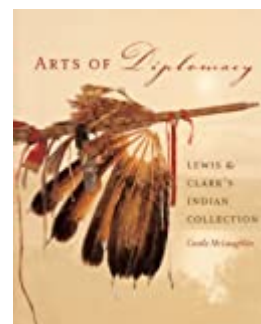


Castle McLaughlin. *Arts of Diplomacy: Lewis and Clark's Indian Collection.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003. 416 pp. \$40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-98361-5; \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98360-8.



Reviewed by Amy Lonetree (American Indian Studies Department, San Francisco State University)

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The Life Histories of Objects: The Lewis and Clark Collection

The commemoration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition is well underway. Exhibitions, documentaries, books, historical markers, and reenactments have all been produced as part of the Bicentennial Celebration of the Corps of Discovery Expedition. These commemorative acts have been critiqued by some as continually emphasizing the story of Lewis and Clark at the expense of the indigenous peoples they encountered. Emphasis is continually placed on their motivations for the expedition, and their “encounters” and experiences with various tribal nations from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean, which eventually paved the way for westward expansion and the spread of American Imperialism. The story is almost always about “discovery” and rarely viewed through the lens of colonialism.

Recently, tribal nations have criticized or taken a stand against this master narrative of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In October—as part of the Stop Lewis and Clark Resistance Group—Native leaders protested the reenactments happening on their homeland. They argued that the Lewis and Clark Expedition is not something to celebrate, stating “We Say No! to all entreaties

to ‘celebrate’ or ‘commemorate’ the genocide of five hundred Nations and the theft of our history.”[1] Additionally, the scholarly journal *Wicazo Sa Review* devoted an entire edition to “American Indian Encounters with Lewis and Clark” in 2004. The articles in the volume challenge the benign narrative of the expedition and situate it as a major component of the colonization process.[2]

How prevalent is this notion of the Corps of Discovery Expedition as a celebration of westward expansion? Last year at the Science Museum of Minnesota, I attended a showing of *Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West*, a film produced by National Geographic. It was well made and narrated by actor Jeff Bridges, but failed to place Indians—their perspectives, stories, responses—at the center of the narrative. The voices of indigenous people were once again relegated to the periphery, serving as a backdrop to the more compelling story of Lewis and Clark’s travels. I left the film feeling simultaneously shocked, angered, and discouraged. At this stage in our nation’s history, it is depressing to see documentaries that only celebrate discovery and ignore indigenous people’s perspective are still produced. It really begs the question: Has academic

revisionist writing on the Lewis and Clark Voyage had so little influence on the public's understanding of this event that documentaries produced today still can reflect a one-sided interpretation? So, it is with these eyes, and a certain amount of Lewis and Clark weariness, that I engaged with yet another text produced in honor of the commemoration. What new insights can be gained through an analysis of the objects attributed to the Lewis and Clark Expedition and now housed at the Peabody Museum at Harvard?

Much to my relief—a great deal. *Arts of Diplomacy: Lewis & Clark's Indian Collection* represents an important step in the right direction in challenging the one-sided interpretation of the Lewis and Clark master narrative. In her impressive text, Castle McLaughlin sets out to listen “to the stories these objects can tell” (p. 10), and through exhaustive interdisciplinary research seeks to provide a fresh analysis of the expedition through an examination of the Lewis and Clark Collection housed at the Peabody Museum. In focusing on the gifts and trade items received by Lewis and Clark, the book is less about the explorers themselves and more about the Native people with whom the objects originated. Indian voices, through an analysis of the objects they created, exchanged, and traded, are given center stage.

The text contributes significantly to the literature on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, as well as museum studies scholarship. The life history of the objects as they moved from tribal hands into the possession of Lewis and Clark and finally into the museum world is meticulously documented by McLaughlin. Her “object-driven anthropological history” provides important insights into the life history of objects as being more than museum artifacts, but as social symbols “that both created history and became a part of it” (pp. xxiii, 10). And, the histories that the tribal objects in the collection embody speak to the complex diplomatic exchanges that took place between the two representatives of a new nation and the leaders of indigenous nations. Additionally, the text provides insight on the provenance and significance of an important collection of indigenous material culture that includes pipes, ornaments, garments, hats, and robes.

The methods employed by McLaughlin are well documented and her team conducted both “documentary research and formal analysis of the objects themselves” (p. 5). The significance of the pieces to our understanding of the history of the expedition, as well as their continual importance to Native people, led McLaughlin and her team on an exhaustive process spanning several years to

research the collection.

The amount of time taken to bring this project to fruition speaks volumes about the conditions of records on museum collections. The text vividly captures how poorly documented museum collections truly are, and the complicated processes involved in telling their history. Discussion on objects featured in the text is very descriptive and typically focuses on what they were made from, the time period in which they were made, the tribal or cultural group attributed to the pieces, their significance and use, how they are attributed to the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and the context in which they came into the museum world. Given the exhaustive background on the pieces, it is not surprising that it took them so long to explore the history of the collection. For when one ventures to tell the story of collections, it becomes a piecing together of disparate sources: records given or made by the time of purchase or donation; ethnographic and historical sources; and the oral tradition from those whom they originally belonged. According to the Peabody Museum website, it took them seven years to conduct research on their roughly sixty objects attributed to the Lewis and Clark Expedition.[3] The museum is careful to make a clear distinction about those objects that they can definitively trace to the expedition. At the time of publication, they claim that six objects were acquired by Lewis and Clark, six objects were collected by Lt. George C. Hutter, a nephew by marriage to William Clark, and the rest were most likely collected by Hutter, or by Lewis and Clark.[4]

Though not a large collection, the uniqueness of the pieces cannot be emphasized enough, and warrants the kind of attention received. The Harvard's Peabody Museum has one of the finest collections of North American material culture in the world. The collection contains some of the earliest Native objects housed in museums, and the Lewis and Clark Collection has some of the most spectacular and rare pieces.

A case in point are the Raven Belt Ornaments attributed to tribes “from the Midwest—the western Great Lakes, Prairie and eastern Plains regions” (p. 107). There are nine surviving raven ornaments worldwide and three are in the Lewis and Clark Collection. Worn by respected leaders and warriors in historic times, they are the predecessor to today's feather bustles worn by powwow dancers (p. 106). In describing the meaning attributed to the ornaments, guest contributor Gaylord Torrence claims: “They were worn as sacred amulets in battle, they were worn in recognition of military achievement,

and they were worn as badges of warrior society membership, civil rank, and appointed tribal responsibility" (p. 120). In reading this section on the uniqueness and beauty of these pieces, I am reminded of a lecture given by Tuscarora artist and scholar Richard Hill at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in 2004, when he claimed that "for most Native communities, the best that our people ever made, our best pieces are not in our communities anymore. They are now in museums."

These exceptional and powerful objects also tell a story of the far-reaching intertribal trade networks that were in existence long before the Corps of Discovery ventured on to Native lands. In exhaustively researching these pieces, McLaughlin advances the idea that the world upon which Lewis and Clark came was not a cultural backwater, but rather a place where indigenous nations engaged in extensive trade networks and intertribal diplomacy. The discussions of the provenance of flutes and basketry whalers' hats, for example, are emblematic of the extensive trade networks already in place by the time Lewis and Clark arrived on tribal lands. A particular style of flute attributed to the Winnebago or Ho-Chunk (the official tribal name), an eastern woodlands tribe whose ancestral land base included much of present-day southwestern Wisconsin and northern Illinois, demonstrates the wide-ranging trade networks established. As McLaughlin claims, "By the early 19th century, flutes were popular intertribal trade items and the Winnebago style was much in vogue with suitors along both the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers" (p. 142).

The description of the basketry whalers' hats by Anne-Marie Victor-Howe is another case in point, and reflects the sophisticated trade networks and cultural exchanges taking place in the Pacific Northwest. Referred to as a "Clatsop" hat in Lewis and Clark's journals, Victor-Howe correctly identifies it as a Makah or Nuuchah-nulth whaling hat. That a hat symbolizing whaling can be attributed to a nonwhaling people, is evidence of extensive trade networks and "regular cultural contact" happening in the Pacific Northwest long before the arrival of the Corps of Discovery (p. 97).

The sections by indigenous people on the meanings placed on the pieces, both currently and historically, are some of the most compelling parts of the book. Particular standouts are the writings by Pat Courtney Gold and Mandan leader Mike Cross' essay entitled "From Time Immemorial." That the objects are intimately tied to both the present and the past is central to an indigenous view of museum collections. Both of these essays convey that

point beautifully. However, I am somewhat critical of the manner in which their views are presented, which inadvertently privileges the more scholarly interpretation. The essays from Native contributors are typically sidebars, and the historical and ethnographic descriptions on the objects are featured in the main body of the text. In doing so, McLaughlin is separating indigenous voices and literally and figuratively placing them on the periphery. Why are their voices not embedded in the text and their perspectives given more voice?

In the beautiful and compelling essay by Wasco artist Pat Courtney Gold, she describes her life's work as a basket weaver. Inspired by a Peabody Museum Wasco Root-Gathering basket, or Sally Bag, her essay speaks to the resonance of the basket and the power of ancestral objects to inspire contemporary indigenous artists today.

The Wasco, like other tribal communities, experienced a great deal of cultural loss in the wake of disease, land loss, removal, and reservation era assimilation policies. Gold writes of the loss of traditional knowledge, language, and life-ways, and the revitalization efforts that are currently taking place in the community. And she claims that it is her "generation, adapted to reservation life, that is helping to rediscover and revive Wasco culture" (p.283).

Her commitment to reviving her traditions, specifically basketry, led to her participation in the Oregon Folklife Master-Apprentice Program, where she worked with a master weaver who learned from tribal elders. In a moving discussion, she describes her visit to the Peabody Museum at Harvard, and the first time that she held the Wasco basket that is part of the Lewis and Clark collection. Describing it "as an emotional and spiritual experience," her story captures beautifully tribal perspectives on the power of objects and how they are as much a part of the present as the past.

This by far the most interesting section, and in my estimation what makes this scholarship on the Lewis and Clark collection so important. The basket in the museum inspired a Native weaver to continue maintaining her people's rich ancestral traditions. Her artistry and activism reflect what it means to be a contemporary Wasco basket weaver today. And objects still housed in museums are critical to the continuance of cultural traditions and indigenous survival.

Given the last 500 plus years of colonialism, museums such as the Harvard Peabody Museum have a moral imperative to not only care for the Native American ob-