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Robert S. Grumet. *First Manhattans: A History of the Indians of Greater New York.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. 256 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8061-4163-3.

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The Munsees of Manhattan: More Than Just a Lopsided Land Deal

It seems safe to say that no scholar has done more to uncover the history of the Munsee Indians than Robert S. Grumet. A recently retired anthropologist and archaeologist for the National Park Service, Grumet has provided us with numerous publications increasing our knowledge and understanding on various aspects of the culture and history of Munsee Indians in the Hudson and Delaware River valleys. The book under review here is a more concise version of his 2009 work, *The Munsee Indians: A History*, and should provide an accessible as well as scholarly account of the Munsee Indians to a wider, popular audience who may have never even heard of the Munsees.[1]

What many people do know, or think they know, is that a group of Indians sold Manhattan Island to the Dutch sometime in the 1620s for twenty-four dollars–the best real estate deal ever made on Manhattan. Beyond this, many would be hard-pressed to discuss the subsequent history of Indian activity in the area. Grumet takes on the mythologized account of the land deal and places it firmly within its historical context. He then proceeds to reveal the history of the Munsee, as well as other Indian peoples, during the colonial period, ending with a brief discussion of the history of the Munsees from 1767 to today. His primary achievement is bringing to light the history of this understudied Indian group.

One of the most valuable contributions in this book is Grumet's explanation and contextualization of land deals between Europeans and Munsees, beginning with the infamous Manhattan land grab. There is no deed or bill of sale for this event, and the best evidence in support of it is a letter from a Dutch West India Company (WIC) agent from November 1626 that merely states, "purchased the island Manhattes from the Indians for the value of sixty guilders" (p. 26). The identity of the Indians who participated in this exchange remains unknown despite the fact that they were identified as Manhattan Indians by one of the WIC directors, Johannes de Laet, who never set foot in New Netherland, in a 1633 edition of his promotional pamphlet *Nieuwe Wereldt* (New World). While the poorly documented purchase of Manhattan Island moved into the realm of myth, the significance of well-documented land dealings has gone relatively unexplained and unnoticed, until now. Grumet's chapter "Dealings, 1630-1644" clearly explains the nature and significance of land deals between the Munsees and the Dutch. Rejecting the idea that these early land sales were "a confused hodgepodge of scattered tracts signed away by random Indians duped into putting their marks onto any paper colonists shoved in their faces," Grumet reveals an orderly and systematic process of Indian sales and retreat away from colonial settlements that was "overseen by a small number of sachems politically linked to colonial governments or interest groups over several generations" (p. 60). With his meticulous and unmatched research and interpretation of deeds and bills of sale, Grumet reveals a process that required mutual understanding of terminology and intent as well as compromise from both the Munsees and the Dutch. He provides a clear explanation of the concept of usufruct entitlement and the Munsee understanding of land rights versus Dutch concepts of fee simple ownership. Instead of just introducing these concepts as mutually exclusive, he proceeds to uncover "common ground for cross-cultural comprehension," including understandings of communal versus personal or familial rights within both cultures (p. 62).

While exploring a common ground in which to understand how and why Indians participated in such land deals, Grumet does not try to convince the reader that these deals were completely equitable exchanges made on a level playing field. He does, nevertheless, bring clarity to a very murky system. For example, he explains how, when Indians sold land to the Dutch, the Dutch viewed this as a transfer of both title and sovereignty over

the land. But such transfers of sovereign rights through a land sale, Grumet notes, would never have occurred if both parties had been European, even if from different countries. This chapter alone provides a great service in educating a wider audience, both public and undergraduate, on the complexities of European/Indian land deals. In addition, Grumet explains how Maryland, Virginia, and New France did not recognize private land purchases from Indians, but acquired land through seizure or diplomatic treaties.

Despite the growing inequality of the relationships between the Munsees and Europeans, as outlined in chapters entitled "Contentions," "Devastation," "Unmoored," and "Sold Out," Grumet does an excellent job revealing the Munsee ability to adapt in his chapter "Soldier On," covering the years 1686-1701. His discussion of various Munsee actions in the midst of competition over land and sovereignty between the colonies of New York and New Jersey provides a clear explanation of how Indian peoples were both well aware of intercolonial disputes and adept at creating alliances in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for themselves. In doing so, Grumet brings to light some of his best examples of the identity and voice of Munsee individuals, which is another valuable contribution of this work. His discussion of the Hackensack sachem Oratam clearly illustrates how Munsee leaders gauged the intercolonial competitions and adjusted as needed to achieve the best possible outcomes for their peoples. Conversely, his handling of Hackensack sachem Pierwin reveals the inner workings of Munsee leadership and how a leader seen as "a liability in the eyes of his followers" could lose the support of the people and thereby be removed from power (p. 101).

Oratam and Pierwin are just two of the numerous Munsee individuals brought to light by Grumet. His work in *First Manhattans* reveals both Munsee "tribes" and individuals to a wider audience who may only know of the Munsee Indian's more frequently studied neighbors, such as the Iroquois and the Delawares. Those looking for a more academic approach to the Munsee Indians would be better served to take up Grumet's *Munsee Indians* also published by the University of Oklahoma Press in order to take advantage of his copious notes.[2] However, a more general audience will greatly benefit from *First Manhattans* and can further benefit from his notes on sources, although they may find the depth of his explanations on the genealogies of certain Munsee leaders a bit exhausting. This is a small price to pay, however, for an otherwise highly accessible account of a people who have been too long overshadowed.

Notes

[1]. See also Robert S. Grumet, *Historic Contact: Indian People and Colonists in Today's Northeastern United States in the Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

[2]. People interested in the history of the Munsee Indians would also benefit from Paul Otto, *Dutch-Munsee Encounter in America: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Hudson Valley* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

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