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War Paths, Peace Paths: an Archaeology of Cooperation and Conflict in Native Eastern North America, by David H. Dye

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War Paths, Peace Paths: an Archaeology of Cooperation and Conflict in Native Eastern North America, by David H. Dye, 2009. Lanham (MD): AltaMira Press; ISBN 978-0-7591-0746-5 hardback £44.95 & US\$70; ISBN 0-7591-0746-7 paperback £16.95 & \$27.95; ISBN 978-0-7591-1312-1 ebook £44.95 & US\$70; xx+215 pp., 29 figs.

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Scholarship on pre-Columbian warfare in North America finds itself at an interesting crossroads nowadays. Its revival beginning in the late 1980s has involved a protracted debate over concerns of re-igniting negative bellicose stereotypes of Native Americans versus the fact that there is now widely accepted archaeological evidence for increasingly pervasive conflict through time. Yet as archaeological studies of indigenous warfare in North America have become more acceptable they often remain steeped in either neo-evolutionary or very broad-brush perspectives that may elide the anxieties and horror of war. This concern does not seem restricted to archaeology. The eminent British military historian John Keegan (2009) has recently produced a major work on the American Civil War and reviews stateside have been mixed, in part because its top-down perspective of great generals and grand strategies seems out of step with current research. It seems that hardly a month goes by in the United States without someone discovering their great-great-grandfather's wartime letters in the attic. These and other kinds of personalized accounts have fostered considerable attention to the more experiential aspects of fighting through a particularly bitter and bloody war that unfailingly polite Southerners still refer to as 'the recent unpleasantness'.

David Dye's book, *War Paths, Peace Paths*, sides more with the top-down perspective of neo-evolutionary approaches. To give him his due, he achieves his goals within that framework. Beginning in the late Pleistocene and wending toward the period of European colonization, Dye portrays an increasingly tight correlation between increases in sedentism, foodway intensification and population growth on one side of the equation, and an expansion in intergroup conflict on the other. His explication of this trajectory will be valuable to scholars of warfare worldwide because it is at the same time historical (revealing trends particular to the archaeology of eastern North America) and comparative (pulling out broad patterns that may be evaluated with regard to similar patterns elsewhere). Because I think Dye is extremely successful in depicting the unfolding of conflict over several millennia, it hardly seems worthwhile for a reviewer to engage in well-worn debates between evolution and history, explanation and interpretation — particularly when archaeologists such as Norman Yoffee (2004) and the late Bruce Trigger (2003) have made such sophisticated defences of the judicious use of social evolutionary perspectives. Dye's sympathies clearly lie in that camp, although there are drawbacks that do merit some consideration.

The organization of the book tracks the standard time periods for eastern North America. It begins with the

Palaeoindian era and the (meagre) evidence for small-scale hostilities, then moves through Archaic and Woodland stages. The three chapters prior to the conclusion bifurcate into considerations of contemporary late prehistoric (post-AD 1000) cultural expressions in the northeastern, midwestern and southeastern sections of North America, when warfare appears to have been endemic.

Because this narrative is pitched within a neo-evolutionary context, inferences about what occurred during those intervals in some respects seem self-fulfilling. Dye proposes that conflict in eastern North America traced a predictable route that began with simple homicides during the time of small bands, expanded to feuding with the emergence of complex hunter-gatherers and the founding of early horticulture, and segued into larger-scale intergroup conflict with the development of towns and maize agriculture. The rationale for this sequence draws largely from ethnographic descriptions of violence within bands, tribes and chiefdoms, such that Dye is able to argue

Archaeological evidence of conflict during the period from approximately 11,000 to 5000 bc is lacking for a variety of reasons ... If it were available, archaeological evidence of human skeletal trauma during the Paleoindian and Early Archaic periods would include individuals in retaliation for murder or because of sexual jealousy (p. 171).

Given this foreknowledge, why even bother with the archaeology?

Admittedly, the broad contours of the model that Dye presents seem very likely. To ignore the empirical evidence for the dual expansion of conflict and social complexity would put me in the same analytical category as cigarette company executives who long denied the links between tobacco and lung disease in the face of an overwhelming history of correlation studies. Nevertheless, the proverbial devil is in the details. If demographic expansion is a key impetus for warfare, as Dye asserts, why did the Hundred Years War in Europe march on at the same time that its population was decimated by the arrival of the bubonic plague in the 1340s? Appeals to *lebensraum* seem cursory when trying to explain the fuller context of why communities decide to violently confront one another.

Fortunately, David Dye's larger, twenty-year project on North American warfare has increasingly balanced the roles of the quotidian and the large canvas. In other publications he has pursued a number of fascinating studies that delve into the experiential and sensual, ranging from trophy-taking of human body parts to the systematic defiling of ancestors' temples. These more recent interests of his have crept into his book, and they greatly enliven his narrative.

Dye's accounts of the changing bodily treatment of victims of conflict through the millennia are particularly fascinating. Beginning in the Archaic era, scalping and the removal of heads as trophies became increasingly common throughout eastern North America. These practices transcend traditional culture-history boundaries, linking cultures (e.g. Mississippian and Iroquoian) that few would argue were engaged in any type of regular contact. If one used behaviour related to conflict as an attribute for deriving

culture areas rather than, say, ceramic types, those boundaries might look very different indeed.

In contrast to what became pervasive practices of dismemberment there are also limited intervals of idiosyncratic uses of the body. During the Middle Woodland period human skeletal elements were often rendered into musical instruments. If, as Dye suggests, leaders during this era were shamans, is it possible that victims' body parts were integrated into public rituals surrounding a community-based ethos? That emphasis differs from scalping and the removal of heads, which appear to relate more to an individualized goal of absorbing the spirit and power of others. One could argue in either case for the transformational dimensions of embodied violence.

Landscapes of war also play a prominent role in the book. Dye describes the development of buffer zones between chiefdoms, areas that ecologically were conducive to settlement but which he posits were largely evacuated as a form of avoidance. Archaeologists in eastern North America have long struggled to explain the late prehistoric abandonment of large stretches of extremely fertile lands along the Mississippi and other major rivers. Dye's insights should prompt us to re-examine regional conflict as a factor in the depopulation and re-organization of polities in and around these regions.

By the end of the first millennium AD fortifications began to appear in eastern North America. A few centuries later they were ubiquitous. While this expansion of the built environment had its protective function, Dye points out that its corollary was a landscape of fear. He asks the compelling question as to whether periods of chronic conflict with populations confined within stockades also had wider costs in terms of nutrition and disease? There are certainly historical precedents for this argument. As just one well-known example, the mysterious Plague of Athens coincided with the Peloponnesian War and the siege of that city. Archaeology seems well suited to pursue research dedicated to the wider health outcomes of chronic conflict.

Admirably, Dye is equally interested in the practices that allowed societies to live peaceably. He makes the argument that war is not an inherent proclivity of Native Americans, or any group for that matter, and it must be viewed in a larger context of checks and balances. This point is particularly well turned out in the later chapters, where he is able to draw from historic accounts to demonstrate that groups often strenuously debated internally over taking up arms against an external foe. All recognized the gravity of such a decision. And we are reminded by Dye that this decision-making was not restricted to men. In the Northeast, Iroquoian clan mothers played a pivotal role in making or stymieing decisions to go to war.

Various expressions of peace-making are evident in the archaeological record. The calumet (an expression of the archtypical 'peace pipe') described by European chroniclers appears to have material manifestations that go back at least to the fourteenth century AD. Dye believes that many of the exchange systems commonly attributed to environmental unpredictability and subsistence sharing may have been related instead (or in addition) to attempts to forge alli-

ances in periods of brittle truce. His ideas should urge us to examine more closely variation in the types and contexts of objects that travelled long distances, because exchange likely served many purposes.

Dye has become one of the foremost scholars of warfare in eastern North America. As he observes in his preface, his own path toward warfare studies was far from premeditated and involved several episodes of happenstance. In parallel fashion, I suspect that future archeological studies of warfare will lean increasingly toward historical contingency rather than the predictable. *War Paths, Peace Paths* should certainly be required reading for those interested in a broad map of the evolution of conflict. But I would urge readers to peruse as well the bibliography for Dye's own provocative case studies of warfare in the American Southeast, which successfully evoke the passions surrounding physical conflict and attempts to maintain social harmony.

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