



James W. Bradley. *Evolution of the Onondaga Iroquois: Accommodating Change, 1500-1655*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xv + 260 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8032-6236-2.

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Continuity, Change, and Acculturation among the Onondaga

Archaeologist James W. Bradley's important book, *Evolution of the Onondaga Iroquois: Accommodating Change, 1500-1655*, re-released with a new afterword in 2005, is as pertinent today as it was when it first appeared almost two decades ago in 1987. Beginning with an early history of the Onondaga circa 1200, Bradley explores evolving cultural persistence and change until the early years of European contact. In the post-contact decades, the author extends his knowledge of the archaeological evidence to encompass documentary records and explores how the Onondaga conceptualized and integrated European trade goods and materials in culturally appropriate manners. Ultimately, by uncovering earlier trends in Onondaga culture, Bradley aims to assess the cultural change sparked by European arrival and to correct the misconception that Aboriginal cultures were static and unable to cope with novel people and goods.

Bradley begins by uncovering the origins of the Onondaga before European contact, drawing on archaeological material as well as ecological foundations that help explain how the Onondaga coped with the stress of change. In examining the four phases of Iroquois cultural tradition (Castle Creek, Oak Hill, Chance, and Garoga), Bradley pinpoints the Chance phase as representing the evolution of the Onondaga from the unison of two anterior communities in what is now central New York State. The author incorporates an astounding amount of archaeological evidence into his study in an effort to isolate changes in cultural patterns in a truly intriguing (and highly visual) manner.

To strengthen his analysis, Bradley does not solely describe changes according to the archaeological record; he also attempts to uncover what caused change, exploring factors such as the introduction of maize, an increase in internecine warfare, and environmental change, which lead him to conclude that the Onondaga culture was dynamic and flexible, changed at different rates and allowed for the integration of new people and

traits. Ultimately, Bradley believes that such patterns show the Onondaga considered European materials as just "another set of exotic elements to be integrated into their culture and used in traditional ways," an hypothesis which he explores in more detail later in the book (p. 47).

To address the date of Deganawidah's Great Peace, a constant enigma for Iroquoianists, Bradley highlights the puzzling evidence towards the end of the Garoga phase—including an increase in population for reasons other than defense, more elaborate material culture, and the renewal of long-distance trade in exotic material—that may point to the founding of the Confederacy.[1] Bradley insists more research must be completed in order to explain these important changes during the Garoga phase that indicate something important happened. One wonders, however, if a stronger focus on Iroquois oral traditions might have shed further light on the late Garoga phase, when examined alongside the archaeological evidence. While Bradley's analysis throughout the book makes original use of the available archaeological material, his study might have benefited in a few places by using ethnographic sources to complement his conclusions.

One highly original observation involves Bradley's breakdown of warfare and trade as intertribal dynamics in the sixteenth century. Accordingly, while the east-west axis provided "stability and homogeneity," the north-south axis encouraged "diversity and change" (p. 83), an observation that is not only unusual, given the tendency of scholars to concentrate on the east-west axis, but is also crucial since it reflects aspects of the Great Peace. Bradley, however, neglects to explore the Founding Epic in which the white roots of peace travel out from Onondaga in the four cardinal directions, which again may have provided an important complement to the archaeological evidence. Similarly, Bradley's original assertion that most European goods originated

from the Susquehannocks to the south, rather than from the St. Lawrence, as is usually assumed, might also have benefited from a deeper understanding of how the League conceptualized outsiders, especially considering Bradley's assertion that the Susquehannocks moved further away from Iroquoia because of trade competition and increased hostilities.

One of the book's most interesting theories is that the Iroquois reacted to European contact with an extended revitalization movement, the first phase of which was a cargo cult and which resulted in the alteration of the Confederacy itself. Bradley asserts that the Onondaga saw European objects as "materials of 'power' perhaps sent by the ancestors in order to aid in reforming themselves and extending the Confederacy," which he confirms by the increasingly lavish material offerings in burial sites (p. 109). The increasing need for such "power" stemmed from an increase in new diseases, the escalation of old hostilities, and a rapid change of pace. Drawing on George Hamell's work, Bradley asserts that, from a Native perspective, "Europeans appeared as returning culture heroes, otherworldly man-beings who rose from beneath the water on 'floating lands,' bringing with them a wealth of Under(water) World substances" (p. 66). Again, while Bradley explores the material data in exceeding detail, additional analysis of the mythical origins of some "powerful" items, like Hiawatha's use of wampum for example, might have helped explain how and why the Onondaga fit European objects into a similar category.

As contact with Europeans increased in frequency in the seventeenth century, Bradley tracks the stages of the Onondaga acquisition of European goods, indicating, for example, that the Onondaga primarily valued kettles as a source of metal and did not replace ceramic vessels with them until a few decades later. Thus, objects were appropriated, used, and reused in a manner that fit with the Onondaga perception and needs of particular materials and goods. Most importantly, Bradley concludes that there was no "donor" or "recipient" culture, as often assumed in studies of acculturation; rather, both First Nations and Europeans donated and received items, learning from one another, and modifying their own cultures, in the process.

Bradley's concluding chapter dwells on the very issue of accommodation and what it means in the redefinition—not replacement—of a particular culture. Summarizing the first century of contact, Bradley claims the Onondaga response was active, creative and innovative, and simultaneously reflected both continuity and change. New European materials enforced traditional Onondaga cultural

patterns, instead of changing them. When the change of materials did occur, it was gradual and selective in its effect (marine shells, for instance, retained their ornamental importance); many cultural values and beliefs therefore remained the same, while material preference and technology related to an object were most likely to change. By emphasizing the various degrees of change, Bradley debunks the myth that acculturation is responsible for a culture's decline, instead demonstrating the hybrid culture that often emerges. Finally, Bradley briefly explores the trade relationships between the Five Nations themselves; while strained during the first half century of contact, the Confederacy eventually adopted the Covenant Chain alliance as a means to strengthen itself both internally and externally and to extend the rafters of the Longhouse beyond Iroquoia.

Bradley's 2005 afterword is helpful in guiding the reader towards new archeological findings and hypotheses. It highlights the major changes in the field since the book first appeared, including the 1990 passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and the increasing involvement of First Nations communities in archaeological research. No matter how the field has and will change in the future, Bradley has produced a valuable tool in understanding the archaeological origins of the Onondaga that will and should be used for years to come.

Note

[1]. Interestingly, Bradley and other scholars in 1987 distinguished between the founding of the Confederacy and the League: the "Confederacy," in Bradley's mind, represents the indigenous peace-keeping alliance that operated among five Iroquois nations, while the "League" depicts the more united formalized structure that grew out of the Confederacy in the late-seventeenth century in response to political and economic demands sparked by European contact. Historian Daniel K. Richter, by contrast, termed the indigenous peace as the "League" and the subsequently altered political alliance the "Confederacy." While the terms of reference differ, both authors assert that the original structure conceptualized by Degánawidah and Hiawatha gradually changed into a more political and diplomatic entity in response to European contact. Daniel K. Richter, "Ordeals of the Longhouse: The Five Nations in Early American History," in *Beyond the Covenant Chain: Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800*, ed. James H. Merrell and Daniel K. Richter (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

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