

Culture



Bruce G. TRIGGER, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered*, Kingston and Montreal/Manchester : McGill-Queen's University Press/Manchester University Press, 1985, 430 pages, \$18.95

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This book by a master of the arts and sciences has two interconnected goals. The first is to "reconsider" Canadian history by shifting attention away from the interactions among the representatives of European nations on Canadian soil towards an inquiry into the ways in which the interests and reactions of the native American peoples shaped the actions of the incoming French of the initial 16th and 17th centuries. The purpose here is not merely to offer another and perhaps more up-to-date account of the "Heroic Age," but to enact "a reexamination of the framework within which the whole of Canadian history must be considered" (p. xi).

The second aim intertwines with the first. Trigger wants to accomplish this reexamination by drawing on data and insights drawn from history, archaeology, ethnohistory, and social anthropology. These disciplines may deploy different techniques to tap various sources of information. Yet Trigger believes—and demonstrates—that their expository and analytic capability is at its most productive when they are used together in the search for convergent understandings. *Natives and Newcomers* is thus not merely a reassessment of extant data, but a critique and reappraisal also of the traditions of obtaining and using knowledge, most specifically as these have developed in the contexts of Canadian scholarship. This is therefore also much more than a "revisionist" account of Canadian history. It represents a major contribution to a new multidisciplinary way of conceiving historical processes and outcomes as the effects produced by the many-sided interaction of participant groups, pursuing and defending their interests at different points and levels in the material network of social relations.

The diverse parts of the book are laid out with care to serve these interconnected purposes. There are six chapters and a section containing "Notes on Sources" (pp. 345-356) which reviews the most important literature relevant to each chapter. In Chapter 1, on

"The Indian Image in Canadian History," Trigger reviews the ways in which historians and anthropologists both contributed to a view of the native peoples as antagonists of civilization and revealed religion, and thus destined to be overcome and transcended by the march of progress. Instead, Trigger presents the arguments of more recent work stemming from the contributions of A.G. Bailey and Leo-Paul Desrosiers that has increasingly emphasized the active part of the native populations in the construction of Canadian society.

Chapter 2, entitled "Before History," examines the current state of knowledge about the history of the Iroquoian peoples, and offers both a critique of earlier archaeological interpretations and an evaluation of what needs to be done in further research. In so doing, Trigger not only explicates the various archaeological perspectives (chronological, spatial, ecological, symbolic) to historians, but also discusses the vistas opened up by historical linguistics, ecology, physical anthropology (especially in the study of prehistoric diets), and demography. The goal is to view culture not "as collection of artifacts but rather in terms of the social system" (p. 73).

Substantively Trigger shows that a largely horticultural economy began to replace primary reliance on hunting and gathering as early as 300 A.D., some 700 years before the date of 1,000 A.D. accepted until recently. (Interestingly, this transition does not seem to have been caused by population pressure, the Iroquoians apparently maintaining patterns of child spacing similar to those of the historic Algonkian hunters and gatherers [p. 108]). The 14th century witnessed a period of "prehistoric florescence," which gave rise before the advent of the Europeans to larger villages and clustered settlements, but also to spiralling warfare, accompanied by the development of the "captive complex" of ritual incorporation, torture, and consumption of captives, as well as the ritual patterns of the communal reburial of the dead. Trigger suggests that the intensification of warfare may have been due to the prestige-seeking activities of young men, relegated to a secondary economic role by the development of intensifying horticulture in the hands of women. Most importantly, this warfare led to the destruction of the Iroquoian communities in the St. Lawrence valley to the west of Montreal, and to their incorporation into Huron and Petun groupings. Trigger thus sees these events as preceding, and not following, the advent of the Europeans. Here, as elsewhere, Trigger is judicious in

discounting interpretations of the prehistoric native peoples as peaceful “noble savages” who only developed warfare and the captive complex as a response to European penetration and conquest. He also believes that confederations may have been a feature of prehistoric times (pp. 103-104), and not merely a political reaction to the encroaching Europeans.

“The Approach of the Europeans, 1497-1600” (Chapter 3) specifically addresses a period largely neglected by archaeologists and historians. Here, Trigger takes issue with archaeologists who limit their studies of culture change to prehistoric times, as well as with historians who neglect the formative 16th century to emphasize the role of the state builders and religious champions of the century following. At the same time he is critical of the anthropologists working within the Boasian tradition for slighting the realities of native culture change. The Boasian view of culture “as a distinctive pattern of norms which governed the behaviour of its members” (p. 115) existing in a timeless “ethnographic present” discounted the real historic changes that took place as native peoples encountered European sailors, fishermen, slavers, and fur hunters. Ethnographic descriptions divorced from their historical background are no longer acceptable. European goods appear in archaeological sites much earlier than previously thought. At the same time, Trigger argues, these goods travelled into the interior over pre-existing trade networks, in settings defined by prehistoric patterns of making peace and war, and destined primarily for use in ever more elaborate mortuary ceremonials. It was thus the native peoples who primarily defined the contexts in which European-made objects found their use.

In Chapter 4, “Traders and Colonizers, 1600-1632,” Trigger unravels the complex and often conflictive relations among the European traders, administrators, and missionaries, as well as the interactions of all of these with the native peoples in the early 17th century. He is especially intent upon giving due recognition to the role of traders who, as members of “a less influential class” (p. 347), were often denigrated by the governing French elites. Just as traditional historical writing discounted the contributions of native Americans, moreover, so its class biases worked against recognizing the import of social groups that did not form part of the traditional upper classes. To elucidate the multiplex motivations at work among these various contestants, Trigger suggests the use of the concept of “the interest group” (p. 169). The proper recognition of interests embodied in such groups becomes an important tool in the interpretation of historical and ethnohistorical sources. Ethnohistory is seen here not as a special discipline, but as “a set of techniques for studying native history” (p. 166). History, native and colonist alike, involves the play of rival interests. European societies

were hierarchical and class-stratified, but the various interest groups formed by social actors in the New World might well crosscut class alignments. A contextual reading of reports thus requires a definition of who is, socially, speaking to whom about what. Native social formations lacked classes, but conflictive interests are often revealed in the opposition of factions, as in the rivalries between peace chiefs and war chiefs. European observers, however, all too often misunderstood the nature of native interests involved. This, Trigger argues, extends to latter-day interpreters of native motivations. These are often too economic, on the one hand, taking too little account of evolving native values. It is certainly erroneous to see native producers and traders as inveterate maximizers in economic transactions. On the other hand, it is at least equally erroneous to argue that native participants lacked an interest in profit or gain in the course of exchange. Their limited ability to transport goods to market constituted one important factor in limiting maximization. Another was their tendency not to produce or offer more goods once their needs were met: what they wanted was to meet their requirements with less effort, not to escalate their needs. Furthermore, their exchanges of goods were embedded, to use Polanyi’s term, in political considerations of war and peace, not in abstract economic accumulation. They sought gain, where possible, but the goal of gain was to accumulate prestige through redistribution, not to pile up profit for the purpose of reinvestment.

“Plagues and Preachers” (Chapter 5) takes up the history of interaction between the Jesuits and the native peoples. The story is seen primarily from the perspectives of the native Americans whose encounter with the missionaries paralleled their demographic decline under the impact of European-borne diseases. Within native medical knowledge and practice, the spread of illness and the intensifying mortality was interpreted as due to witchcraft. Trigger shows in rich detail how the Jesuits came to be identified as sorcerers and agents of witchcraft. This interpretation polarized the Huron into a minority of Christian converts and a majority of anti-Jesuit traditionalists, even while the Huron federation fell into intensifying arguments over the benefits and demerits of increasing dependence on the French trade in furs. These disagreements weakened the confederacy in the face of the mounting fury of attacks by the Iroquois. The Iroquois, moreover, obtained guns in quantity from the Dutch, while the French bestowed guns only upon baptized Hurons. In the subsequent dispersal of the Hurons, many traditionalists found a welcome among the Iroquois tribes. In the wake of the Huron defeat, the French opened up connections with the tribes of the upper Great Lakes, and began a series of political maneuvers to keep the Iroquois neutral as a buffer between themselves and the

rival Europeans advancing up the Hudson River Valley. Jesuit missions were sent into Iroquois country, but never managed to duplicate their earlier successes in Huronia, because the French “never acquired the economic control or the military ascendancy that was necessary to achieve the Jesuits’ goal” (p. 292). The success or failure of missionary activities among peoples markedly more egalitarian and less hierarchically organized than the Europeans is thus seen to depend directly on the nature of the political economy that could back the efforts at conversion.

In the final chapter of the book (Chapter 6) Trigger returns to the key question of “Who founded New France?”. He re-iterates his view that European penetration and settlement could not have been accomplished without native assistance. The native peoples were demographically in the vast majority. They were knowledgeable about the environment in ways that the Europeans were not. They controlled the one resource, animal furs, that underwrote the entire Euro-Canadian economy. They were in a position to destroy the Europeans militarily, but entered into trade relations with them instead. “If Europeans had gained a toehold in Canada, it was because a substantial number of native peoples wished them to do so” (p. 298). On the other hand, it was the French fur traders whose contacts with the natives and whose knowledge of their ways ensured the flow of furs that would ultimately capitalize the Seigneurial system favored by the metropolis and its representatives in New France. Trigger discounts supposed differences in national character as a conceptual device for explaining the different roads to European colonization followed by the French, the Dutch, and the English in North America. Instead he locates the significant causative differences in “social and economic, rather than ethnic and cultural variations between the mother countries” (p. 342). A systematic comparison of these differences in class hierarchies, political structure and ecclesiastical organization becomes relevant here, but is clearly the subject matter for another book. It might be fascinating, for example, to comprehend the active, but denigrated role of the French fur traders in Canada in terms of the conflict within France between the trading cities of the Atlantic Fringe and the centralizing state pivoted upon Paris. That such questions come to mind after one has put down *Natives and Newcomers* is a measure of its success. Bruce Trigger has written an account that speaks not only to Canadian concerns, but to the growing and generalizing interest in relating local and regional issues in all their historical and spatial peculiarities to larger trans-continental processes. This is a very good book indeed.

Paul FRIEDRICH, *The Princes of Naranja: an Essay in Anthropological Method*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986. 305 pages, U.S. \$12.95 (paperback).

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Paul Friedrich’s *The Princes of Naranja* is a sequel to a book that appeared nine years earlier. This earlier book, *Agrarian Revolt in a Mexican Village*, has become a classic anthropological case study of the agrarian struggle of Tarascan peasants during the Mexican Revolution. *The Princes* provides additional insights into agrarian politics and social change in this indigenous community. Friedrich’s second monograph also explains how he collected and then analyzed his data and how he wrote up the results of his research.

The Princes is divided into four parts. Part one presents seven short biographies of agrarian leaders, followed by a description of three political meetings. This part includes most of the ethnographic data which provided the basis for Friedrich’s discussion of the social psychology of political leadership, the use of oral language as well as non-verbal cues in the arena of village politics and the role that violence has played in the politics of rural Mexico. Parts two and three present a political analysis on both the micro level (the village of Naranja) and the macro level (Mexico as a whole). Here Friedrich mainly presents his own objective (etic) analysis, addressed to a more specialized academic audience, although much of the content of this analysis consists of native categories or translations of what the natives said. His methods of anthropological fieldwork and a discussion of the actual process of writing ethnography appear in part four.

As the sub-title indicates, *The Princes* is as much about anthropological method as it is about local level politics. It is also about anthropological writing. For example, part four includes a chapter on Friedrich’s own process of writing over a twenty year period, starting at the time of his doctoral dissertation and cumulating in the production of *The Princes*. This chapter includes a section in which Friedrich outlines some principles of composition in anthropological writing. Another chapter spells out how his personal background and more general reading outside of his own discipline (whether the Greek classics or Russian novels) inspired him in making sense out of what he observed in rural Mexico.

Friedrich’s work represents a novel way of writing ethnography in terms of style as well as organization. A novel feature is the incorporation of his ethnographic fieldnotes. Within anthropology, fieldnotes (usually meant to be read only by the researcher himself) may be