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Review of *The Jesus Road: Kiowas, Christianity, and Indian Hymns* By Luke Eric Lassiter, Clyde Ellis, and Ralph Kotay

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The Jesus Road: Kiowas, Christianity, and Indian Hymns. By Luke Eric Lassiter, Clyde Ellis, and Ralph Kotay. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. xii + 152 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index, compact disc. \$50.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Christianity, metaphorically referred to as the “Jesus road,” came to the Kiowas of southwestern Oklahoma towards the end of the nineteenth century. Today, most Kiowas are at least nominally Christian, and, like other Oklahoma Indians, render prayers and hymns in their Native tongue in services that are otherwise Baptist, Methodist, or Pentecostal. In explaining why the Kiowas accepted Christianity and how Kiowa hymns still play a vital part in Kiowa community life, *The Jesus Road* contributes to a growing body of literature about Native American Christians who have not abandoned their personal and cultural identity. Anthropologist Luke Eric Lassiter, historian Clyde Ellis, and Ralph Kotay, a renowned Kiowa singer, collaborated to produce this short, albeit informative, book and companion CD of twenty-six Kiowa hymns sung by Kotay, accompanied by Pat Kopepasah and Letha Peters.

Harry Tofpi Sr.’s 1997 burial service in Saddle Mountain Cemetery—beautifully

nestled in the northeastern edge of the Wichita Mountains—opens part 1, Ellis’s historical sketch delineating the arrival of Christianity in Kiowa country after the 1867 Medicine Lodge Treaty and how Kiowas converting to the “Jesus way” did so according to their own needs, without giving up their Kiowa identity. Largely based on the works of Isabel Crawford, founder of the Saddle Mountain Kiowa Indian Baptist Church in 1896, and secondary sources, Ellis narrates how other missions were established among the Kiowas in the late nineteenth century, though little attention is paid to the twentieth century, except through the ethnographic present.

Lassiter begins part 2 discussing the importance of Kiowa hymns, which are started by a song leader and performed without instrumental accompaniment for specific occasions; every song belongs to a family and has a story behind it, and, as Kotay nicely points out, Kiowa hymns—and other songs—are not “composed,” but “come through the Spirit and the minds of people who really believe.” Part 2 continues with Kotay explaining the personal, deeper meanings of the twenty-six songs on the companion CD. In the afterword, the three authors stress how preserving Kiowa hymns is instrumental to preserving the Kiowa language.

Having met Lassiter and Kotay on May 17, 1994, at one of Ralph’s hymn classes, I can attest to their admirable dedication in preserving Kiowa language and culture through songs. One shortcoming of the book, however, is an inconsistent orthography for Kiowa terms and, moreover, the absence of phonetic transcriptions for the hymns. How can this book help maintain the songs and the Kiowa language when only English translations are provided?

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