

Gilbert C. Din and Abraham P. Nasatir. *The Imperial Osages: Spanish-Indian Diplomacy in the Mississippi Valley*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983) 432 pp., \$39.95.

In a sixty-year career Abraham P. Nasatir collected 200,000 sheets of transcripts, photostats, and notes on the Spanish regime in the upper Mississippi Valley. His colleague Gilbert C. Din is also a student of the Spanish-Indian (primarily Osage) relations on the west bank of the Mississippi before 1808. Their study, *The Imperial Osages*, contains an excellent description of Osage culture (including the important economic role played by women), a fine examination of the impact of U.S. policy on the Osages after the demise of Spanish rule, and a good conclusion, bibliography, and index. However, the remainder of the book consists of a never-ending chronicle of Osage attacks on hunters and traders, internecine fighting between the commanders of different Spanish posts, and Spanish efforts to preserve the peace when faced with pressure from the French, English, and finally the Americans. Although the title of the work suggests that the vantage point of the Osages is a crucial consideration, the story is told from the Spanish point of view. Indian motives are little elaborated upon, and no evidence is advanced to indicate that the Osages were, indeed, “imperialists”—at least in any European sense of the word. The Osages actually controlled very little territory (in comparison with the influence of other contemporary native peoples, such as the Iroquois and Comanche). And even Spanish motives and techniques are described in an unclear way. One wonders, for example, how the “Spaniards maintained the loyalty of most of the Indians residing within their jurisdiction,” when those Europeans suffered from a “chronic scarcity in merchandise and Indian presents.” Moreover, it appears rather naive to state that “Spanish policy in Louisiana displayed a humane attitude in the treatment of the Osages” when the Spanish—few in numbers and fearing the French, English, and Americans at different times—had no other choice but to ignore Osage killings.

The Imperial Osages is essentially a chronicle of little use to non-military historians. Good analysis is often missing. The repetitiveness of the year-by-year accounts stifles interest. Complete listings of large medals, small medals, gorgets, commissions of the first class, and commissions of captains to Osages listed by Indian name and “common names” appears excessive, unless such lists serve to illustrate some point. Overall, *The Imperial Osages* reads more like a doctoral dissertation than a narrative in which the best information has been culled from the available material—which evidently the authors had at their disposal—and that presented in an illuminating contextual way.

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