

BOOK REVIEW



Zuni Origins: Toward a New Synthesis of Southwestern Archaeology, edited by David A. Gregory and David R. Wilcox. 624 pp., 207 illustrations, 48 tables, Foreword. The University of Arizona Press, 2008. \$75.00 (Cloth). ISBN 978-0-8165-2486-0.

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This is an impressive and, for now, unique contribution to Southwestern archaeology. Inasmuch as it weighs in at more than 500 pages spread over 22 chapters, and features contributions by an all-star lineup of scholars, one is impressed initially simply by the fact that the book exists at all. It is in many ways a very progressive effort, focusing archaeological attention on questions of cultural affiliation that are of great interest to Native American groups, in addition to academics. Yet in other ways some might see the book's approach as rather conservative, relying heavily on culture-historical frameworks that may not be well suited to the reconstruction of ancient identities.

The volume covers virtually all angles potentially relevant to the question of Zuni origins: environment, subsistence, trade, oral tradition, rock art, pottery, textiles, and more. Some of this is familiar territory, but even the summary chapters provide new data and fresh perspectives. The editors explicitly embrace a culture-historical approach, and employ (with modification) traditional culture area terms—Mogollon, Anasazi, Hohokam, etc. Greatly simplified, the working hypothesis which inspired the book was that ancestral Zuni populations became isolated in “sky islands” in the Mogollon region, setting them on a distinct cultural trajectory that culminated in the contemporary Zuni Tribe. The centerpiece to this hypothesis is the conclusion by Jane Hill (ch. 3) that the Zuni language has been a linguistic isolate for the past 8,000 years, showing only minor, recent (post-A.D., 1200) borrowing. Hill's conclusion is repeated by many chapter authors, and the editors appear to interpret the claim for long-term linguistic isolation as an indication that “Zuni” ancestors must also be identifiable as far back as 8,000 years. It is the task of searching for evidence of this antiquity to which the editors set the contributors to the volume. Clark (ch. 4) outlines the material culture signatures expected for a distinctive cultural group, but despite (or perhaps, because of) detailed consideration of the distribution of ceremonial and domestic architecture (ch. 11), perishables (ch. 16), rock art (ch. 15),

and ceramics (ch. 13), the subsequent chapter authors find no unique/coherent/bounded material culture signature for ancestral Zuni populations until very late in the game (the Pueblo III time period). Likewise, Hill herself acknowledges that the Zuni language is "not visible to the historical linguist" prior to the Late Pueblo III period.

This is a conundrum, because Hill (ch. 3) is unambiguous that the Zuni language could not have diverged within the last 1,000 years without leaving evidence of its links to other languages. Hill's resolution is to propose that the Zuni language was spoken by hunter-gatherers for the majority of its history, whose opting out of maize agriculture accounts for the language's lack of differentiation (following Bellwood's ideas about the relationship between food production and language change). The broad territory covered by hunter-gatherer Zuni language speakers was presumably whittled down by agriculturalists over time, so that when the remaining Zuni speakers committed to agriculture relatively late in prehistory (possibly as late as the Pueblo III period), they were surrounded by other long-entrenched language families. This scenario still requires some demographic gymnastics, since evidence for maize agriculture in the Zuni heartland is early (2000 B.C.) and convincing (ch. 8). It also requires us to assume the existence of a distinct hunter-gatherer population in the area of interest, for which there is currently little direct evidence. Thus, the people who introduced the Zuni language to the Zuni area must have immigrated to and become dominant in a region already occupied by agriculturalists, who presumably spoke a different language. This occurred despite the immigrants' apparent minority status within the region, given Kintigh's (ch. 18) conclusion that "it is far from clear that migrants made up a large component of the Zuni population." Even more intriguing, this joint/hybrid population, some of which had only recently converted to agriculture, others of which had only recently adopted a new language, then proceeded to "set the pace" for Pueblo IV-style aggregation, building large, preplanned, plaza-oriented villages earlier than any other region of the northern Southwest (as early as the A.D. 1270s).

This is a provocative scenario which bears further scrutiny. It is also possible, however, that the editors have too readily assumed the convergence of language and culture. There is no reason to assume—and considerable empirical evidence, much of it assembled in this volume, to doubt—that the speakers of the Zuni language maintained continuity in any other meaningful (or at least, archaeologically visible) cultural attributes other than language over most of the past 8,000 years. The fact of the persistence of the Zuni language is not necessarily evidence of the persistence, or even existence, of a "Zuni" culture or identity. Hence the tension in the volume—noted by a few of the contributors (especially Mills, ch. 13)—between the goals and methods set out by the editors. This tension is commented on quite nicely by Stephen Kowalewski in his discussant chapter, who makes a provocative assertion of his own: that this volume, though it set out

to resolve the question of "Zuni origins," not only fails to answer this question but "effectively demolish[es] prehistoric cultural affiliation (Who were these people?) as a scientific concept." In other words, the unprecedented application of archaeological firepower to the question of Zuni origins has resulted in a compilation of distributional evidence so convincingly non-isomorphic that it calls into question the legitimacy of the entire "cultural affiliation" enterprise.

All of which is to say that this is a wonderfully thought-provoking volume. The data assembled between its covers offer something of interest for everyone; a particularly notable contribution is the Coalescent Communities Database (ch. 12), which permits pan-Southwestern demographic patterns to be modeled as never before. The book's distributional maps—of people, goods, language families, migrations, etc.—will be grist for countless productive debates and conversations. This book establishes a new point of reference in archaeology, and its existence requires responses to the fundamental issues it raises. Can we answer questions of cultural affiliation? Should we try? If so, how should these questions be phrased? What are the proper units of analysis and cultural identity? The editors of *Zuni Origins* are to be commended for presenting their approach clearly and thoroughly. It will be exciting to see what "next steps" this volume inspires.