

**NATIVE AMERICAN
LANDSCAPES**

**An
Engendered
Perspective**

**Edited by
Cheryl Claassen**

This collection of essays focuses on what Cheryl Claassen terms the “multi-vocal” landscape—the idea that different groups and genders look upon the same natural features but perceive different meanings and potential in what they are seeing. Through ten chapters, various contributors showcase the ways in which native peoples see, and interact with, the natural world. At the heart of this book is the idea that Europeans associated nature with the feminine and saw the natural world as a passive frontier to be dominated. Native Americans, however, looked at landscape differently. They saw nature as a place in which to engage in complex negotiations between spirits and humans. This approach to nature cemented a relationship to the land based more on a partnership rather than subjugation.

These essays deepen our understanding of the interaction between native people and the land. While other books focus on the gendered gaze of European men upon the landscape, this collection emphasizes that native men and native women looked upon natural formations and constructed landscapes differently from one another, a difference in perception that is important for archaeologists and anthropologists to understand. While there have been advances toward admitting this more complex view in the rest of the

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world, *Native American Landscapes* is the first to focus on how native men and women viewed the world around them.

Native American Landscapes is organized by region, taking readers across the country from the rock shelters of the Cumberland Plateau, in the east, to the Mojave Desert and the Mexican Gulf Coast, then north to what is now British Columbia and farther west to Hawaii. Readers of this collection, through a study of creation myths, vision quests, fertility shrines, and other ritualized uses of landscape, will learn more about the land and about humans’ perception of our natural surroundings, which forms the bedrock of our present relationship with the natural world.

CHERYL CLAASSEN is professor of anthropology at Appalachian State University. She is the author or editor of six books on Native American prehistory, including *Feasting with Shellfish in the Southern Ohio Valley*; *Shells, Rituals, and Beliefs in Archaic North America*; and *Women in Prehistory: North America and Mesoamerica*.

Jacket design: Kelly Gray.

Jacket photo: Okotoks Rock, split and halted by Napi’s friends as it chased him. Photo by Alice Kehoe.

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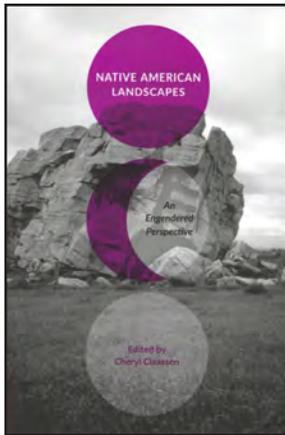


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Native American Landscapes: An Engendered Perspective

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Reviewed by Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan, and Associate, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

Cheryl Claassen has edited a provocative and stimulating volume that critiques androcentric constructions of prehistoric landscapes from a male gaze and instead analyzes differences and relationships between women's and men's taskscapes, storiscapes, ritescapes, and perceptions of landscapes. The nine chapters are divided into three geographical sections covering the Mid-continent, the Plains, and the Gulf Coast and Western US, including Mesoamerica and Hawaii. Claassen's introduction begins with the feminist exposé (also summarized in Chapter 9) of the origin of the word 'landscape' in men's androcentric paintings of land and sea as feminized, passive, docile and subjective, which Claassen contrasts with the Native American view of landscapes as active. Archaeological landscape studies are critiqued for nearly all being ungendered, while actually stripping out women and focusing on men's perceptions, uses, meanings and creation of landscapes. Claassen explains how this viewpoint is due to the projection of the Western gendered private/public divide involving the assumptions that women stayed at home while only men roamed landscapes because they were dangerous. She points out that these assumptions have led archaeologists to recognize men's sites and family sites but not women's sites, aside from home bases. Claassen traces the woman-at-home ideology to Joan Gero (1985), but this critique was first discussed by Sally Linton Slocum (1975). Claassen also erroneously claims that only one previous landscape study analyzed how gendered social groups perceived and created landscapes, overlooking Sherene Baugher and Suzanne Spencer-Wood's 2010 edited volume *Archaeology and Preservation of Gendered Landscapes*, which includes two particularly relevant chapters by Robert Venables and by Kathleen Allen, who analyze Native American gendered taskscapes.

This volume takes a remedial feminist perspective in critiquing the dominant androcentric interpretations of landscapes and focusing predominantly on women's perceptions of, and relationships to, landscapes. Men are also included in this book, albeit sometimes in less detail than women. Chapters 3, 6, and 8 present male characters in storiscapes that demonstrate a gendered gaze. Claassen's introduction frames the book's focus as gender rather than sex, but relates the construction of gendered gazes to "sexed landscape features" that represent geographical places and areas as either feminine or masculine. Some landscape features represent parts of female bodies, including sexual parts. Claassen's introduction defends the etic interpretation of gender differences in views and uses of landscapes even for the Blackfeet that have no word for gender, according to Kehoe's chapter. It also provides background about the development of gendered gazes on land-

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scapes through gendered cosmologies and origin myths about women's and goddesses' actions and bodies that formed the earth, and about women's and men's identification of spiritual landscape features that become places of ritual. It further discusses other examples of ways taskscapes, storyscapes and ritescapes lead to the development of gendered gazes across landscapes involved in formation of gender identities.

The introduction indicates some limiting assumptions of this volume. While challenging the androcentrism in the stereotypes of stay-at-home private women with evidence of women's use of nearby and distant landscapes, the vast majority of chapters base interpretations of landscape features on the assumption that women were gatherers or farmers and men were hunters. This is the primary division of labor in the vast majority of modern hunter-gatherer groups, but women also usually travel across landscapes to trap or hunt smaller game and also collect shellfish. Claassen holds a dualistic vision of gender that considers the different views, uses, and meanings of "multivocal" landscapes held by women and men, albeit with variations due to different ages and social positions. Claassen only considers third genders as cross-overs by men to women's roles. Nor is it overtly discussed that both genders can share the same view or construction of meaning of landscapes in some cases, although some chapters, including the introduction, discuss gendered myths and stories about landscapes that were shared by entire cultures. The focus is on how myths and stories lead to gendered gazes across landscapes and the formation of gendered identities from taskscapes, storyscapes and ritescapes. Claassen's introduction mentions that all people move through, use, see, hear, and create meanings of landscapes, yet the gazes of girls and boys of different ages in perceiving landscapes are not discussed in any depth, and children are typically only considered from the perspective of adults.

In Chapter 1 Claassen provides artifactual evidence from sites in the Cumberland and Ozark escarpments where women travelled across landscapes to visit "bleeding rocks" that leach red ochre, boulders and crevices used as fertility shrines, and to live and work together at times in rock shelters used for women's retreats during menstruation and birth, as well as for processing nuts in some cases. Based on historic practices of groups in California and Iowa, clusters of bedrock mortars and pitted rocks are interpreted as pecked to produce the sound of thunder for rain-calling, which implicitly references fertility. Claassen makes the androcentric assumption without evidence that male priests performed rituals deep in caves.

In Chapter 2 Jay Franklin, Lucinda Langston, and Meagan Dennison state that the evidence they found of bedrock mortar holes at sites without rock art indicates that they were artifacts of women's taskscapes for processing nuts rather than ritual sites, although they admit that the evidence of subsistence use of the mortar holes does not preclude social use at the same time. This chapter addresses limitations in the *chaîne opératoire* approach by addressing human interactions with changing environments that increased women's roles in providing food, resulting in matriarchal cultures.

Chapter 3, by James Duncan and Carol Diaz-Granados, genders mythology in rock art connected with landscapes of economic exchange by the Dhegihan along the Mississippi River between the Missouri and Ohio rivers. The myths depicted in rock art

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were interpreted from ethnographic sources. While this chapter focusses on the spiritual and economic contributions of women, the myths also include the exploits of men. Women and men made pilgrimages across landscapes to sites of rock paintings depicting these myths and there acquired nearby minerals, exchanged gifts of exotic crafted ritual objects, and engaged in rituals of fasting and vision quests. Although the high status of elite women is pointed out, it is difficult not to view them as subordinate to the men who exchanged them in marriage alliances for warfare.

In Chapter 4 Natalie Mueller and Gayle Fritz discuss, within the context of Mississippian women's farming that altered landscapes and ecology, how women manufactured, distributed and sometimes broke and "killed" flint-clay "fertility" statues and Kneeling Woman effigy vessels. It is argued that the statues represent the grandmother myth rather than the traditional interpretations of maize goddesses, corn mother, or earth goddess. Long distance travel by women is indicated by the wide geographical spread of corn and the grandmother myth, and probable pilgrimages to boulder and rock shelter fertility shrines near the source of the flint clay in cedar groves of the Missouri Ozark mountains. Ritual buildings with statues and unusual artifacts, which were removed from main areas of a settlement, were interpreted as possible women's houses for menstrual and/or birth seclusion. This remedial feminist chapter focusses on women's roles, just noting that many figurines depict male or neuter persons.

In Chapter 5 Mavis and John Greer analyze 19th-century diaries of white male traders in northeast Montana who married Native American women and recorded their tribal mourning ceremonies, leading to the argument that women travelled great distances to visit the Indian Lake Medicine Boulder and Monument Boulder as fertility shrines. The boulders are inscribed with symbols that have been connected with women's fertility. These boulders suggest that Native American women "kept alive the ritualized landscape of their ancestors."

In Chapter 6 Alice Kehoe argues that among the Blackfoot generation or age was more important than gender, and found that this Algonkian language, and thus probably others, is not gendered with male and female suffixes on words, as linguists thought it was. Kehoe critiques the belief of whites in a pan-Indian Mother Earth deity, pointing to the unreliable source of this idea. She argues that the Blackfoot have not constructed gender as an oppositional dichotomy, but the bush was considered men's territory and camps were considered women's territory, a dichotomization of space that has been critiqued by feminist prehistorians as not universal or even true because women's gathering takes them away from camp into landscapes sometimes at great distances. Further, Kehoe recounts stories of women as well as men roaming landscapes and encountering small bison-shaped rocks that are believed to call both women and men to take them and bring them to camp.

In Chapter 7 Barbara Roth discusses differences between prehistoric men's and women's views of the Mojave desert landscape based on their different taskscapes, and suggests that a gendered gaze on the landscape is a useful starting point to identify where sites would be located. Using a direct historical approach, Roth posits that men made tools (contra Gero 1991), hunted and fished, but antelope and jackrabbit were

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hunted communally by both genders, and women trapped small game and gathered plants that formed most of the diet.

In Chapter 8 Jessica Christie compares storyscapes of the 19th-century patriarchal chiefdoms of the Northwest Coast and Hawaii, finding that in both places predominantly male ancestors roam storyscapes while women usually fulfill traditional roles as wives and mothers. In the Northwest Coast deviant women are monsters in storyscapes, while in Hawai'i a feminist scholar identified more goddesses and chieftesses than were identified by a male scholar. In both areas women were key to chiefly accumulation of land and wealth.

In Chapter 9 Shankari Patel critiques how the assumption of domestic women resulted in the neglect of post-classic Mesoamerican women's pilgrimages across distant landscapes. She discusses how androcentric colonial men and archaeologists focused on men and removed women from landscapes, disappearing women's central role in pilgrimage practices and international politics, including public active women rulers, warriors, priestesses, healers and scribes. Patel critiques androcentric archaeologists who overlooked goddesses and feminine cults indicated by excavated women's artifacts and figurines at pilgrimage sites.

While some may think that the interpretations in this volume are speculative, they are as well supported by evidence as accepted interpretations of evidence of men's hunting, stone quarrying, trading and other activities that are equally based on assumptions about prehistoric gendered divisions of labor drawn from ethnographic data. In addition, the meanings of many artifacts and features are inferred using a direct historical approach that uses the most relevant ethnographic data to make interpretations. This volume is breaking new ground in presenting evidence of aspects of women's lives that have not been previously considered in archaeology.

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