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2003

Book Review of *Plains Indian Rock Art* by James D. Keyser and Michael A. Klassen

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Steinbring, Jack, "Book Review of *Plains Indian Rock Art* by James D. Keyser and Michael A. Klassen"
(2003). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 650.
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Plains Indian Rock Art. James D. Keyser and Michael A. Klassen. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001. xii+332 pp. Photographs, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper.

While its title purports the work to cover the North American Plains, it is, in fact, almost entirely restricted to the *northwest* Plains. There is a constant effort to attempt iconographic relationships with other areas, including the Columbia Plateau, the Eastern Woodlands, and Precambrian Shield, with inevitably debatable conclusions. Its basic contribution is its highly ambitious effort to synthesize and integrate the full body of northwestern Plains rock art both culturally and chronologically. Although the approach to cultural determinations in the archaeological past and their continuity into identifiable groups in historic times is probably more

explicit and definitive than the data will bear, this is a commendable effort to make sense of the voluminous available data. The illustrations, impressive and perfectly done to clarify points in the text, reflect the main stylistic and typological modes of northwestern Plains rock art. The volume will very probably serve as a basic source for all further study of the subject.

Plains Indian Rock Art—divided into two parts, an “Introduction and Background” and “Rock Art Traditions of the Northwestern Plains”—is comprised of eighteen chapters, nine of which are three pages or less in length. An extensive bibliography, which includes the vast majority of contributions to Plains rock art, is alone a significant and lasting virtue of the work.

In reconstructing the history of northwestern Plains rock art, the authors assert a beginning in Paleoindian times, perhaps as early as 9,000 B.C.E. From a worldwide perspective this is entirely reasonable. Some groups, like those of Australia, have roots in the very distant past, as early as 40,000 years ago. And it is widely believed that the Australian Aborigines arrived from southeast Asia with some form of rock art. For the Plains in America, the authors accept a naturalistic, solidly pecked petroglyph style known as Early Hunter to be the initial representation of human graphics. This style is quite sophisticated when compared with others on the Plains. These are not stick figures or abbreviated images for transient purposes, but whole animals for the most part, often species-specific, and showing mass in their medium. The authors note this, but not for impact. Such conveyances are truly fundamental, contrasting with the stylized modes of all others in the multi-linear evolution of form. Of note in this regard are the naturalistic bison at the Jeffers Petroglyph Site in southwestern Minnesota and at various sites in the Precambrian Shield around Kenora, Ontario, all part of a broad iconographic tradition having profoundly deep roots. Mobile hunters drew pictures of what was important in their lives.

In light of the search for initial graphic symbolism in the Plains, or anywhere else in America, one is surprised to find the authors attributing the “ribstone phenomenon” (which they call “glyphstones”) to their “Hoofprint Tradition” (pp. 177-78), which dates from about 250 C.E. and includes the Protohistoric. Their citation of the Avonlea radiocarbon dates for the Herschel Petroglyph Site in western Saskatchewan is correct. However, those dates are basic to a *minimal* chronological placement; they do not specifically fix the rock art. Cupules at this site were buried beneath Avonlea deposits, as were rock paintings and carvings at the Swift Current Creek Site 80 miles to the south. Again, an Avonlea stratum covered part of a black rock painting, showing only that at some unknown point in time it was executed *prior to* an Avonlea deposition. While Swift Current is not specifically assigned to the ribstone tradition, it contains a very naturalistic, solidly pecked bison on the crown of the monolith which forms the site. At Herschel, the

monolith—with hundreds of cupules arranged over a long period, and extremely weathered—looks much more like the ribstone phenomenon.

Moreover, several investigators of the ribstone phenomenon have placed it in an early context, based, in part, on the total repatination of many of the monoliths as well as the findings of an archaeological investigation at the Scapa Ribstone Site in Alberta. The excavations at Scapa (within a few meters of the monolith) yielded Plano materials sealed below ash. The Mazama eruption occurred in 6,600 B.C.E. Identifiable bone recovered from the units of this multicomponent station were mostly bison; blood residue on tools included bison, antelope, and human. Since there is no direct articulation between these early deposits and the Scapa ribstone (it was stolen), there is no proof it is connected to any of the chronological units at the site.

The authors appear to have given more than casual commitment to “shamanic” theories of rock art inspiration, which could have been tempered by the citation of opposing arguments on this professionally heated issue. The complexity of this debate includes an enormous variability in the seemingly simple matter of what, in fact, a shaman is. Alice Kehoe’s *Shamans and Religion* (2000) is a good place to start.

While every effort has its warts, no investigator of rock art on the Plains can live without this volume. Whether all the typological categories survive remains to be seen, but the meticulously comprehensive chronology will certainly prove fundamental to future research. **Jack Steinbring**, *Department of Anthropology, Ripon College*.