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Weaving the Dance: Navajo Yeibichai Textiles (1910-1950). By Rebecca M. Valette and Jean-Paul Valette.

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to reference his sources. Rather, the reader must flip to the lengthy source notes at the back of the book to identify where he got his information.

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**Weaving the Dance: Navajo Yeibichai Textiles (1910–1950).** By Rebecca M. Valette and Jean-Paul Valette. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2000. 72 pages. \$19.95 paper.

This exhibition catalog/book attempts to provide information on figures woven into Navajo textiles between 1910 and 1950. Many of the textiles are presented for public viewing for the first time in this work. Each figure presented is in need of cultural analysis to give appropriate perspective and legitimacy.

This book is certainly one of a handful that continues to document work on warp and weft count. There is a desperate need to fold in more accurate cultural information, which is generally missing in books about “Other” cultures. In that sense, *Weaving the Dance* is in need of many clarifications and explanations. As with any book not authored by a member of the community, it leaves many questions unanswered and/or perpetuates misinformation.

The key problem in need of explanation is the difference between *Yei* and *Yeibichai*. The *Yeis* presented in this literature are the woven figures, which serve as symbolic representations of the Holy People. They are not *the* Holy People, however. Within Navajo culture, it is considered impossible to actually depict the Holy People. For clarity, *Yeibichai* are the Holy People’s maternal grandchildren. As mentioned in the book, Navajo men impersonate the *Yeis* as *Yeibichai* dancers. The root word *-chai* is the Navajo term used to address a maternal grandfather or the way an older person may address a specific clan-related maternal male grandchild.

In Nightway Ceremony, Navajo males are representatives of the Holy People (*Yei*). Not just any Navajo man can become a *Yeibichai*, however. One has to be called to it by the Holy People and it requires a lengthy initiation process. In the ceremonies, these men are elevated above the human status they occupy when they are not participating in winter ceremonies. They are treated differently, and thus are not called by their birth (Navajo name) or individual given (English) names. For example, a woman whose spouse is a *Yeibichai* dancer does not address him as her spouse, but as her grandfather.

Since religion is generally understood to be a male domain in various cultures around the world, only Navajo men were permitted to participate in Navajo ceremonies. This was true into the early part of the twentieth century. Women were not permitted to participate in any part of a Navajo ceremony since they have natural power (menstruation) that would disrupt a ceremony. They were not considered to be dangerous or evil (p. 28). It is still thought that their natural power would supersede manmade power (religion). Women were not active participates in Nightway and other Navajo cere-

monies, but it was not due to a “lack of appropriate training” (p. 28), as mentioned in this publication.

Also, biological male persons were used to represent women in these ceremonies. A specific type of male person who occupied a cross-gendered role was utilized. Within the culture they were understood to be *nadleeh*. A *nadleeh* is a male person who is in a constant state of change (my translation). These people are generally referred to as hermaphrodites, as well.

In several places, the book notes that there was an absence of women dancers in the textiles of the 1930s. That was the time when many of the *nadleeh* people were forced underground within the culture, mainly due to the infiltration of Western education and full force Christianization movements. The culture had to remove the *nadleeh* people from Navajo society, since they countered the Western ideology of human life. These people and their ways of life never resurfaced to reclaim their positions in the Navajo world.

There are several minor errors in the book that might have been avoided with keen research. For example, Fort Wingate is actually in New Mexico, not in Arizona as the authors attest (p. 9), and the San Juan River is in the northwest region of New Mexico, not the northeastern, as mentioned in Part One (p. 6). In addition, the authors state that, “The most powerful rite in the ceremony is the sandpainting. . .” (p. 8). Actually, the stories accompanying the songs are the most powerful according to the various Navajo medicine people I have worked with for many years. This cultural ideology is based on the importance of the language, since words and songs constructed the existence of the holy deities and the Navajo people. Language is one of the four basic elements of Navajo creation stories.

Furthermore, not all Navajo rituals include sand paintings (only a handful do, in fact). This type of misinformation continues the generalization and occasional dismissal of indigenous practices and is peppered throughout this and other books. It is not only present in *Weaving the Dance*, but also in practices commonly accepted (and expected?) by people who “study” indigenous cultures.

There are other generalizations made which beg for further elucidation, but cannot be accommodated in this review. To provide just a few examples, the authors’ statement that, “the figure of the god-impersonators are accurately represented” (p. 11) does not necessarily mean that they are culturally accurate, but that they are considered accurate through filtered lenses. In this case, the dresses are missing from the female representatives for a few reasons, briefly mentioned above. The artist might have dismissed the addition to eliminate the confusion of seeing men dressed in women’s clothing.

During and before 1860, Navajo textiles were woven for domestic uses as clothing, blankets, and trading. Since the 1880s, due to lower costs of Navajo textiles, they were produced in quantities to fulfill the need of European-American households, especially on the East Coast. At that time, Navajo textiles began replacing the more expensive textiles imported from elsewhere. Because these buyers placed Navajo textiles on the floors of their households, the English term *rug* was applied to Navajo textiles.

It is further stated that “the textiles are non-representational” (p. 5). From a Navajo perspective, Navajo textiles have always been representational

of various ceremonies. The act of weaving is not simply about putting designs onto a loom; weaving is done with various symbols, which have lost their cultural meanings due to centuries of enculturation and acculturation. In the process, weavers interpreted and acquired views on aesthetic, economic, political, and social changes that then showed themselves in their weavings. During the nineteenth century and earlier, all Navajo textiles had a religious ceremony symbol intertwined with them, but general cultural knowledge of such symbols has been displaced through time, due mostly to the continual cultural loss the Navajo are experiencing.

Of course, many of my questions on this book circulate around Navajo weaving and the broader cultural understanding of indigenous art. As a weaver for the past twenty-five-plus years, the current Navajo weavers view their work more as an art than anything else. Navajo textile weaving is commonly referred to here and elsewhere as craft (p. 4). In art theory, craft is attributed to the manual labor involved and which is thought to involve limited intellectual thought process or creativity skills.

It is certainly time to move away from the continuous commodification of Native art, which has been overanalyzed for decades. It is the twenty-first century and works on color and weft/warp analyses still are published in abundance. There is a desperate need for specific tribal and cultural analysis of textiles and other art by Native people, since they will utilize the outcome of the work and not shelf the results.

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**Where the Two Roads Meet.** By Christopher Vecsey. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999. 400 pages. \$40.00 cloth.

Christopher Vecsey's *Where the Two Roads Meet* is the third and final volume of his historically comprehensive series *American Indian Catholics*. Volume one, *On the Padre's Trail* (1996), treats Spanish Catholicism among Native Mexican peoples, the Pueblos of the Mexican-American Southwest, and Indian Catholicism in California. Volume two, *The Paths of Kateri's Kin* (1997), focuses on French Catholicism's effects on seventeenth-century Algonkians and Iroquoians, the history and contemporary character of Catholicism for those peoples and for the Muskogean of the Southeast, and it examines the trajectory of Catholicism in the Pacific Northwest. Similarly, *Where the Two Roads Meet* combines a historical analysis of the development of Catholicism among the Sioux, a careful reading of American Indian missiology, and a detailed study of Indian Catholicism in general in the period after World War II. All three volumes consolidate what is known about the historical and ongoing Native American-Catholic encounter.

Although all three volumes share a similar structure, *Where the Two Roads Meet* best expresses Vecsey's intent of reconstructing religious history as a way of understanding contemporary forms of Indian Catholicism. In a number of