

doing so include consulting with contemporary Indigenous scholars and constructing narratives that transgress the precolonial/colonial divide. With a turn toward history, new possibilities abound for seeing the Southeastern Native past as eventful as our own time.

*Creation Stories: Landscapes and the Human Imagination.* ANTHONY AVENI. 2021. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. xii + 220 pp. \$26.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-30025-124-1.

Reviewed by Gabrielle Vail, University of North Carolina

This engaging companion to Anthony Aveni's *Star Stories: Constellations and People* (2019) "celebrates the audacity of the human imagination" (p. xi) through creation stories from 22 cultures spanning over 2,500 years of human history. What links these stories, as Aveni demonstrates, is an emphasis on the natural world and a desire to make sense of its rhythms and how the world and the beings that inhabit it came to be. Rejecting the notion that the stories told are myths in the sense of fabrications, Aveni instead counters that what makes these stories different from those recounted by contemporary Western astronomers is that they include living participants whose actions play a key role in the progression of the narrative. Derived from careful observations of the natural world, creation myths explore the role of people as "mediators in a powerful universal discourse" (p. 11).

Rather than taking a more traditional perspective, Aveni focuses on the experience of the storyteller in relation to the landscape, which he characterizes as a dynamic interaction of land, sky, and people. These ideas resonate with those expressed in Leslie Marmon Silko's essay "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories" (*Antaeus* 57, 1986; reprinted in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Simon and Schuster, 1996). Silko (1996:37) cites the importance of landscape-based narratives in "[delineating] the complexities of the relationship that human beings must maintain with the surrounding natural world if they hope to survive." Landscape and, in particular, the type of landscape in which each story takes place—mountains, waterways, caves, islands, or extreme environments—guides the organization of the book.

Much of the volume focuses on the Americas, with stories ranging from the far northern extremes (inhabited by the Inuit) to Tierra del Fuego. Other narratives from North American Indigenous peoples include those told by the Diné/Navajo (Mountains), the Tlingit

(Waterways), and the Cherokee and Haudenosaunee, grouped with the Hawaiian and other islanders because they envision their homeland as "Turtle Island." Latin America is represented by Aztec, Andean, and Amazonian narratives related to mountains, and others pertaining to caves told by the K'iche' Maya and Inca. These stories are paired with narratives from cultures worldwide inhabiting mountainous terrain (Greece, China), river deltas (Tigris-Euphrates, Nile, and Inner Niger), karstic landscapes (southwest Australia), islands (Polynesia, Japan, Dobu), and extreme environments (the Norse culture inhabiting Scandinavia and the North Atlantic).

This organizational structure allows Aveni to preface each section with an overview of how certain landscapes impacted the lives of the people living there, and how that was manifested in their origin stories. The Navajo homeland, Dinétah, for example, is bounded by four directional mountains and delineated by the path of the sun and stars across the sky. The creation story focuses on finding balance within this landscape, which oscillates between order and chaos. Contributing to the latter is the Coyote trickster—one of several trickster figures in Native American creation narratives Aveni explores. He notes that they sometimes function as creator (e.g., the god Maui, who created the Hawaiian Islands) and sometimes transformer (e.g., the Tlingit Raven), but that they invariably use deception and humor to highlight the conflicting sides of human nature.

Other tricksters include the Hero Twins in the Maya creation story, who defeat the underworld lords through trickery. Twins commonly appear in origin myths; Sapling and Flint in the Haudenosaunee story serve as yet another example. Rather than being seen in terms of "good" and "evil," as they are sometimes characterized, they instead—like Coyote—epitomize the human impulses toward order/creation and disorder/destruction that must continually be balanced.

*Creation Stories* closes with a fifth-century BC Greek creation myth, which Aveni describes as a "parent of today's scientific stories of creation" (p. 23; italics added). Placing it alongside other origin narratives provides a reminder that all such stories are rooted in cultural traditions and serve an important function for their listeners: "Through the stories," Silko (1996:30) writes, "we hear who we are." Aveni's narrative challenges us to beware of simple dichotomies by demonstrating that "myth" and "science" together "contribute to our ever-changing understanding of the phenomena that shape our experiences in the world" (p. 11).

This attractively illustrated volume, with its informative endnotes, offers an insightful glimpse of how multiple peoples, at different times and places,

answered the profound questions surrounding human existence and that of the universe. Its richness stems from its exploration of this universal theme in all of its complexity, penned by a prolific scholar whose writings continue to ask probing questions and tackle issues of relevance to society today.

*Agent of Change: The Deposition and Manipulation of Ash in the Past.* BARBARA J. ROTH and E. CHARLES ADAMS, editors. 2021. Berghahn Books, New York. xi + 242 pp. \$120.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-80073-036-6. \$29.95 (e-book), ISBN 978-1-80073-037-3.

*Reviewed by* Ruth M. Van Dyke, Binghamton University, State University of New York

Some decades ago, my first archaeological excavation in the US Southwest involved a pueblo room filled with lenses of ash replete with restorable vessels, projectile points, and articulated fauna. At the time, we interpreted these materials to represent Schifferian “secondary refuse”; we assumed the ash itself represented nothing more than detritus from cooking hearths. It would be fascinating to revisit this assemblage in light of the issues raised in Barbara J. Roth and E. Charles Adams’s edited volume, which focuses on the ritual uses and meanings of ash deposits in Indigenous North America. Ash and fire are “universal elements of human society” (p. 2), and the book’s contributors are engaged in revisiting and reevaluating the common presence of ash in archaeological contexts. Through case studies that are well grounded in ethnographic literature, the book’s authors convincingly argue that ash deposits often do not represent secondary refuse. Rather, ancient peoples intentionally deployed ash to effect transformations, protections, and connections across time.

Although none of the authors take an explicitly phenomenological stance, all of them are thinking creatively about the ways fire and its byproducts (heat, light, ash) affect the human experience. Because ash is created through the transformation of another material (wood), and because many ancient structures contained wooden elements, it is not surprising that many ancient peoples used ash for structural closure and renewal. This interpretation figures prominently in case studies presented by Adams as well as Samantha G. Fladd et alia (Homolov’i area, northeastern Arizona), Roth (Mimbres Mogollon), Susan C. Ryan (Mesa Verde region), and Anna Marie Prentiss et alia (British Columbia). Intentionally deposited ash lenses, smoke, and fire are associated with power

and with change and continuity through time in case studies presented by Melissa R. Baltus and Sarah E. Baires (Cahokia), Marvin Kay (Caddo), and Christopher B. Rodning (Cherokee). Chapters by Michael A. Adler (northern Rio Grande), William Fox (Iroquois), and William H. Walker and Judy Berryman (southwest New Mexico) focus on ash used for protection and for medicinal purposes. For Cheryl Claassen (US Southeast, Great Basin) and James L. Fitzsimmons (Maya), ash lenses indicate specific kinds of practices (fertility, purification, the feeding of gods) not commonly considered by archaeologists. Other materials found associated with ash (turquoise, projectile points, faunal remains) also get closer scrutiny. All the case studies are interesting and well written; all contain complementary and overlapping ideas. The introductory chapter contains a helpful overview and table describing the ways chapter authors found ash to be used, along with archaeological and ethnographic/historic examples.

It is difficult to know whether any particular ash lens represents an intentional deposit—as a result, authors generally rely on aggregate data to show that past peoples’ ash use was patterned. Here, Ryan’s contribution is particularly effective. She uses Crow Canyon’s extensive site database to demonstrate that ash found in Mesa Verde-region hearths is unlikely to be simply the result of the occupants’ last meal—rather, inhabitants deposited ash and other materials to decommitment the features. Another standout chapter is Claassen’s discussion of ash, ground stone, and textile deposits from dry caves in the US Southeast and the Great Basin. She argues that these sites may represent women’s shelters, where women (in addition to carrying out gender-specific tasks) repeatedly burned bloody menstrual materials.

Like many edited volumes, the book reads unevenly. Authors call on a diverse range of theoretical perspectives, from “symbolism” (Fladd et al.) to animate “bundling” (Baltus and Baires) to a rather unconvincing marriage of behavioral archaeology with Gell and Latour (Walker and Berryman). In the six chapters focused on cases from the US Southwest (and, indeed, in several other chapters), authors repeat the same strings of references, ethnographic examples, and general arguments. As a result, almost any of the book’s chapters could easily be read as a stand-alone (which is both a strength and a weakness of the volume). At the book’s end, I found myself wishing for a deeper attempt at synthesis and comparison across time and space. Should ash deposition as a closure practice be considered part of a broader package of ideas (e.g., color symbolism, directional cosmographies) shared across North America (as Fladd et al.