

REVIEW

Becoming White Clay: A History and Archaeology of Jicarilla Apache Enclavement

B. Sunday Eiselt
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Becoming White Clay is a remarkable exploration of Jicarilla Apache cultural history. Examining Jicarilla history through the theoretical lens of ethnic enclavement, which describes how a minority group maintains its distinct culture and identity within a larger multi- or polyethnic context, Sunday Eiselt has produced a valuable contribution to the understanding of the pluricultural history of the Southwestern U.S. and of the Jicarilla Apaches' unique role in that history. Utilizing scholarship ranging from reconstructed proto-Apachean kinship models, documentary records, and ethnographic data before getting to Eiselt's own archaeological research, the result is quite dense but well-written and worth reading.

The first two brief chapters provide an introduction to Jicarilla history and establish the theoretical grounding for the consideration of the Jicarilla as an ethnic enclave in northern New Mexico. These chapters each begin with a vignette illustrating Jicarilla historical experiences, the first an 1885 letter from the governor of New Mexico to the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs relaying the request of a group of Jicarilla people to abandon the Mescalero Apache reservation in southern New Mexico to which they had been relocated and offering to relinquish all government annuities in exchange for the right to homestead "as white men do" back in their homeland. The second relates the experience of the Jicarilla contingent to the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, at which the representatives joined the Chiricahua Apache Geronimo and were exhibited as purported uncivilized counterpoints to the educated products of the Indian boarding schools. Taken together, the two stories illustrate the complexity of Jicarilla social and political acuity and

the limits of Western scholarship's understanding of that complexity.

The remainder of the book is organized into two parts, using a Jicarilla ritual practice as metaphor for the group's historical experiences. In preparation for raiding, Jicarilla men would paint themselves with white clay that made them invisible to their enemies; Eiselt uses this imagery to characterize Jicarilla integration into the multiethnic social, political, and economic circumstances of their upper Rio Grande region homeland. The first part, "Becoming White Clay," sets the stage for understanding Jicarilla social and political organization through an examination of southern Athapaskan prehistory and Spanish colonial historical records. The second, "Being White Clay," takes a more synchronic look at Jicarilla cultural history in the nineteenth century, during the period from the end of the Spanish colonial era to the 1887 creation of the Jicarilla Apache reservation. The book actually reads as if in three parts, with the second section comprised of two sections, a documentary-based history of the Jicarilla and their Puebloan and Hispanic neighbors, followed by Eiselt and her colleagues' own archaeological field research findings from the Río del Oso region in northern New Mexico.

Eiselt begins Part I by examining the incomplete and long-contentious evidence for Athapaskan migration from the boreal forests of the subarctic to the Southwest. In this discussion she builds upon John Ives' (1990) reconstruction of proto-Athapaskan kinship principles, making provocative arguments about how local group formation could facilitate successful long-distance migration by coherent social groups. Arguing that matrilineal residence, which was historically shared by all southern Athapaskan groups, might have had its origins early in their migration history, she also makes compelling arguments for the critical role of women in a many generations-long migration. Eiselt also does an admirable job of reviewing the historic documentation of Apachean groups following the arrival of Spanish chroniclers in the Southwest. A remarkable contribution in this section is a chart (Fig. 4.4) diagramming no fewer than 52 Southern Athabaskan groups named in documentary records from 1540 to 1840. The figure is reminiscent of Grenville

Goodwin's (1942:Map 6) classic map of Western Apache clan migrations—with some effort one can parse out the individual trajectories, but for the casual reader both illustrations serve primarily to represent how complicated Apachean history truly is. This is a valuable reminder.

The first chapter of Part II presents a useful explanation of Jicarilla cosmogeography that further reinforces our understanding of the critical role that landscapes and placemaking play in the social construction of all Apachean cultural groups (see also Basso 1996). This section relies primarily on the early twentieth century ethnographic research of Morris Opler. Though Eiselt acknowledges one anonymous Jicarilla advisor, I would like to see more evidence of consultation with and contributions from contemporary Jicarilla knowledge holders throughout the book.

After further establishing the social context of nineteenth century north-central New Mexico, the final substantive chapter of the book presents Eiselt's study of the Jicarilla and Hispano archaeology of the Río del Oso valley. This is the most readable section of the book, and the patterns of settlement and occupation, as well as the evidence of cross-cultural craft production and trade, offer compelling support for the thesis of Jicarilla enclavement.

As a fellow scholar of Apachean culture and history, it is refreshing to read a work on an Apache group that has not been the subject of extensive, recent academic attention. This book contributes immensely to our

understanding of Jicarilla Apache history, but it also provides a broader perspective on the complexities of Apachean history more generally. The popular—and unfortunately often the scholarly—imagination has long been fixated upon the last few decades of extraordinary strife between the Chiricahua Apache and Euroamerican newcomers in the 1870s and 1880s. This fixation has limited our ability to recognize the diversity of Southern Athapaskan experiences, and the many ways that Apachean, Puebloan, and other indigenous (and for nearly three centuries Spanish-descendant people) interacted, cooperated, and built a polyethnic society in the American Southwest before the concentration and removal of the various Apache groups in the later 1800s. Sunday Eiselt's book goes far toward correcting this shortcoming.

REFERENCES

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