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•*Dinéjį Na`Nitin: Navajo Traditional Teachings and History.* By Robert S.

McPherson. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012. x + 287 pp. Paper, \$24.95.)

THIS WORK by Robert McPherson draws on over thirty years of personal experience as a teacher of Navajo students and as a collector of oral histories from elder Navajos who were raised during the traditional times of the first third of the twentieth century. From his careful listening to Native voices, the author has developed a rare in-depth understanding of the Diné worldview and its implications. The book interprets the traditional cultural teachings, including divination, prophecy, the role of witchcraft and evil, and the power of metaphorical thought within the Navajo (Diné) language. The main argument is that Navajo daily life is intertwined with thinking and reasoning influenced by traditional stories and teachings. McPherson also stresses the toll of cultural loss in the neglect of language, ritual, and traditional culture and the need for the reaffirmation of this invaluable legacy by current generations of Diné.

Instead of providing a systematic introduction to Navajo traditional teachings and history, the book explores specific topics through a collection of chapters that shift in focus between ethnographic, historical, and linguistic emphases. For example, the first chapter outlines the traditional practices of divination, and the second chapter follows with a narration of the cross-cultural responses to the 1918 influenza epidemic by various communities, demonstrating how the Navajos encountered the new and devastating disease from their traditional understanding. The third chapter describes witchcraft and the role of sacred evil in Navajo culture, and chapter four relates the story of Ba'alílee (a practitioner of taboo ritual and the reversal of sacred ceremony) whose resistance to the government ended in an armed standoff called the "Brawl of Aneth" in 1907.

The organizational pattern shifts with the fifth chapter, which describes how traditional thought is embedded in the metaphorical aspects of the Navajo language; the eighth chapter shows how keen observation and wit are embedded in contemporary metaphorical descriptions of objects and processes. Sandwiched in between the discussion of metaphor are the stories of how Father H. Baxter Leibler used aspects of Diné language and culture in his conversion of Navajos to Episcopalian Christianity from the 1940s to the 1960s, and how the mystery surrounding the distinctive Pectol shields unearthed by amateur archeologists in 1926 was solved by attention to Navajo oral tradition in 2003. The book ends with a presentation of

prophetic warnings of Navajo elders about signs of the coming of the end of the world and how they relate to creation myths and observations of cultural deterioration.

The strength of the work is McPherson's correlation of material from standard anthropological texts on Diné thought and culture with voices from his many oral interviews gathered over the past thirty years. The result is an accessible record of Navajo beliefs and heritage that updates and illustrates, but does not necessarily extend, our understanding of these select aspects of Navajo traditional culture. The linguistic chapters, likewise, record and preserve various Navajo language metaphors, both old and new. The author should have spent more time, however, in his sections on history by giving context to the underlying contrasts and conflicts between traditional Navajo culture and the worldviews of outsiders, such as a government agent (Sheldon), Episcopalian missionary (Father Baxter), and LDS bishop (Ephraim Pectol). To this reviewer, the actions and motives of the Anglo participants in these sections seem to go largely unquestioned.

This book is highly recommended for readers interested in a knowledgeable and sensitive description of some of the basic aspects of traditional Navajo teachings, thought, and language and how the infringements of the dominant American culture in the past decades has undermined the application of those teachings in the lives of the contemporary Navajo people.

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