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Winter 2000

Review of *The Caddo Chiefdoms: Caddo Economics and Politics, 700-1835* By David La Vere

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Hornbeck-Tanner, Helen, "Review of *The Caddo Chiefdoms: Caddo Economics and Politics, 700-1835* By David La Vere" (2000). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2175.

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The Caddo Chiefdoms: Caddo Economics and Politics, 700-1835. By David La Vere. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Map, pronunciation key, notes, bibliography, index. xiv + 198 pp. \$45.00.

The Caddos, to use their American-devised collective name, actually lived “from time immemorial” on the southeastern margin of the Great Plains. In the sixteenth century, their aboriginal territory of fifteen or twenty communities, with dispersed settlements, encompassed a vast area surrounding the middle course of the Red River in the present states of Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas. As the most western and longest-surviving of the great Mississippian states, Caddos provide a vantage point for viewing Great Plains history over many centuries. La Vere’s interpretation of this lengthy saga appears to emphasize

the long-lasting chiefdoms whose end he correlates with the year of the Treaty of July 1835 surrendering their final land base in Louisiana to the federal government.

Discussions of the buffalo hide and deer-skin trade, as well as horse raiding and trading, occupy much of the text. As La Vere points out, the Caddos living in northeast Texas and northwest Louisiana secured Spanish horses long before other tribes of the Great Plains and the Southeast. Their acquisition of Spanish trade goods preceded the time that they allowed the first Spanish expedition into their country in 1691. He believes they achieved very early a dominant role in the ensuing trade, using trade connections already established with tribes along the Mississippi River and even further east. The horse trade to the Illinois country was well established by the opening years of the eighteenth century. The Caddo trade westward extended to the pueblos by the mid-fifteenth century, but a hundred years later was disrupted by incursions of recently arrived Apaches who reached the upper Rio Grande not long before the first Spanish expeditions. Apache slaves also became an article of commerce. By the eighteenth century, Caddos acquired supplies of horses from the Comanches and tribal communities later collectively called Wichitas.

In his economic analysis, La Vere stresses the disadvantages of the mercantile capitalism introduced into the exchange economy of the tribes living in the Plains region. Of course, historians in all parts of the western hemisphere have noted the deleterious effects of the introduction of European trade items—particularly alcohol—and the credit system which induced perpetual indebtedness.

A third theme recurring throughout the text is the importance of kinship, real and fictive, and the privileges and obligations accompanying the establishment of these relationships. As La Vere points out, the Caddo readily incorporated both French and Spanish, and some Africans, into their enlarged family networks, but Americans remained aloof in Louisiana and exceptionally hostile in Texas.

This slender volume is a compressed abstract of Caddo history drawing on recent publications in archaeology and history as well as documentary records. La Vere's particular contribution is information from the Spanish archives in Seville, source of much of the detailed trade and population data for the late eighteenth century. A few more pages are really needed to clarify the diaspora of the Caddos, 1835-50, during an era of Texan-Mexican-American warfare and their final transfer from a briefly-existing reservation in west Texas to a permanent location in western Oklahoma in 1859.

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