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Review of Midtrød's "The Memory of All Ancient Customs: Native American Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley"

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The Memory of All Ancient Customs: Native American Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley. By Tom Arne Midtrød. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. xxxiv, 297 pp. \$35.00.)

Usually, histories focus on groups of people distinguished by culture, language, ethnicity, or political organization, or that are delimited by the boundaries of nations or other political entities. Such studies can miss the connections among those who share a common territory. Tom Arne Midtrød argues that the native peoples of the Hudson Valley should be studied collectively, despite linguistic and political distinctions. In fact, the key to their interaction and unity was a set of shared practices and, more importantly, a collection of “political relationships, ties of kinship, networks of exchange, and other forms of interactions” (p. xii). His story focuses on the experience and outlook of the Hudson Valley people and their relations with their native neighbors and European outsiders throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not without its weaknesses, this book makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the native people of New York and their relations with Europeans.

In the traditional style of an ethnohistorical study, *The Memory of All Ancient Customs* includes foundational chapters on the cultural practices of the people under study. The difference in this case is that this is not a “tribal” study focused on a particular native group, but a regional study. Instead of laying out a native ethnology, Midtrød more broadly outlines the relations between the diverse Hudson Valley peoples and the cultural structures and practices widely shared by them. Showing how these “ancient customs” served to connect these people throughout the region, Midtrød goes on to examine native-Dutch, native-English, and native-native relations from first contact to the American Revolution. This thoroughly researched and heavily documented study demonstrates that traditional alliance practices enabled the Hudson Valley Indians to absorb the brunt of colonial trespass and sustain their presence in the Hudson Valley longer than most studies generally acknowledge.

The book’s strength—focusing on several peoples throughout the Hudson Valley—is at times its weakness. The emphasis on the various networks tying together the peoples of the Hud-

son Valley often downplays or entirely overlooks ethnic and cultural differences. Without noting what made the Mahican, Esopus, and Munsee peoples distinct, the author implies a kind of cultural and political unity among these people that did not always exist. A more traditional ethnohistorical methodology could have helped on this point, but Midtrød tends to take primary sources at face value without bringing to bear ethnographic understanding that might distinguish between the different groups involved. Indeed, not only does Midtrød seem to omit such anthropological approaches but he also draws on evidence from sources originating throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to establish claims about cultural practices of the “River Indians” as they existed at the time of contact. Furthermore, emphasizing the Hudson Valley people’s cultural and geographic durability, Midtrød leaves unanswered the question of what cultural changes might have occurred among these peoples as a result of contact with Europeans.

Still, *The Memory of All Ancient Customs* makes an important contribution to our understanding of European–Native American relations in New York, offering an important supplement to works that focus on tribes rather than regions. The book helps make comprehensible the complex history of relations between culturally diverse peoples in early America.

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