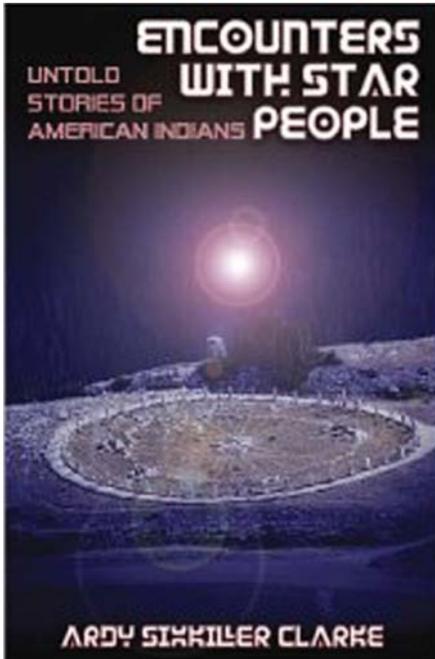


BOOK REVIEW

Encounters with Star People: Untold Stories of American Indians by Ardy Sixkiller Clarke. San Antonio, TX/ Charlottesville, VA: Anomalist Books, 2012. 191 pp. ISBN 193-3665726.

For more than 20 years Dr. Ardy Sixkiller Clarke, a professor at Montana State University (now emeritus), has interviewed American Indians (her preferred term) and recorded accounts of their experiences with UFOs. She prefaced her book with an explanation that “Star People” belong to widespread Indian traditions, some that identify the stars as the home of native peoples, others that tell of “little people” and celestial visitors that continue to interact with Indians and sometimes help them. But she intended to study modern encounters rather than folklore or “ancient astronauts.” In her travels around the country, she collected more than 1,000 UFO stories that Indian people had to tell, and now recounts a sample of firsthand narratives for readers of this book.

The cases include several close encounters by police officers, a report of a UFO hovering over a missile silo, and an ex-soldier’s account of a UFO descending on a military base and shining a harmful beam of light on a guard who drew too near. An aged man recalled the crash of a UFO, several tall aliens that survived the accident, and a second spaceship that came to their rescue. A couple came upon several mutilated cattle by the side of a road, then experienced missing time after a lighted cylindrical UFO approached. Afterward, the husband found that the barrel of his pistol had melted. Several people reported classic abduction cases with small, insect-like aliens and physical examinations, also other people held captive aboard the craft. In several cases the narrators encountered reports of apparent hybrids or Men-in-Black-like beings. Some contactee-like stories include an account of traveling to other planets, warnings that the earth was damaged, and promises that the Star People would rescue Indians and carry them to a better planet when the time of cataclysm arrived. Even stranger accounts appear—of a man who shot an alien for attempting to steal his dog, of a boy who gave his favorite marble to an alien as a gift, and of a snowplow driver in an Alaskan blizzard who gave a ride to an odd-looking being that later left the truck for a UFO hovering over the road. Some aliens disappeared into a mountainside, others were shapeshifters, passed through walls, or prevented guns from working.



These narratives are clearly a cut above the average UFO account for high strangeness. They also reflect little of traditional belief. The idea of Star People and their visits recur as an undercurrent through these accounts, but the substance belongs thoroughly in the realm of current UFO ideas. This complete dominance of extraterrestrial craft and alien visitation emerges as even more striking given the fact that half or more of Clarke's informants were elderly, the very people most likely to recall old ideas and interpret their experiences in traditional terms. One solution might be that these informants have absorbed the UFO ideas circulating in mass culture so

that the new ideas have completely replaced the old. While superficially appealing, this explanation runs up against the hard facts of Indian life. Many of the older informants lived on remote parts of reservations without electricity and without a TV, radio, or computer. These people rarely went to town or any place that they might be exposed to mass communications. Few of these older informants had access to much reading material, and in some cases they were either illiterate or relied on a grandchild to read to them. Word of mouth might compensate for these lacks, but any reader familiar with the subject cannot help but be struck by the richness of UFO motifs that fill these stories. If they were tale-tellers repeating a story they heard or constructing a yarn from parts, these narrators deserve a prize for their depth of knowledge acquired under conditions of hardship, and their skill in creating stories that fit in so deftly with other UFO accounts without merely mimicking them.

A second solution is that the expertise resides in an author who is familiar with the UFO literature and puts these stories into the mouths of the informants. No justification for this harsh verdict arises anywhere in the text. Clarke's career demonstrates a lifelong commitment to betterment of native peoples and her extended project of collecting these accounts suggests genuine interest, scholarly integrity, and a desire to provide a chance for

people to talk about experiences they have had to hide for fear of ridicule or losing their jobs. Moreover, she records some motifs without seeming to notice that they have a place within the more recondite corners of the UFO literature. She does not satisfy the reader's curiosity about the relationship between Star People traditions and modern UFO accounts, but she states that the current book is the first in a trilogy, so we can look forward perhaps to analytic treatment in the future. For now readers can acquaint themselves with a fascinating and unsuspected trove of experiential narratives, instances where ordinary people witness extraordinary things and a reminder that encounters with the unknown know no cultural boundaries. Thanks to the author for this labor of love, and to Anomalist Books for another worthy publication.

THOMAS E. BULLARD
tbullard@indiana.edu