

RECONSIDERING BLACKFOOT ORIGINS

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ABSTRACT

Blackfoot people claim they have *always* resided in their defined traditional territory on the Northwestern Plains of North America since time began. Today their treaty reserves and reservation remain as fragments within that defined territory. When the primary Blackfoot subsistence economy of buffalo hunting vanished in the late 19th century, various efforts were made by Blackfoot chiefs and White recorders to document Blackfoot culture and oral stories, many of which described the creation of the Blackfoot people and their traditional landscape. Various academic opinions subsequently emerged about these traditional stories to interpret how the Blackfoot came to be where they are. This essay re-examines those recorded traditional oral stories, subsequent academic opinions and collateral research.

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I also want to acknowledge that unlike my county neighbours I am not a Blackfoot speaker and for purposes of the essay have relied on the *Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots, and Affixes* by Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell, second edition, 1995.

INTRODUCTION

Early linguists led by Edward Sapir recognized the Blackfoot language as a distinctive variation of the Algonquian or “Algic” family of languages, and inferred that this distinctiveness reflected a long isolation by Blackfoot from the wider Algonquian linguistic family. Sapir outlined this linguistic analysis in his *Proposed Classification of American Indian Languages North of Mexico (and Certain Languages of Mexico and Central America)*, published in the 1929 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. This analysis and classification soon became interpreted and accepted by academic scholars as proof-positive that Blackfoot people had led a prehistoric Algonquian migration westward from the Northeastern Woodlands onto the Northwestern Plains of North America, a point of view still accepted as fact today. Some examples of this are the following:

“The Blackfoot were a nomadic people who followed the buffalo. The Blackfoot migrated to their present territory from the northern Great Lakes Region.” <http://www.bigorin.org/archmn-blackfoot.htm>.

“As a member of the Algonquian language family, the Blackfoot are related to other Algonquian speaking tribes whom ethnologists believe migrated onto the plains from the eastern woodlands several centuries before contact with whites. Some Blackfoot do not readily accept that historic interpretation.” Richard C. Hanes & Mathew T. Pifer in: <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/A-Br/Blackfoot.html>.

“Due to language and cultural patterns, anthropologists believe the Niitsitapi [Blackfoot people] did not originate in the Great Plains of the Midwest North America, but migrated from the upper Northeastern part of the country. They coalesced as a group while living in the forests of what is now the Northeastern United States. They were mostly located around the modern-day border between Canada and the state of Maine. By 1200, the Niitsitapi were moving in search of more land. They moved west and settled for a while north of the Great Lakes in present-day Canada, but had to compete for resources with existing tribes. They left the Great Lakes area and kept moving west.” George B. Grinnell 1892a in: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackfoot_Confederacy. As described, Grinnell emerges as perhaps the earliest proponent of an east-to-west Blackfoot migration theory.

Others have been more even-minded about the idea of continental Blackfoot migration. John C. Ewers in his 1958 book *The Blackfeet: Raiders On The Northwestern Plains*, citing the late Clark Wissler, simply noted about the Blackfoot:

“... that they ‘were on the plains a long time before the discovery of America.’

Alternatively, there has been little ongoing academic effort to record the narratives of the Blackfoot people themselves concerning their origins (or migration). Nor has there been any satisfactory thesis tendered about how early Algonquian speaking Blackfoot first got to the Northeastern Woodlands in order to then subsequently leave and migrate to the Northwestern Plains.

BLACKFOOT STORIES AND COLLATERAL INFORMATION

By the late 19th century, there was an effort by various Blackfoot leaders to ensure the recording of their history. Chiefs of the *Aamsskáápipikani nan* along with other South Peigan elders made concerted efforts to ensure traditional Blackfoot history and culture would be written down for posterity. Following the Blackfoot starvation years of 1883-84, and the disappearance of buffalo from overhunting, George B. Grinnell, who had intervened with the US Government on behalf of the Peigans in their time of need, was apparently recruited as a friend to assist with the recording effort. In this regard, the chiefs White Calf and Mad Wolf adopted Grinnell into the tribe, gave him a powerful name and made him a tribal chief. Later, while socializing one evening with Double Runner, Small Leggings, Mad Wolf and The Little Blackfoot, Double Runner noted to Grinnell:

'... The old things are passing away, and the children of my children will be like white people. None of them will know how it used to be in their father's days unless they read the things which we have told you, and which you are all the time writing down in your books.' [Grinnell replies] *'They are all written down, Nisah, the story of the three tribes, Sík-si-kau, Kaínah, and Pikuni.'* (Grinnell 1892b:note:ix)

As we will read, Grinnell did indeed write down and publish stories about the origins of the Blackfoot along with various other stories in his book *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*. Then twelve years later Mad Wolf adopted Walter McClintock as his son (thus also adopting McClintock into the tribe), and honoured McClintock by allowing him to gaze upon an uncovered sacred Beaver bundle, in another effort to ensure traditional Blackfoot history and culture would be written down. On the basis of his relationship with Mad Wolf, McClintock went on to compile his experiences among the South Peigan in his book *The Old North Trail: Life, Legends & Religion of the Blackfeet Indians*.

More recently, Blackfoot authors have also been writing down their own history. Percy Bullchild was one such author who researched and wrote about his Blackfoot origins. Percy Bullchild (1915-1986) has been described as a full-blooded Blackfoot artist and musician born on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. In his lifetime Percy collected traditional oral stories about his tribal origin and genesis as they were retold to him by his paternal grandmother Catches Last, and various other tribal elders including Yellow Kidney, Weaseltail, Herman Dusty Bull, Two Guns White Calf, Jim White Calf, Many Hides, Bear Medicine, Shortman, Lazy Boy, Shoots First, Little Plume, Percy Creighton, Heavy Breast, Calf Tail, Little Leaf, Yellow Horn. Percy eventually compiled and published the stories in his book *The Sun Came Down, The History of the World as My Blackfoot Elders Told It*.

The stories in Percy Bullchild's book which describe the Earth's beginning portray a traditional religious world view in which a primary spirit of the Blackfoot world, Creator Sun [*Naato'si* as pronounced by the Blackfoot] came down from the spirit world in the sky to create the Earth [as the Blackfoot know it] from a ball of clay made by spitting into

some space dust ¹. Creator Sun then used clay to make the first mortal life [snakes] after which he covered the earth with green grass.

Creator Sun subsequently used more clay to make the Moon [his first bride], who, in turn, bore them seven children [the seven stars in the big dipper constellation]. This was followed by a time of turmoil and tension between Creator Sun & his family and a shape shifter named Snakeman. Snakeman was finally killed by Creator Sun and his sons, after which the Moon and seven sons were sent to live in the sky. From this conflict came the many natural forces that prevail in the Blackfoot world.

Creator Sun then took Mother Earth as a second bride. Mother Earth became lonely and wanted some company, so Creator Sun again took up some clay and molded a form in his own shape, breathing life into its nostrils to create Mudman, the first male human. Mudman in turn became lonely so Creator Sun took Mudman's smallest left rib ², formed it into a composite likeness of himself, Mudman and Mother Earth, and breathed life into it to create Ribwoman. Ribwoman was the first female human and a mate for Mudman.

Creator Sun went on assisting and teaching his children how to feed and care for themselves, using more clay (or mud) to create the first buffalo for meat and the other animals in the traditional Blackfoot world. Creator Sun introduced language, and mortality in the forms of sickness and death, to his Blackfoot children in this new world.

Creator Sun then decided he needed to return to the spirit world above and be with his first family, the Moon and her seven sons. In deciding to do so, he needed someone to care for Mother Earth and her many children on earth. According to Percy Bullchild, to do this Creator Sun made a disciple called Oldman [*Náápi* as pronounced by the Blackfoot] by using a small part of his great supernatural spirit, which was formed into a likeness of Mother Earth and her children. Oldman went on to complete many of the tasks and features still needed to complete the traditional Blackfoot world, having many whimsical adventures and misadventures, often using mischief and trickster logic as he did so, traits for which Oldman was well known to the Blackfoot people.

Eventually, assisted by a young man called Scarface and his bride, Creator Sun introduced the annual sun dance ceremony to the Blackfoot so they could continue to honour Creator Sun and the many things he provides for them.

Other recorders of traditional narratives about Blackfoot genesis credited *Náápi* directly for various versions of the creation activities and other stories attributed to Creator Sun and described by Percy Bullchild. Examples of this can be found in such works as Clark Wissler & D.C. Duvall (1908:19-24), George Grinnell (1892b:137-144) and John Ewers (1958:3-6).

[Footnotes ¹ Wissler & Duvall (1908:19) recorded an early story about making the Earth in which otter, beaver, duck and muskrat dove in turn into a flood trying to obtain "earth" (clay) for *Náápi*. ² Grinnell (1892b:138) recorded an early story in which *Náápi* created both first man & woman from clay.]

In sum, this writer's foreshortened and simplified version of Percy Bullchild's account of the genesis of the Blackfoot world created by *Naato'si* and his disciple *Náápi* outlines elements of a religious world view shared by many other traditional First Nations tribal people throughout central North America.

Specific information from Blackfoot informants about their perceptions of their own traditional territory was also provided to HBC explorer Peter Fidler in 1801-02, who collected five maps drawn for him by Blackfoot and Atsina chiefs trading at Chesterfield House at the junction of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan Rivers (see Judith Beattie n.d., D.W. Moodie & Barrie Kaye 1977 and Theodore Binnema 2001). The maps (with Fidler's added notes) provide much first hand detail about the mountains, hills, rivers, tribal locations and boundaries constituting Blackfoot Confederacy territory at that time.

Overall, there is little evidence in any of the recorded Blackfoot stories for concerted migrations of Blackfoot people into their described territory from somewhere else. When asked about their origins, Blackfoot traditional story tellers themselves consistently repeat assertions they have always lived on the land they still recognize today as their home territory. Blackfoot people are adamant they have always occupied their traditional lands, stretching south from the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta to the Yellowstone River in Montana, and from the continental divide of the Rocky Mountains east to approximately 105 degrees longitude in Saskatchewan.

For example, Clark Wissler & D.C. Duvall (1908:22-23) recorded a migration story in which Oldman led people:

"... from the far north down to where the Blood Reserve now is.... (...and among these were the representatives of all the tribes now in this country. At that time the Blackfoot were just one tribe.)"

In the above story it is unclear whether "the far north" was a specific geographic reference by Wissler's & Duvall's informant(s), or whether terms such as "the far north" and "this country" described Canada and the United States generally, or traditional Blackfoot territory specifically. This writer thinks the latter.

Walter McClintock (1910:434-435) recorded a description of the Old North Trail, as told to him by Brings Down The Sun:

"There is a well known trail called The Old North Trail. It runs north and south along the Rocky Mountains. No one knows how long it has been used by the Indians. My father told me it originated in the migration of a great tribe of Indians from the distant north to the south, and all the tribes have, ever since, continued to follow in their tracks.... In many places the white man's roads and towns have obliterated the Old Trail. It forked where the city of Calgary now stands. The right fork ran into the Barren Lands as far as people live. The main trail ran south along the eastern side of the Rockies, at a uniform distance from the mountains, keeping clear of the forest, and outside of the foothills. It ran close to where the city of Helena now stands, and extended south into the country, inhabited by people with dark skins, and long hair falling over their faces (Mexico). In former times, when the Indian tribes were at war, there was constant fighting

along the North Trail. In those days, Indians, who wanted to travel in peace, avoided it and took to the [montane] forest....”

There is no indication in Brings Down The Sun’s descriptive story as to whether the Blackfoot people themselves travelled the North Trail to or from the Barren Lands, or instead were simply aware of that northern geography. In contrast, Brings Down The Sun was very specific in describing an historic Blackfoot expedition along the Old North Trail taken over a four year period south to Mexico for which he was even able to recall the names of the expedition participants.

George Grinnell offered two conflicting migration stories about the Blackfoot people. The storytellers were not identified. The first story recorded by Grinnell (1892b:137-144) describes a Blackfoot genesis in which Oldman is clearly described travelling from south to north, creating various features within traditional Blackfoot territory. (This writer’s emphasis):

“Oldman was travelling about, south of here, making the people. He came from the south, traveling north, making animals and birds as he passed along. He made the mountains, prairies, timber and brush first. So he went along, travelling northward, making things as he wentOne day Oldman determined he would make a woman and a child; so he formed them both — the woman and the child, her son — of clay. After he had moulded the clay in human shape, he said to the clay, ‘you must be people,’ and then he covered it up and left it, and went away.... The fourth morning [after checking each preceding day] he went to the place, took the covering off, looked at the images, and told them to rise and walk, and they did so.... [Oldman then carries out various activities to benefit the newly created Blackfoot people] After he had taught those people these things, he started off again, travelling north, until he came to where the Bow and Elbow rivers meet. There he made some more people, and taught them the same things. From here he again went northward. When he had come nearly to the Red Deer’s river, he reached the hill where Oldman sleeps. There he lay down and rested himself. The form of his body is to be seen there yet. When he awoke from his sleep, he travelled further northward and came to a fine hill. He climbed to the top of it, and there sat down to rest. ...This is as far as the Blackfeet followed Oldman....”

The second story recorded by Grinnell (*ibid* :177-178) is a discussion about the past and the present of the Blackfoot people, and begins with a migration story which describes a complete reversal of the previous story’s indicated direction of travel. (This writer’s emphasis):

“Long ago before the coming of the white men, they lived in another country far to the north and east, about Lesser Slave Lake, ranging between Peace River and the Saskatchewan, and having for neighbours on the north the Beaver Indians. Then the Blackfeet were timber people. It is said that about two hundred years ago the Chippewayans from the east invaded this country and drove them south and west. Whether or not this is true, it is quite certain that not many generations back the Blackfeet lived on the North Saskatchewan River and to the north of that stream. Gradually working their way westward, they at length reached the Rocky Mountains, and, finding game abundant, remained there until they obtained horses, in the very earliest years of the present [19th] century. When they secured horses and guns, they took courage and began to venture out onto the plains and to go to war....”

After reading this latter migration story one wonders if it was a personal opinion by Grinnell rather than a traditional Blackfoot story? Specific attribution by Grinnell might

have helped assess the latter story. To this writer's eye the latter story appears at odds with the various preceding stories (including that by Grinnell 1892a noted in this writer's introduction). It seems implausible that buffalo era Blackfoot storytellers in the 1880s would identify such specific extra-territorial white place names as Peace River or Lesser Slave Lake in one of their traditional stories. This latter story has some legs, because it even gained currency in modern day *Káínaa* storytelling. Sharon Oakley & Reggie Black Plume (2004:342-343) describe a long standing Anglican priest on the *Káínaa* Reserve, Archdeacon Middleton, providing a very similar tale in 1945 but with a decidedly biblical twist. However, skepticism about Grinnell's storytelling is not unique to this writer. For more thorough reviews on Grinnell's latter story, readers are referred to Clark Wissler (1910:15-18), David Smyth (2001:189-192) and Paul Raczka (2010:8-13 - latter pub. is unpaginated).

What is indisputable is that throughout their long tenure on their traditional land, *Siksiká nan* (Blackfoot), *Káínaa nan* (Blood), *Aamsskáápipikani nan* (South Peigan), *Aapátóhsipikáni nan* (North Peigan) and other tribal people in the Blackfoot Confederacy gained a fearsome reputation for ruthlessly and successfully expelling trespassers trying to take their territory and its resources from them without their permission. Blackfoot Confederacy tribes were among the last plains warrior nations to move onto reserves during the late 1800s. Aside from the cowardly and undeserved 1870 winter camp massacre of women, children, elders and smallpox victims by the U.S. Army on the Marias River in Montana, the Blackfoot people claim to have never been decisively defeated in war by anyone. Thus, they settled into reserve life with their society values and knowledge relatively intact.

Today, Blackfoot leaders like Chris McHugh of the *Siksiká* tribe will tell you their traditions and knowledge remain closely held within their traditional system of tribal societies, and this knowledge is still being used to instruct Blackfoot people about their values and to shape their society (from my 2013 unpublished notes). Another, Wilton Goodstriker of the *Káínaa* tribe, has spoken of an elder who told him their society underwent several periods of change over a very long time, and the Blackfoot society which is recognizable today began approximately 3000 years ago (again from my 2013 unpublished notes). Even today Blackfoot people remain deeply religious and conservative, with a strong self identity as Blackfoot.

Regarding recent comparative linguistic and glottochronology studies, statistical analyses have assisted linguists such as Ives Goddard (1994), Matthew Dyer (2007), Peter Bakker (2006, 2012), Peter Denny (1991) and Donald Frantz (1999) in reconstructing a proto-Algonquian language and classifying its evolution through time and space. Their emerging consensus is that a proto-Algonquian language originated on the Columbian Plateau west of the continental divide, and then migrated and evolved, moving with people from west-to-east across North America approximately 3400 years ago. Given this thesis, it becomes easier to understand how Blackfoot people could have occupied their traditional territory as early as they say they did, and become as isolated from the remaining Algonquian linguistic family as these recent studies suggest.

Regarding archaeological evidence, organized archaeology came late on the Northwestern Plains. Prior to the 20th century, known Blackfoot Confederacy territory would have been as much a spiritual as a physical landscape for Blackfoot people, likely filled with familiar, spiritually significant rock-outlined territorial markers and ritual figures, and tribally known and named geographic features and habitation places. The maps collected by Peter Fidler certainly hinted at a deeply intimate and knowledgeable relationship by the Blackfoot with their traditional territory. However, homesteading and farming practice early in the 20th century has eradicated much of the physical evidence of Blackfoot (and other tribal) territoriality by activities such as mining buffalo jumps for bone deposits and piling the historically arranged rock and cobble figures along newly established fence lines and in field corners to facilitate cultivation, before most of the rock outlines could be mapped by archaeologists. As such, relevant archaeological research wasn't carried out in a systematic way on the Northwestern Plains until the late 1950s. Not long afterward, partly due to the flourish of oil wealth and development in Alberta, and newly minted provincial and state heritage legislation in the Canadian provinces and US states in the region, archaeologists then fanned out to locate, excavate, salvage and evaluate a great many prehistoric sites.

A major issue in North American archaeology has been a persistent search for the earliest people in the new world and how First Nations people came to occupy the continent. On the Northwestern Plains much effort has been focused on finding evidence for Upper Palaeolithic "pre-Clovis migrants" traveling from Siberia and Beringia south through an ice free corridor, which was purported to open periodically between the Cordilleran and Wisconsin ice sheets during the last great ice age and trend along the East slope of the Rockies through glaciated Alberta. Despite years of intensive archaeological research no credible evidence emerged that such a migration through the region ever occurred.

The ice-free corridor theory took a sharp turn in 1979 when Knut Fladmark published a ground breaking article *Routes: Alternate Migration Corridors for Early Man in North America*, in the *Journal of American Antiquity* (44-1:55-69), proposing a Pacific Coast Migration model for early human migrants entering the new world. Suddenly there was a plausible explanation for such things as the linguistic thesis of an Algic language origin on the western Columbian Plateau and an eventual eastward dispersal of some Algonquian speaking people, such as prehistoric Blackfoot and Atsina, locating themselves essentially where they have always claimed, east of the Rockies on the Northwestern Plains.

However, theories are subject to change. Elaine Dewar in her book *Bones: Discovering the First Americans* (2001:470-496) describes a decade of field research into Mackenzie River Valley glacial history in Canada's North West Territories in the 1980s, by Geology Survey of Canada geologist Alejandra Duk-Rodkin and a team led by Owen Hughes. The Mackenzie River Valley lies north-south through the northern heart of the alleged ice free corridor region. Duk-Rodkin and her colleague Don Lemmen (2000:11-20) were able to conclusively prove no glacial corridor ever opened through the valley for human migration between 30,000 - 10,500 B.P. Dewar went on to indicate the two authors

(although not in total agreement) also raised serious doubts about the northern Pacific coast as an alternative migration route between 18,000 - 13,000 B.P. However, more recent glacial research indicates that the Hakai Passage region on the British Columbia central coast:

“... has experienced a relatively stable sea level over the last 15,000 calendar years. These findings are significant in that they indicate a relatively stable coastal environment amenable to long-term human occupation and settlement of the area....” (McLaren *et al* 2014:abstract).

In effect, this rescripting of northern glacial history eliminates the previously identified ice corridor route for Upper Palaeolithic human migration into the new world, while a northern Pacific coastal sea-going route post-15,000 years ago may have been used.

The earliest peopling of the new world has been a hot button issue among many North American archaeologists, some still defending an entrenched “Clovis-first” point of view, others defending the burgeoning “pre-Clovis migrants” point of view. Long-held theories, academic reputations and scholastic careers are all in play here, featuring disagreements over the precision of site excavation techniques and the interpretation of artifact analyses, geology, site stratigraphy, skull metrics, dating accuracy and genetic evidence. The research is further limited by the small sample size of early human fossils, poor *in situ* preservation, substandard curation, lab processing costs, tribal religious concerns, and various legislation concerning the protection and repatriation of the recovered human remains.

Even so, research advances are being made. Examples are the excavations of the Meadowcroft site in Pennsylvania, USA (Andosovio with Page 2003:146-188), Cactus Hill and Saltville sites in Virginia (*ibid* :264-271), Topper site in North Carolina (*ibid* : 271-271), Taima Taima site in Venezuela (*ibid* :202-204), Lapa Vermelha and Santana do Riacho sites in Brazil (Dewar 2001:323-328), Monte Verde site in southern Chile (Andosovio with Page 2003:207-216, Dewar 2001:71-101), possibly the Pedra Furada site in Brazil (Andosovio with Page 2003:204-207, Dewar 2001:362-364,387-391), and possibly the reported (Katz 2017) Triquet Island (EkTb-9) site on the central coast of British Columbia, being investigated by Alisha Gavreau and the Hakai Institute.

Recently, mitochondrial DNA extracted from early human remains has emerged as another avenue for research. mtDNA data and results are now often viewed as resolving early prehistoric new world human migration issues, despite the previously noted limitations, although it does have the advantage of producing scientifically derived results which can be replicated in a lab. Early examples of this work are Stone (1999), Schurr and Wallace (1999). A more recent example by Perego *et al* (2009:abstract) examined two rare Native American haplogroups, D4h3 and X2a, revealing:

“... that two almost concomitant paths of migration from Beringia led to the Paleo-Indian dispersal approximately 15–17 kya. Haplogroup D4h3 spread into the Americas along the Pacific coast, whereas X2a entered through the ice-free corridor between the Laurentide and Cordilleran ice sheets.”

As such, geneticists continue to validate both previously described migration routes, apparently derived from existing archaeological descriptions and assumptions, rather than sourcing such data from independent scientific research (i.e. Dewar 2001:114).

In another recent example Rasmussen *et al* (2014:abstract) sampled and analyzed mtDNA from a male child, C14 dated approximately 12,707 - 12,556 B.P., from a burial site (Anzick-1) in western Montana. Red ochre and an assemblage of “Clovis Complex” artifacts were associated with the child. The child’s mtDNA haplotype D4h3a is described as ancestral to new world First Nations people, showing that:

“... the gene flow from the Siberian Upper Palaeolithic Mal’ta population into Native American ancestors is also shared by the Anzick-1 individual ... before 12,600 years BP. We also show that the Anzick-1 individual is more closely related to all indigenous American populations than to any other group.”

To this writer’s knowledge, other than the Anzick-1 Clovis child, no other prehistoric human remains of this antiquity in the new world have been successfully examined for mtDNA. Geneticists do this research by comparing sampled results from living First Nations and Asian people with prehistoric samples, reasonably assuming the mtDNA haplotypes of early prehistoric people are reflected in their descendants, and describing the correlations as links between people in various new world locales and those in Palaeolithic Siberia (i.e. Dewar 2001:122). In this particular case genetic results previously obtained from the 24,000 year old remains of a child from the Mal’ta site in Siberia (Wade 2013) were apparently also compared with those of the Anzick-1 Clovis child. As such, the information provided by the Anzick-1 child find is exciting, located as it is in the southwestern corner of traditional Blackfoot territory. However, in this writer’s opinion the comparative prehistoric sample base of two individuals is very small, the time and space differences very large, while northern glaciation would have severely limited opportunities for migration and gene flow between Asia and the new world.

In sum, what this mtDNA examination has enabled us to say is that the Anzick-1 Clovis child is more closely related to living Central and South American First Nations people than any one else (this writer’s emphasis). We can also say that there is a genetic relationship between an ancient child in Siberia and the Anzick-1 Clovis child in Montana; that the two are separated by thousands of miles in distance, thousands of years in time and a significant barrier of Pleistocene glacial ice; that the relationship between the child in Montana and the tribal people in Central and South America is also separated by thousands of miles in distance and thousands of years in time; and that we have no knowledge about how these various relationships actually occurred.

In other recent research, an archaeological consensus has begun to emerge about late prehistoric period ethnicity on the Northwestern Plains, particularly in Alberta, when people occupying the region 1800 years ago began making Avonlea-style projectile points, intensively operating buffalo jumps and pounds, importing bow and arrow technology from the interior of British Columbia, and producing net-impressed, parallel grooved and cord roughened pottery. In this regard, readers are referred to Reeves (1983), Meyer and Walde (2009), Peck (2012), Vickers and Peck (2009).

As defined by archaeologists, the “Avonlea Phase” transitioned approximately 1100 years ago into “Old Woman’s Phase” occupation sites on the northwestern Plains, the latter featuring Cayley-style side-notched points, continuing intensive use of communal buffalo jumps and pounds, pervasive use of ammonite *iniskim* buffalo stones as religious charms, *Náápi* effigy cobblestone outlines, continuing use of late variant Avonlea pottery, large numbers of ceremonial cobblestone circles (e.g. “medicine wheels”) and residential cobblestone circles, cobblestone cairns, anthropomorphic petroglyphs and pictographs, and an areal site distribution closely consistent with the traditional Blackfoot territory described previously. These cultural characteristics continued into the historic period, and archaeologists have come to recognize the Old Woman’s Phase as characteristic of the prehistoric Blackfoot.

Interestingly, another type of late prehistoric site was examined and reported in 1960 deep inside traditional Blackfoot territory, the Cluny Site, an earthen fortified village located at Blackfoot Crossing on the Bow River east of Calgary. This is the only such site ever found in Alberta, or anywhere else in Blackfoot territory. All agree the Cluny site is not Blackfoot. The site is reported as *Cluny - An Ancient Fortified Village in Alberta*, by Richard Forbis, reprinted in 1977 as Occ. Paper No. 4, Dept. of Archaeology, University of Calgary.

Forbis tentatively identified the Cluny Site as a protohistoric outlier village from the Middle Missouri River in the Dakotas, dating to AD1740, based partly on oral history stories recounted by the Blackfoot elders Running Wolf and One Gun. Soon after, Cluny ceramics, stone tools, rectangular bison scapula “squash knives” and a bell-shaped cache pit were found further west by William Byrne (1973, 1978) in an open campsite called the Morkin Site in the Porcupine Hills of Alberta, a known Blackfoot wintering area. Based on his 1973 pottery analysis, Byrne labelled the Cluny artifact assemblage the “One Gun Phase”, differentiating it from the Old Woman’s Phase. Cluny ceramics are different from those found in late prehistory in both Alberta & the Middle Missouri, although some archaeologists see similarities to “Mortlach Phase” ceramics in Saskatchewan, sometimes considered to be late prehistoric Assiniboine.

The Cluny Site is being further excavated as a University of Calgary archaeology field school by Dale Walde. Walde (2013 personal communication) says the original village occupation lies below a protohistoric level and may actually date slightly earlier, say AD1700. The site features local shell & bone bead production, consumption of a great many dogs besides bison, defensive pits & ditches, Cluny (One Gun Phase) pottery, Cayley side-notched points, various stone grinding and smoothing slabs, post & earth fill structures, and evidence for a brief occupation during winter. No evidence for cultivation has ever been found.

The people at Cluny may have come to Blackfoot Crossing to trade imported corn for products such as pemmican and bison robes. Given the proclivity of the Blackfoot for efficiently eliminating trespassers, one concludes the Cluny Site existed by mutual agreement to fulfill mutual needs, trade being the most likely explanation. All indications are for a brief One Gun Phase occupation at both southern Alberta sites, with some sort

of social interaction and diffusion of new pottery styles at the time, rather than intensive intrusion into the region.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, it is fair to say that archaeologists, anthropologists, linguists and the Blackfoot haven't always agreed about Blackfoot origins and history. However, Clark Wissler, in his monumental study of Blackfoot society for the American Museum of Natural history, succinctly concluded in his *Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians* (Anthropological Papers, 1910, vol. 5-1:18):

"In general, no satisfactory evidence has come to hand that the Blackfoot ever occupied other definite territory than their historic habitat"

It is worth noting Wissler presented his research concerning Blackfoot origins and lack of migration as ethnographic information in *Material Culture*, rather than in his preceding *Mythology* volume. In this writer's opinion, Wissler remains the most complete and influential academic researcher into historic Blackfoot society in the twentieth century. His information and conclusions were based on a good working relationship at that time with traditional Blackfoot people and his translator David Charles Duvall.

When asked by this writer in 2013, some Blackfoot people at Blackfoot Crossing say the Cluny Site was a Mandan village, i.e. "... the people who lived below the ground". Others cite the Running Wolf story, saying the site was a Crow/Hidatsa village. The One Gun Phase sites are definitely intrusive, briefly occupied, possibly Mandan or Crow/Hidatsa or Assiniboine. However, nothing about the two sites suggests a major influx of Siouan people preceding the Blackfoot into Blackfoot traditional territory even during late prehistory. And as an aside, it is also worth noting that unlike many other tribal people on the plains the Blackfoot did not, and do not, eat their dogs.

Neighbouring western tribal people, such as Shoshone, interior Salish and *Ktunaxa* (Kutenai), persistently intruded into Blackfoot Confederacy territory in the 18th century (and probably earlier), but were decisively driven out with the advent of horses and guns before that century ended (Secoy 1953: 51-52). While many identifiably Siouan and eastern *Aunishanabeg* (Algonquin) people also eventually advanced onto the Northwestern Plains, this writer believes those migrations were enabled by the onset of colonialism and the historic fur trade, again with access to horses and guns.

In effect, to this writer's eye there is nothing definitive in any of the above, or in any other Blackfoot traditional stories recorded by various scholars, that defines a Blackfoot origin different from what they continue to claim today, or that they were ever preceded on the Northwestern Plains by another people. In coming to this conclusion this writer has simply attempted to follow and interpret the existing data provided by traditional Blackfoot storytellers, linguists, anthropologists, historic travellers, geneticists and archaeologists. Based on available information Blackfoot people appear to have never

migrated to or from anywhere else and to have remained on their traditional territory a very long time.

So what does one make of the story recounted by Percy Bullchild about the traditional Blackfoot world created by *Naato'si* and *Náápi*? Percy Bullchild's story of creation by *Naato'si* and *Náápi* shares several aspects with the Biblical story of creation in the *Book of Genesis* and with many First Nations' traditional stories — particularly those of Algonquian speaking tribes, eastern Siberian tribes and elsewhere — a single creator above us all, a trickster/disciple who represents fate, a primal flood, earth created from clay, celestial bodies created in the sky, first man and woman created from clay/mud/dust, animals and plants created for their/our use. Campbell (1983:236) offers various examples of the “Earth Diver” motif used in other Blackfoot origin stories and suggests the theme originated in Siberia. Thus, traditional Blackfoot origin stories are not much different from the views held by many other people around the world. What this writer finds interesting is that the Blackfoot stories are framed within the confines of their defined territory, and do not describe any continental migration in or out of their territory from another place, nor a timescale for their tenure on the land.

On the other hand, what to make of the ongoing story about early human migration in the new world? mtDNA genetic research holds great promise to provide science-based information about prehistoric people and their distribution in time and space, but as with the other classes of data discussed in this essay, there are significant limitations with mtDNA. In this writer's opinion, it is therefore important to prudently interpret the data, identifying what of the data is assumed, and what of it is scientifically derived. In doing so, we should consider the comments by Kristian Kristiansen (2017:3):

“When it comes to collaboration between genetics and archaeology, we have witnessed a transformation of relative archaeological knowledge to absolute knowledge about migrations based on the identification of genetic change and admixture. Future genetic research will undoubtedly allow much more refined characterizations of migrations and mobility patterns, but as archaeologists we need to meet the interpretative challenge to transform this new knowledge into a revised understanding of their social and historical contexts.”

And given knowledge such as the ground-truthed, science-based glacial geology data provided by Alejandra Duk-Rodkin, Don Lemmen and Duncan McLaren, archaeologists and geneticists alike will surely continue to face considerable uncertainty about the entry of the earliest people into the new world.

Seen in this light, the traditional information provided by Wilton Goodstriker is interesting. If the information could ever be reasonably corroborated by future archaeological and/or genetic research, then presumably evidence for Blackfoot people might conceivably be identified as far back as approximately 3000 years ago, a timescale roughly consistent with the linguistic interpretation noted in this essay. However, such revelations would be long odds in this writer's opinion, given the rapid, ongoing alteration of the Northwestern Plains landscape by industrial-scale agriculture. Looking beyond the published Blackfoot stories noted in this essay, a broader acceptance and a more meaningful understanding of historic Blackfoot narratives would

also be helpful (e.g. Gavreau and McLaren 2016). While at the earliest end of the scale, when humans initially entered the new world (whenever and wherever that was), this writer foresees little prospect for any other research that could credibly identify anything so specific as an early prehistoric Blackfoot people. Thus, the earliest origins of the Blackfoot will likely remain shrouded in tradition and mystery, and the questions will remain deceptively simple: who were those early people, where did they come from, when did they arrive, how would you identify anything unique to them if you found it?

Reconstruction of non-literate Aboriginal cultural histories is challenging research. Assigning ethnic identities to prehistoric people is even more problematic. Consideration of widely disparate lines of evidence are often required to reconcile the oral stories and written accounts created by people with widely differing cultural agendas. Traditional oral stories offered by one tribal group may well be considered fantasies by another unless some substantive evidence, such as archaeology, genetics and linguistics, can be found to provide collateral support for the stories. The collateral information can be difficult to verify, and researchers evaluating traditional stories about prehistoric migrations in the new world should carefully consider how, when and where Aboriginal people first came to be where they say they once were, before considering the validity of any ensuing continental migration stories. This certainly applies to any consideration of Blackfoot origins.

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