation, and Architecture.* By Annalies Corbin and Bradley A. Rogers

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The Steamboat Montana *and the Opening of the West: History, Excavation, and Architecture.* By Annalies Corbin and Bradley A. Rogers. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. xviii + 143 pp. Maps, photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $59.95.

In recent decades, a group of maritime historical archeologists has, through meticulous examination of sunken ships, enhanced existing work by traditional archeologists and historians. Eastern Carolina University's History Department has built North America's strongest program in maritime archeology. It was an ECU team, supported by a score of public (and two) private groups, that gathered the data for this book about the nineteenth-century Missouri River steamboat *Montana*. Coauthors Annalies Corbin and Bradley A. Rogers write, "The *Montana's* history and subsequent archeological investigation can be utilized as a case study for understanding and appreciating the development of the trans-Mississippi West."

Built in Pittsburgh in 1878-79, the 280 ft. x 58 ft. *Montana* was the largest steamer in the Rocky Mountain West. For five years the *Montana* worked the difficult Missouri River trade, hauling freight between St. Louis and upper river ports. On June 22, 1884, near St. Charles, Missouri, the *Montana* collided with a railroad bridge and sank. Everything above the waterline was salvaged and the rest left to rot beneath the muddy waters of the Missouri. But in September 2002, a team of East Carolina University underwater historical archeologists began a "dig" of the *Montana*. This book is a result of their labors.

"A shipwreck is unique like a fingerprint," the authors write. "Archeologists are trained to look at artifacts for what they can tell us about the cultures that produced them. Combined with history, archeological analysis helps form and sharpen insights into regions and cultures, into what it was like to live in a place during any given time period."

What does this book tell us about "the cultures that produced" the *Montana*? The authors conclude that the *Montana* represented the "latest steamboat technology of the day"; its structure reflected "oceanic ship construction"; "Wood was still the preferred [boat] construction material"; "shipping and selling goods on the American frontier was big business"; and "transportation networks were created to handle the flow of goods." Finally, the steamboat's structure "could not withstand the pressure" produced when the *Montana* was "forced to beach"; it disintegrated and sank.

This reviewer, while impressed with many of its aspects, concludes that most historians already know what the book tells us about "the cultures that produced" the steamboat *Montana*.

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