

## BOOK REVIEW



### *Uncovering Identity in Mortuary Analysis: Community-Sensitive Methods for Identifying Group Affiliation in Historical Cemeteries*

Edited by Michael P. Heilen. 311 pp., 8.5 x 11, Acknowledgments, Index, References Cited. Left Coast Press, Inc., Walnut Creek, CA. 2012. 311 pp. ISBN 978-1-61132-184-5

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Determination of cultural affiliation is the primary responsibility of institutions controlling Native American human and material remains covered under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), and it has become one of the principle concerns behind archaeological documentation in the 21st century. Applications of the law and the ethical ethos behind it have modified traditional approaches to mortuary archaeology. An outstanding example of this direction is *Uncovering Identity in Mortuary Analysis: Community-Sensitive Methods for Identifying Group Affiliation in Historical Cemeteries*, edited by Michael P. Heilen.

*Uncovering Identity in Mortuary Analysis* presents the background, theoretical and methodological approaches, and findings of the Joint Courts Complex Archaeological Project (JCCAP), the excavation and analysis of a large and ethnically diverse historic cemetery in downtown Tucson, Arizona. The Alameda-Stone cemetery was in use from the late 1850's to 1875 when it was closed after being engulfed by the expanding population and a new cemetery was opened on the "outskirts" of town. The cemetery would have originally contained the remains of nearly 2,000 individuals of diverse cultural and biological backgrounds from the frontier town. Excavation lasted for two years (2006–2008) and documented 1,386 individuals. The unique contribution of the project—and this volume—is the concerted focus on "identity" and consideration of cultural sensitivity as guiding paradigms in both its construction and execution.

The JCCAP project was funded by a county bond and, therefore, shaped by state rather than federal law. Consultation with potential descendent communities was the guiding force from the first steps to the closing repatriations of

remains and involved diverse groups such as several Native American tribes, the US Army, the Catholic Dioceses of Tucson, *Los Descendientes del Presidio de Tucson*, and several social orders. The primary concern for all involved was the reconstruction of identity from mortuary contexts to facilitate the final disposition of the remains recovered. This was accomplished by 1) establishing lineal descent or 2) estimating cultural affinity based on three equal lines of evidence (contextual, biological, and historical).

*Uncovering Identity in Mortuary Analysis* contains eight chapters that present summaries from the extensive project report series published by SRI Press, specifically focusing on the reconstruction of identity through mortuary contexts. The first three chapters cover background for the project, cemetery, and the theoretical and methodological approach to reconstructing identity and assessing cultural affinity. Chapters four through six present the major findings of the project and describe life, death, and burial in historic Tucson during the cemetery's use-life. The final two chapters provide a dynamic comparative, theoretical, and methodological framework for the results of the project and its potential application to future archaeological projects that would deal with potentially multi-ethnic cemeteries.

Overall, this volume's scholarship and data are on par with any quality edited volume, and I would not hesitate to recommend it to professionals and advanced students who have a specific interest in its thematic approach or project-specific information. Of particular interest are its contributions to an identity-based approach and culturally sensitive framework. The contributors do a good job of sustaining the central themes across the chapters and in considering the issues in local, regional, and even national scales. There are a few critiques that I have, however. There are some minor issues with writing style that detract from reading in a few of the chapters; specifically with repetitive text. There is a significant discord in the methodological intent as it was outlined versus how it was executed in the project. The most glaring is in the stated desire to establish, and give precedence to, lineal descent when plausible. There were certainly several cases in the cemetery where an individual could have been positively identified, but were instead assigned a cultural affinity and returned without a name. With "identity" as the guiding paradigm, the ethics of determining identity would encourage one to bring it to its furthest reasonable conclusion. Nevertheless, in the larger scheme of the volume's rationale and objectives, these are minor considerations and do not, in the end, detract from its value.

In sum, *Uncovering Identity in Mortuary Analysis* is an excellent volume that describes a unique case study and provides a model for other archaeological projects dealing with documentation of a multi-ethnic historic cemetery. I recommend it for professionals that deal with issues of cultural affiliation and anthropological ethics, archaeologists and historians concerned with this time period

regionally, and bioarchaeologists and archaeologists who document and investigate mortuary features. It combines a corpus of theoretical and methodological applications within a single project and is a significant contribution to identity in mortuary analysis.

