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The Comanche Empire (The Lamar Series In Western History)



Synopsis

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a Native American empire rose to dominate the fiercely contested lands of the American Southwest, the southern Great Plains, and northern Mexico. This powerful empire, built by the Comanche Indians, eclipsed its various European rivals in military prowess, political prestige, economic power, commercial reach, and cultural influence. Yet, until now, the Comanche empire has gone unrecognized in American history. Â This compelling and original book uncovers the lost story of the Comanches. It is a story that challenges the idea of indigenous peoples as victims of European expansion and offers a new model for the history of colonial expansion, colonial frontiers, and Native-European relations in North America and elsewhere. Pekka HÃ¤mÃ¤lÃ¤inen shows in vivid detail how the Comanches built their unique empire and resisted European colonization, and why they fell to defeat in 1875. With extensive knowledge and deep insight, the author brings into clear relief the Comanchesâ™ remarkable impact on the trajectory of history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

ThisÂ comprehensive history of the Comanche people treats them as an independent power rather than asÂ victims of American westward expansion. And though Hamalainen frames his arguments within scholarsâ™ debates on proper perspectives toward the Comanche, general readersÂ interested in the history of the Southwest will discover his to be a fascinatingly informative volume in its explanatory and narrative modes. Between the Comancheâ™s initial appearance in

Spanish records in 1706 to their final defeat by the U.S. in 1874, Hamalainen traces an ascent in Comanche numbers, wealth, and influence that enabled them to dominate western Texas and New Mexico for decades. InterpretingÂ such ComancheÂ activitiesÂ as raiding and slaving as distinct instruments of imperialism, HamalainenÂ credits theseÂ practicesÂ with endowing the Comanche with their fierce frontier reputation withinÂ the extensive Great Plains trading network they operated. A valuable library resource for its subject. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

"Hämäläinen succeeds in introducing a new perspective on Southwestern history, mastering Spanish and Mexican historic resources to tell of a horse- and bison-based Comanche empire, Comancheria- a. . . . Enthusiastically recommended for academic and public libraries."â"Library Journal" "This comprehensive history of the Comanche people treats them as an independent power rather than as victims of American westward expansion. And though Hamalainen frames his arguments within scholars' debates on proper perspectives toward the Comanche, general readers interested in the history of the Southwest will discover his to be a fascinatingly informative volume in its explanatory and narrative modes. . . . A valuable library resource for its subject."â"Booklist" "Cutting-edge revisionist western history. . . . Immensely informative, particularly about activities in the eighteenth century."â"Larry McMurtry, The New York Review of Books" "The Comanche Empire is a hugely important documentary survey of the Comanche Nation, as known from documentary sources between the late 17th and the late 19th centuries. . . . By removing the anthropology, material culture, and social history from this study of the Comanche, the author finds room to plunge deeply into the political archives of the time and tell the reader how Comancheria functioned as the midcontinental power brokers of the 1700s and 1800s."â"Ed Baker, The Austin Chronicle" "[A] fascinating and richly detailed study."â"Si Dunn, Dallas Morning News" "A fascinating new book, details [the Comanches] unusual and colorful history. . . . Hämäläinen writes well and his narrative has an infectious verve and flow. . . . His broad themes are never in doubt, and the evidence he marshals is both compelling and convincing. He has rescued the Comanches from myth and distortion and given them their due in the sprawling epic that is our American story."â"John Sledge, Mobile Press-Register (AL)" "The Comanche Empire is a hugely important documentary survey of the Comanche Nation, as known from documentary sources between the late 17th and the late 19th centuries."â"Ed Baker, The Austin Chronicle" "A fascinating new book, details [the Comanches] unusual and colorful history. . . . [Hämäläinen] has rescued the Comanches from myth and distortion and given them their due in the sprawling epic that is our American story."â"John Sledge, Mobile Press-Register (AL)"

"Comanche Empire is an impressive, well-written, and important study that should significantly influence future metanarratives, whether they include all or parts of Texas, the West, the Borderlands, or even general histories of the United States and Mexico."âTy Cashion, *Journal of Military History*

H  m  l  inen's treatment of the complex relationships between the Comanches and other European and Native American societies is unique . . . H  m  l  inen collates and narrates the events of the eastern and western frontiers through time in such an effective manner that the reader is swept in the flow of an almost seamless narrative."âMariah F. Wade, *Great Plains Quarterly*

"The Comanche Empire is the best book anyone has written about the Comanche Indians of the southern plains. For many readers, it will be an eye-opener because of its vigorously advanced argument that for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Comanches created a mid-continental empire that controlled the economy of a huge part of the West, turned the northern Spanish and Mexican territories into its colonial appendages, and dominated the geopolitics of the both the Republic of Texas and, for a time, the United States in their imperial designs on the Southwest. If you are unused to thinking of American Indians as having this kind of agency in western history, The Comanche Empire will rearrange the furniture in your head."âDan Flores, *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*

"Perhaps we can simply stipulate that The Comanche Empire is an exceptional bookâin fact, one of the finest pieces of scholarship that I have read in years. . . . H  m  l  inen has given us a closely argued, finely wrought, intensely challenging book."âJoshua Piker, *William and Mary Quarterly*

"The Comanche Empire connects 'the West,' understood by American historians to mean the trans-Mississippi Western United States, with 'the West' as understood by world historians, through the materialist lens of world systems theory. What emerges is formerly unthinkable: a world of 'reversed colonialism' in which the Comanche consciously created a functional empire by exploiting and controlling a huge geographic area and the several Euroamerican states that contested for it. . . . The construction and maintenance of this empire by the Comanche and their sometimes surprising allies, and its Carthaginian destruction by the massed might of US forces, form a grand narrative, convincingly told."âJohn Harley Gow, *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'h  istoire*

"The Comanche Empire offers an acute analysis of the rise of the Comanche power."âJeffrey Ostler, *Western Historical Quarterly*

"This book deserves all the accolades it has and will receive. It is certain to be on reading lists for years to come."âWilliam J. Bauer, Jr., *Journal of World History*

"The Comanche Empire is a landmark study that will make readers see the history of southwestern America in an entirely new way."âDavid J. Weber, author of *B  rbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment*

"This exhilarating book is

not just a pleasure to read; important and challenging ideas circulate through it and compel attention. It is a nuanced account of the complex social, cultural, and biological interactions that the acquisition of the horse unleashed in North America, and a brilliant analysis of a Comanche social formation that dominated the Southern Plains. Parts of the book will be controversial, but the book as a whole is a tour de force."â "Richard White, author of *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* "The Comanche Empire is an impressive achievement.Â That a major Native power emerged and dominated the interior of the continent compels a re-thinking of well worn narratives about colonial America and westward expansion, about the relative power of European and Native societies, and about the directions of change.Â The book makes a major contribution to Native American history and challenges our understanding of the ways in which American history unfolded."â "Colin G. Calloway, author of *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* "HÃmÃlÃinen not only puts Native Americans back into the story but also gives themâ "particularly the Comancheâ "recognition as major historical players who shaped events and outcomes."â "Sherry Smith, Southern Methodist University, author of *Reimagining Indians*:

Pekka HÃmÃlÃinenÃÂ Â™s *The Comanche Empire* reframes the colonial experience in the American Southwest as a clash between four empires, Spanish, American, French, and Comanche. HÃmÃlÃinen seeks to answer the question of how the Comanche managed such a large empire and posed a challenge to the other three. His answer to this question draws upon social history and environmental history. Much of this work relies on an understanding of the ecology of the American Southwest and how that shaped the human geography of the region. HÃmÃlÃinen argues, ÃÂœInstead of merely defying white expansion through aggressive resistanceÃÂ Comanches inverted the projected colonial trajectory through multifaceted power politics that brought much of the colonial Southwest under their political, economic, and cultural sway.ÃÂ He frames his argument with a continued discussion of the role of an empire and how it maintains itself, especially over such a widespread area as ComancherÃ- a. HÃmÃlÃinen argues that the eastern and western halves of the Comanche Empire were semiautonomous. Discussing the western Comanche and their interaction with Mexico, HÃmÃlÃinen writes, ÃÂœThis was an empire that marginalized, isolated, and divided Spanish and Mexican colonies, demoting them, in a sense, from imperial to peripheral status.ÃÂ According to HÃmÃlÃinen, expanding Comanche power directly led to New Mexico breaking away from Spanish and Mexican influence. Discussing the role of natural resources, HÃmÃlÃinen identifies the horse, imported

by the Spanish, as the primary element that enabled the Comanche to create and maintain their empire. He spends a great deal of time discussing the nutritional needs of horses, the ability of the grasslands to provide for them, and how horses enabled the Comanches to hunt the buffalo, which became their primary export and further enhanced their imperial authority. Equestrianism also created a rigidly structured hierarchy of gender in Comanchería, encouraging the capture of slaves and polygyny in order to support the elite members of the empire. Hämäläinen makes numerous comparisons to eastern Native American tribes, specifically the Iroquois. Discussing Comanche influence, he writes, "Like the Iroquois in the Northeast, the Comanches attached on their sphere numerous Native and non-Native groups as exchange partners, political allies, and metaphorical kin, enveloping themselves in a protective human web." To expand this empire, the Comanche created a system whereby captives and others could become Comanche, further echoing studies of Northeastern tribes in the colonial period. Hämäläinen primarily seeks to counter the legacy of historians Walter Prescott Webb and Rupert Norval Richardson. Responding to their work and its impact on the historiography, Hämäläinen writes, "The Comanches who appeared in historical studies from the 1930s on terrorized the Spanish and Mexican frontier with relentless raids, but beyond that they merely occupied space." The narratives that spoke of different kinds of Comanches were marginalized. Hämäläinen argues for returning to the original European sources as the agents of the French, Spanish, and American imperial systems understood the Comanche as a dynamic empire capable of countering Euro-American designs. Further, Hämäläinen relies on a detailed understanding of ecology, even referencing Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* in his conclusion.

Professor Pekka Hämäläinen has based his professional life on study of border lands and ethnicities. This book is the compilation of that research. It is written from a Euro-economic perspective and develops the argument that the Comanche nation grew into and acted as an empire during the period 1706-1875. He bases this argument on analysis of the economic activity of the Comanches as recorded in Spanish archives. This makes for a different story than normally presented. His description of the grand councils provides the governance structure to support such an integrated organization. His argument for the empire classification is throughout the book but most succinctly stated at location 55-56 "For a century, roughly from 1750 to 1850, the Comanches were the dominant people in the Southwest, and they manipulated and exploited the colonial outposts in New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, and northern Mexico to increase their safety, prosperity, and power." Two problems arise from this approach. First, he does not discuss, nor apparently

analyze, the comparative weapons and tactical strength of the Comanches and the other powers on the southern plains. Walter Prescott Webb as well as Hobbel & Wilson argue that the tactical advantage stayed with the Comanche bows until 1847 when the Walker Colt revolver was produced at the specific request of the Texas Rangers. Only then were Euro-colonialist forces able to conduct successful mounted assaults against Comanche war parties. The second shortcoming is the description of the Spanish/Mexican governance of their northern colonies including New Mexico and Texas. They attempted to defend disarmed citizens with centralized armies. This was demonstrably unsuccessful. After allowing individually armed Americans into Texas, the tide began to turn. Individual ranches and farms could be over run, but the reaction of armed neighbors led by the locally organized Texas Rangers proved more effective than the centralized reaction by Spanish and Mexican forces. I read this book on an iPad with the Kindle app. The format resulted in three shortcomings: first, the fine maps, so important in this geographical story were not locatable other than by a search for the artist's name Nelson. An interactive table of contents would have greatly added study. Second, as in other Kindle books, when the reference citation is not spaced away from the body text, they are not useable. Bi-directional links to the reference list should be included in all Kindle books that provide citations. Finally, the index, although extensive was based on the non-available printed page numbers not the Kindle locations.

WOW!. I expected a dull boring history text. This work brings the people and times alive. The Comanche are treated as real and with dignity I did not get the impression of 20th century apologetical (I know, weird word) writing but a real attempt to portray this part of history as real. One must work through the terminology and personal/place names. Remember it is somewhat popularized history and you will be drawn right on in.

Very informative read on the Comanche. I would have liked a little more detail on the demise of the Comanche, but overall the coverage and Hamalainen's idea of the Comanche building an empire and its impact on the Southwest is intriguing. Especially the idea that the Comanche were more involved in dictating to the Spanish than the usually accepted Spanish idea that Spain controlled the Southwest. Overall, a very good read.

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