
Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Thompson, Judy, *Women's Work, Women's Art: Nineteenth-Century Northern Athapaskan Clothing*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013, 307 pages.

*Reviewer: Megan A. Smetzer
Capilano University*

Judy Thompson's *Women's Work, Women's Art* is a meticulously researched and generously illustrated capstone to a 40-year career at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC, now Canadian Museum of History). Thompson gracefully incorporates research on over 400 hide and fur garments found in museum collections worldwide, close readings of early European texts and images, historic and contemporary photographs and the judicious use of ethnographic literature, as well as oral histories and interviews with elders and other community members. These diverse sources enable Thompson to trace both the shared qualities and distinctive regional aesthetics of 19th-century Northern Athapaskan clothing just before and through the early years of European contact.

Thompson notes that 19th-century Northern Athapaskan peoples lived within the vast subarctic landscape extending from western interior Alaska to the western shore of Hudson's Bay. Within this immense territory, she focuses on the garments originating from 23 of 26 identified Athapaskan groups, across three regional divisions: South Central Alaska—Alaska Plateau, Cordillera, and Great Slave Lake—Mackenzie River.

Across these loose divisions, Thompson emphasizes women's ability to utilize the natural resources that surrounded them to create garments that were functional, spiritually imbued and aesthetically pleasing. Different hides and furs were used to construct a range of garments perfectly suited for the short, insect ridden summers and long, dark, cold winters. Although she touches on a wide range of clothing, Thompson focuses on two types of standard outfits used across this region. To the west, this outfit included a sleeved tunic with a pointed bottom hem and moccasin-trousers. To the east, the garments included a sleeved tunic with a straight hem, leggings and high moccasins. Other clothing items accompanied these outfits, which included, but was not limited to, mittens, hoods, robes and caps.

Chapter 1 is the most compelling section of the book, as Thompson explores the physical, spiritual and gendered characteristics of these garments. An extensive discussion of body adornment including jewellery, paint and hairstyles, as well

as body modifications such as facial piercings and tattoos, contributes to a deeper understanding of the rich cultural and social meanings attributed to all manner of dress. The chapter concludes with a brief examination of the impact of the fur trade and its contribution to four trends in clothing fashion. Thompson notes that to varying degrees across the subarctic, Athapaskan people retained older clothing styles, abandoned some self-adornment, incorporated clothing made from introduced materials and developed a few new indigenous styles (pp. 28–30). While Thompson attributes most of these trends to shifts in Athapaskan tastes, one wonders how pressures from traders, missionaries and other newcomers may have contributed to these changing styles.

In chapter 2, Thompson introduces the flora and fauna found in each region and how aspects of each are incorporated into both summer and winter garments. She includes techniques for the preparation of skins and furs, and diagrams on embellishment using natural materials such as seeds and porcupine quills, as well as a brief discussion of techniques for applying trade beads. In chapter 3, Thompson identifies the major clothing types and provides patterns of various items of clothing drawn by Dorothy Burnham, Thompson's colleague at the CMC through the 1990s. These chapters are materials-oriented, technical and valuable for those interested in learning historic construction techniques and decorative patterns.

The final and longest chapter explores clothing styles within the three regional divisions mentioned earlier. Each section of this chapter introduces the environmental attributes of the region as well as the people who inhabited it, discusses the primary sources used and early descriptions of the people and their clothing, and describes the specific garments with provenance attributing them to that area. It appears that the depth of information available to Thompson for each of these regions has much to do with the impact of settler colonialism. With some exceptions, the amount of documentation and extant examples of clothing almost directly opposes the westward movement of the fur trade; typically, the earlier contact occurred, the less information seems to have survived to the present. Thompson thus begins her discussion with those clothing styles that originated among the Athapaskan speaking groups in Alaska and works her way east.

The principal drawback to this work is its insularity from current discourses in material culture and museum studies. Though Thompson draws extensively from the reports of missionaries, fur traders and various government officials for the first-hand accounts and illustrations of early encounters

with Athapaskan peoples, they are not situated into a critical context. Considerations of the impact of settler colonialism are now standard approaches to these types of materials in the anthropological literature and would have enriched the reader's appreciation for what has survived despite great odds. Though Thompson includes a brief introduction to contemporary revival projects in the epilogue, there is little indication of why these practices need revival, or how communities are using projects of this sort to strengthen specific cultural identities in the face of increasing environmental and corporate threats to traditional lands. At the same time, given the recent change in name and mandate at the museum, it is quite possible that this book will be among the last of its kind from this institution, one that privileges the cultural practices of the original inhabitants of this continent over the history of settlement and conquest advocated by the current government.

The lack of critical engagement aside, Thompson's introductory statement rightly positions Athapaskan clothing as "an aspect of culture so central to a people's sense of who they are, so expressive of cultural values and a life-style that endured over centuries, [that it] merits careful study" (p. 4). In this book, Thompson accomplishes this monumental task in a way that is both accessible to a general audience through historic specificity, clear language and lavish colour illustrations, and also useful as a reference tool to those wishing to understand the physical attributes of these garments. In addition, though it is not explicitly stated, Thompson's focus is an important contribution to the ethnographic literature, as women's work is so often overlooked or marginalized as merely utilitarian rather than having significant cultural, social, economic and aesthetic value.

Susan Vincent, *Dimensions of Development: History, Community, and Change in Allpachico, Peru*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 221 pages.

Reviewer: Christiane Paponnet-Cantat
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In *Dimensions of Development*, Susan Vincent presents a historically informed ethnography of a Peruvian Highland community in the Mantaro Valley that she calls Allpachico. Drawing upon political economy and more than two decades of fieldwork experience (1984–2008), the author critically evaluates four distinct people-oriented projects implemented in the village. These development projects and practices are framed within the historical and social contexts of the region in an attempt to trace the structural implications of the uneven but complex infiltration of capitalism in the sierra. Central to her argument is that development projects consolidate capitalist patterns through differential access to external resources, increased consumerism, and greater commodification of local labour. The use of a locally specific approach enables Vincent to explore the role of the *comunidad campesina* and reveal how social differences among Allpachiqueños lead to different viewpoints on demands arising from penetrating capitalism and noncapitalist Andean cultural patterns. People's accumulated experience with intentional development generates contradictions and frustrations but also serves to negotiate and

mitigate the mixed results of external intervention in local livelihood.

Vincent starts her analysis of development by seeking to explicate a pattern of structural change that has shaped the Mantaro Valley and Central Highlands communities over a long period of hegemonic domination—first, Andean with the Huancas and the Incas; then with the Spanish and republicans. She argues that this pattern of change is a hallmark of intentional development based on a conception of Andean people as resources to be profitably exploited. Over time, the process has enabled the penetration of capitalism in the region, strengthening the political reach of the state through the transformation of governance structures. In recent decades, government downsizing and neoliberalism have led to the growth of countless NGOs to provide technical assistance. Intentionally or not, present-day development serves the capitalist economy (p. 166). Both the Peruvian state and transnational helping institutions finance programs and policies that prioritize capitalism, regardless of their local merits. A lack of meaningful consultation on community priorities prevents effective local participation. According to the author, rules and practices dictated by these external initiatives encourage both political clientelism and the infiltration of capitalist rationalities. Meanwhile, outside projects put a great deal of demand on the local population. Communities try to respond to these growing responsibilities by seeking several eclectic strategies to survive and preserve some degree of autonomy and choice. These strategies are what the author intends to explore in all their complexities.

The book has nine chapters. Each is carefully crafted, with an introduction that makes the issues to be dealt with very clear and, at the end of the chapter, a complete synthesis of what has been covered. Chapter 1, "Development in History in Peru," explains the usefulness of political economy as an approach to trace structural change and the development practices that have marked the history of Allpachico. In the second chapter, "Anthropology, Development, and Capitalism," the author sets out the concepts underpinning her theoretically tied analysis, the main actors involved in development and the relationship between anthropology and development. Chapter 3, "Somos libres? Political Structures of Development in History in the Peruvian Central Highlands," and chapter 4, "Community Development: Definition, Context, and History in Allpachico," link the current development context with pre-Colombian, Spanish and republican hegemonic projects within the region and show how domination has transformed Andean communities, indigenous identities and the sense of *comunidad* that today has become a template for collective endeavours.

In chapter 5, "To Teach a Man to Fish (and a Woman to Sew) ... Integrated Rural Development and Basic Human Needs," Vincent critically discusses three development approaches to illustrate how community-based projects have promoted local integration into capitalist markets but ignored the problems caused by market dependence. These approaches include Integrated Rural Development, Community-Based Integrated Development, and Basic Needs. To illustrate some of their contradictions, the author examines a late 1980s Multi-Need, Integrated Rural Development Project, dedicated to market production for increased local incomes. Given the political and economic instability of Peru at that time, the project was cut short and its results questionable. Project workshops were never fully functioning, and women were pushed away