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Review of *The Lipan Apaches: People of the Wind and Lightning* by Thomas A. Britten

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Lipan Apaches: People of the Wind and Lightning. By Thomas A. Britten. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009. xv + 336pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

The Lipan Apaches is the first comprehensive study of a people who were important, integral actors in the history of the Southern Plains, most especially the history of Texas. Rather than casting the Lipans as the victims of Spanish or later American conquest, this meticulously researched work brings to life Lipan history, one steeped in a “tradition of adaptation and cultural reinvention” that of necessity was constantly responding to new and often painful shifting social realities. Britten poses these questions: Who were the Lipan Apaches and under what circumstances did a tribal identity emerge? To what extent did they have control over their destiny?

To answer them, Britten uses a theoretical approach stressing dominance and resistance. He begins his analysis with an overview of Lipan culture, built on a nomadic bison-hunting economy. The Lipans abandoned their mountainous territory moving into the Texas Panhandle by the end of the seventeenth century. The three chapters covering the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century illustrate their fragile hold on their territory and a way of life that required cultural adjustments in response to conflict and adversity. The Spanish ban on the gun trade severely disadvantaged the Lipans and their ability to fend off the Comanches and Kickapoos who actively sought to dismantle their control of the buffalo trade in Texas. Perpetually pressured by Spanish encroachment into their southern territory and under constant attack by other tribes from the north, the Lipans consistently elected to “continue waging war on all fronts to defend their territory, families and independence.” The final chapter documents the collapse of a Lipan identity during the later half of the nineteenth century when their attempts to resist domination could not withstand the joint Mexican-American military campaign to eradicate them.

All in all, the *Lipan Apaches* contains much that is valuable, and the synthesis based on original documents is superb. Readers unfamiliar with the tumultuous history of Texas, however, may get lost in the myriad of details. Nevertheless, the book is an excellent scholarly work and a valuable

addition to the history of Texas and of Native Americans.

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