

Book Notices

Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Omaha Indians: The Big Village Site, by John M. O'Shea and John Ludwickson. Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992. xviii, 374 pp. Illustrations, tables, appendix, notes, index. \$40.00 cloth.

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Big Village of northeastern Nebraska stood as a symbol of the power and prestige of the Omaha Tribe. Virtually every French, Spanish, and American fur trader who traveled up the Missouri River into the Dakotas commented on how the Omahas extracted tribute from wayfarers and how neighboring tribes felt the sting of their raiding parties. Yet, with the advent of a smallpox epidemic in 1801 that killed as many as four hundred individuals, including their imperious leader Blackbird, the tribe began a gradual decline. By 1845, they forever abandoned the site and moved southward to the Bellevue Agency, where they sought easier access to trade goods and white protection against relentless Sioux attacks.

Almost a century later, archeologist John Champe began excavations of the massive Big Village site, which had once been home to 1,600 people. Like the town itself, Champe's study remained buried until the 1970s, when anthropologist John M. O'Shea of the University of Michigan and archeologist John Ludwickson of the Nebraska State Historical Society rediscovered the manuscript and expanded it. What results is a perfect model for similar scholarly work. A fifty-page essay on Omaha history is followed by excellent chapters on earthlodge architecture, village organization, funerary practices, and demographic patterns. In deference to the archeological focus of the book, three other chapters provide detailed descriptions of artifacts and skeletal material that Champe recovered from Big Village. Although this book is clearly intended for academic specialists, it can be read profitably by any layperson who has a general interest in Indian cultures along the Missouri River.

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