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Spring 1997

## **Review of *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective 1706-1875* by Thomas W. Kavanagh**

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Gelo, Daniel J., "Review of *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective 1706-1875* by Thomas W. Kavanagh" (1997). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 487.  
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**Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective 1706-1875.**

Thomas W. Kavanagh. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. xvi+586 pp. Maps, plates, figures, tables, notes, references, and index. \$45.00 cloth (ISBN 0-8032-2730-2).

The precise nature of pre-reservation Comanche political organization has long been a vexing question. Key issues include the meaning of numerous reported names for Comanche-speaking subgroups and the construction of power and authority within and across these units. The present work is the most successful attempt to clarify ethnonyms and describe Comanche organizational principles.

The heart of the book is a chronologic summary of primary and secondary sources, combining the generally more dependable Spanish observations with Anglo-American ones, and adding a Comanche perspective, mainly through records of the 1933 Santa Fe Laboratory of Anthropology field party and tribal historian Joe Attocknie (1911-1984). Comanche activities in New Mexico, Texas, and the Arkansas Basin during five eras of Euro-American contact are reconstructed, usually with great care. The first Spanish record is dated to 1706 instead of 1705 as previously held. Unfortunately, John and Benavides's translation of Vial's account of his 1785 diplomatic mission (*Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 1994) is neglected, with its important inference that Comanches and Kiowas were trade partners prior to the 1790s, and no mention is made of the 1832-33 Comanche-Coushatta clash reported in Coushatta oral tradition and in Berlandier.

The political analysis largely confirms David Burnet's 1851 assessment that Comanche authority was "rather nominal than positive." Notions of static tribe and chiefdom are abandoned in favor of a dynamic, "processual" model of political development, in which personnel and structure respond to "resource domains," the variable bases of authority. This theoretical agenda is helpful initially, though not fully workable. For example, that the shift from pedestrian to mounted hunting would have posed new organizational problems is fundamental. But horse and buffalo are then forced into a single domain, when each resource demanded distinct and sometimes conflicting adaptive strategies. Without any consensus among ecologists about the numbers of either animal on the Southern Plains, or on the relation between wild and domestic animal resources, and with few dependable accounts of Comanche hunting, the author's statistics on mule theft and the robe trade have little scientific value.

Further, the essentially functionalist outlook precludes consideration of ideology, beyond introductory remarks about power and honor. We are never told how the rise of female raider Arriba el Sol, an event unique in the author's account, could have come about. Comanche leaders' reluctance to accept Spanish staffs of office should be explained in reference to the mythological PiamupitsI, who causes death by breaking his staff.

While commendable attention is given to personalities and analysis of names and terms, many of the renderings are spurious. The origin of *paruhuya* 'elk' (p. 111) is "long deer," not "water horse." "Swift fox" (p. 48) includes the diminutive suffix *-tsi?*. "Red powder" and not "red rock" is the literal meaning of *ekwipIsa?* (p. 49), 'ocher.' *Pisi* (p. 113) means 'rotten,' 'smelly,' not simply 'odor.' The author fails to identify the dialectal *surii?*, 'dog,' in the personal name Pahtrisula (p. 242), while the name Ta.na.cio (*sic*, p. 269), deemed "unrecognizable," must be related to *tunayó*, 'black bear,' in García Rejón's 1865 vocabulary. Po-ko-do-ah (pp. 453, 455) is not "little horse" but "horse-son" or 'colt.' *KaawosA* (p. 498) is not the euphemistic 'fox' but coyote as trickster: "trick-sack." The word for 'collar' is translated here as 'scarf' and there as 'sash' (e.g., p. 160). The resemblance between Quita and Kuitaraine, 'Pawnees,' goes unnoticed (p. 108).

Despite such problems, *Comanche Political History* offers a valuable synthesis and interpretation and will be useful to a variety of scholars. **Daniel J. Gelo**, *Department of Behavioral Science, University of Texas at San Antonio*.