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Review of *The Five Crows Ledger: Biographic Warrior Art of the Flathead Indians* By James D. Keyser

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The Five Crows Ledger: Biographic Warrior Art of the Flathead Indians. By James D. Keyser. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000. Illustrations, notes, references, index. x + 105 pp. \$24.95.

Publication of the Five Crows Ledger brings to light a new source of information for examining the complex and shifting boundaries of Plains Indian culture in the nineteenth century. This set of thirteen drawings clearly demonstrates that the Flathead, usually categorized as a Plateau people, participated heavily in

the Plains war practice of counting coup and validating their personal exploits with lasting visual records.

These drawings, now in the collection of the Jesuit Missouri Province Archives in St. Louis, were collected by Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet in western Montana in the early 1840s. De Smet's annotations provide a rich body of documentation that Keyser uses effectively to supplement and enhance the visual narratives of fights with the Blackfeet and Bannack. Five Crows produced eleven of the pictures, and the author presents convincing evidence that the other two were by another Flathead, known only as Adolphe. Well-documented Native drawings from the first half of the century are extremely rare, and examples of Flathead pictorial art from any historic period are even rarer. Specialists will appreciate full publication of not only the drawings but also translations of De Smet's captions, inscribed in French.

To the non-specialist, the drawings may seem crudely executed and of limited visual appeal (which may account for why the dust jacket sports an attractive, but unrelated image from a Mandan painted hide). Keyser's richly detailed explanations of the information conveyed by each minute pictorial element, however, ought to engage readers in the intellectual processes of "decoding" the communicative aspects of the drawings. A good, brief summary of the stylistic development of pictorial art on the Plains from about 1000 C.E. to the late nineteenth century should also be of interest to the general reader.

Ultimately, these thirteen drawings raise more questions than this slim volume is prepared to answer. Why is Flathead pictorial art so rare? Why do these drawings follow the Plains Biographic style, well known from the rock art of the region, while rock art in the Flathead area continues the Plateau Ceremonial style? Keyser optimistically reports that the study of pictorial art has yielded a wealth of data on social systems, intertribal relations, material culture, and personal exploits. Only the latter two are substantively addressed here.

The first two more complex issues remain to intrigue and frustrate.

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