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environmental aspects of diabetes to the everyday realities of women's lives and in raising issues that merit close attention, this volume speaks powerfully to the role of ethnography in addressing significant world problems.

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Inconstant Companions: Archaeology and North American Indian Oral Traditions. By Ronald J. Mason. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006. 298 pages. \$50.00 cloth.

As promised in its preface, *Inconstant Companions: Archaeology and North American Indian Oral Traditions* is a provocative consideration of oral tradition's role in archaeology. Mason's goal is to evaluate the historical veracity of oral tradition and to measure its utility against scientifically collected evidence. He concludes that, in almost any side-by-side comparison with scientific knowledge, oral tradition will be judged the weaker and thus at best can merely confirm, but not add to, scientific reconstructions.

Inconstant Companions is perhaps best understood as part of the broader "science wars," which experienced a marked escalation in the field of archaeology following the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) passage in 1990. This law, which gave Native American tribes the right to repatriate human remains and associated funerary goods from federally funded institutions, mandated that oral tradition be considered alongside biological and archaeological evidence in assessing claims of cultural affiliation between modern and ancient Native American groups. In part as a response to the law, many academics began to search for ways to incorporate Native American perspectives into archaeological research, even if this means including information not subject to the normal ground rules of science (for example, testability, falsifiability). To scholars like Mason, the inclusion in historical reconstructions of stories infused by supernatural phenomena represents a serious threat to the practice of archaeology as social science.

Inconstant Companions, however, is no mere polemic (though several sections, such as one likening a Umatilla religious leader's statements on Kennewick Man to those of an illiterate Soviet peasant, will certainly rankle). It is extensively researched and builds on the author's three decades of experience studying North American history. The book consists of overview chapters on history, memory, and oral tradition, in which theoretical arguments are outlined, and five chapters of detailed oral tradition case studies. The overview chapters emphasize the vagaries of oral tradition, including their tendency to change with retelling, the influence of different narrators and audiences on content, cross-cultural motifs that tend to structure stories independent of the particular event being recounted, differences between oral and written notions of history, and problems with oral chronologies. Chapter 3 presents an interesting overview of literature on memory, though few experiments cited bear on the private, ceremonial-song transmission

of knowledge that characterizes the oldest (and potentially most durable) traditions of many indigenous societies. The case studies cover a wide range of topics, including Viking settlements in the New World, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Bible, Ojibwa origin stories, Canadian Dogrib Indians' battles, mammoths, and Winnebago origins. The research level involved in the case studies is impressive and properly assessed only by specialists in the respective literatures (Mason is candid about his newcomer status in many of these topics). Across the case studies, Mason finds little in accounts of events older than 125 years before the time of narration that can stand alone without support from historical documents and much that is contradicted by written accounts.

One quibble with the case studies regards oral tradition categories. Mason, following common usage, defines oral tradition as memories of actions that took place before a society's oldest living member's lifetime, distinguished from the oral *histories* of living observers (in Mason's playful term, oral traditions are "oral histories with tenure" [96]). But little use is made of oral tradition's further subdivisions, which are recognized by other scholars. For example, Jan Vansina's classic book *Oral Tradition as History* (1985) lists seven major categories including historical gossip, personal traditions, group accounts, traditions of origin and genesis, cumulative accounts, epics, and tales, proverbs, and sayings. Differences between tradition categories are important; information in each category serves different functions within society (including different degrees of intended historicity), is transmitted by and to different community members, and covers different topics, time periods, and/or social scales. Most societies also have their own emic categories of oral tradition—for example, the Hopi distinguish between *navoti* (historical traditional knowledge) and *tuwutsi* (folklore); similar categories have been recorded for the Apache, the Enga of New Guinea, and others. Many oral traditions selected for examination would likely fall into Vansina's group accounts or traditions of origin and genesis, but some—for example, the *Iliad* or Algonquian tales of monsters resembling mammoths—are different in important ways from other types of remembered information. If these stories are not all recording the same kind of information, they should not all be held to the same evidential standard or deconstructed in the same manner. Similarly, greater attention could have been given to the identity and cultural authority of various oral tradition narrators because different members of a community can have access to information of dramatically different detail and accuracy (depending, for example, on initiation into certain ritual societies).

It may also be noted that few societies considered in the case studies have survived into the present without significant geographic, demographic, and cultural disruption. Potentially different conclusions about the historical veracity of oral tradition might have been reached if the case studies focused more heavily on societies with greater historical continuity to the ancient events being described. It is probably not coincidence, for example, that one of the few cases of oral tradition that has passed Mason's test of historical veracity comes from Hopi villages, some of which have been continuously occupied for almost a millennium.

In the end, it is difficult to dispute Mason's conclusion that, in most cases, oral tradition is a weaker line of historical evidence than scientific data. But if the standard of measurement is the epistemology of science, this finding was predetermined. A more useful question (especially given the legal status of oral tradition as evidence under NAGPRA) would be "In what ways can oral tradition be useful to archaeology?"

Contemporary scholars have found much benefit in the use of oral tradition as a stimulus to new hypotheses that can then be investigated by conventional scientific methods. To be fair, Mason does point out that in many of his case studies, oral traditions encouraged scientific research in directions that proved valuable even if the research largely disproved the stories that inspired them. He sees this as the "quintessential role" for oral traditions: "to spark the imagination about matters not accessible by other means and to give impetus to thoughts of testing them" (248). This is well said and important, but it is not the book's primary message, which is more focused on the differences between oral tradition and scientific data.

There is a benefit to discouraging naïve interpretation of oral traditions as unwritten historical texts, and few readers could come away from *Inconstant Companions* with such an inclination still intact. But in North American archaeology—especially in the American Southwest, where collaboration with descendant communities is fast becoming the norm in academic research—many scholars are pursuing innovative combinations of archaeology and oral tradition that move beyond the "science versus myth" dichotomy emphasized in *Inconstant Companions*. Mason deserves credit for advancing the debate over the proper use of oral tradition in archaeology with this and previous publications, but it is exciting to think that the discipline may be evolving faster than some of its critiques.

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In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century. Edited by Waziyatawin Angela Wilson. St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2006. 344 pages. \$29.95 paper.

Hau, mitakuyepi—hello my relatives. The history of European arrival in the western hemisphere is replete with atrocities committed in pursuit of one central theme: take the land by whatever means necessary. The aftermath of the so-called Dakota Uprising of 1862 remains a black cloud that hangs over the relatives alive today who listened to the stories of this genocidal act committed against their people. But as the book's title indicates, third- and fourth-generation Dakota survivors have taken on the task of reliving and relieving the trauma in order to learn lessons that can be used to teach Dakotas and all humanity several important lessons. That is this book's stated purpose. In this way, living American Indians who challenge the standard histories taught in school systems by integrating untold Indian histories into mainstream literature will retake American Indian history.