

BOOK REVIEW

The Origins of Southwestern Agriculture. R.G. Matson. Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1991. \$60.00 (clothbound). Pp. xv, 356. ISBN 0-8165-1196-9.

This is a well written, organized, researched and documented book, based on the author's own work and reports and publications of others. It is profusely illustrated and there are eight tables of data. I wish I could offer as much praise for the index, which I found disappointing in that it is largely a listing of names of investigators and archaeological sites and locations. Beans and squash, both cultivated, are mentioned in a few places in the text, but neither is in the index under either common or generic names.

As a general ethnobotanist with only some exposure to archaeological ethnobotany, I was unfamiliar with the author and his research. Given the title of the book, imagine my dismay when, upon glancing through it, I discovered that most of the illustrations related to archaeology: diagrams of excavations, locations, and projectile points. My immediate reaction was to question the relevance of what appeared to be a superfluity of archaeological data, discussion, argument, and interpretation. Although I have now read the book and see the connection, I must alert readers of this journal that they are likely to find the perspective on the origins of agriculture in this book to be dissimilar from that found in treatises on the subject stemming from a largely biological point of view.

After three chapters, covering over 200 pages, (Introduction; The nature of Basketmaker II; and The nature of the Plateau Archaic), the author discusses maize in 74 pages of text in chapters 4, 5, and 6: The evolutionary model of maize use; The age of maize in the Southwest; and The three models and the age of maize. Herein, Matson also discusses and "tests" these models against the available archaeological data from various regions of the southwestern U.S.A. This is a solid, scholarly approach to the subject and the material in these critical chapters is well integrated with that in earlier and later sections.

Judging from the title of the book, one might assume that other cultivated plants would be given recognition. But the facts of life are that these other species are often only poorly represented in archaeological sites (e.g. seeds of beans do not preserve well) thus making developmental models difficult if not impossible for construction, to say nothing of "testing."

While recognizing that the author wrote primarily for archaeological scholars, I find, as an ethnobotanist, the book's title misleading. Nevertheless, because of my interest in and familiarity with the Southwest, the extensive archaeological treatment was interesting and valuable to me and I recommend Matson's book to those who are working in southwestern ethnobotany, even to those whose studies do not focus primarily upon looking back through time.

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