

EDITOR'S CORNER

Most museums and educational institutions have their energies focused on complying with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). All human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony must be identified, summarized, and examined for affiliation with present-day tribes. Institutions have generally completed their inventories and are now in the process of consulting with tribes on possible affiliations. NAGPRA has significantly changed the face of American archaeology in many ways, and the direct and indirect effects of the law will be felt for many years to come. A key issue for anyone struggling with NAGPRA—tribal member or archaeologist—is the notion of cultural affiliation. In order to make a claim or to identify human remains or objects as associated with a particular tribe, the cultural affiliation of the tribe with the remains or objects must be demonstrated. According to the NAGPRA regulations (Section 10.2 Definitions, page 62160), “Cultural affiliation means that there is a relationship of shared group identity which can reasonably be traced historically or prehistorically between members of a present-day Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and an identifiable earlier group. Cultural affiliation is established when the preponderance of the evidence—based on geographical, kinship, biological, archeological, linguistic, folklore, oral tradition, historical evidence, or other information or expert opinion—reasonably leads to such a conclusion.” The archaeology of the 1980s and 1990s has not been focused on linking archaeological cultures to modern-day descendants. In fact, although such work was sometimes the focus of study in the past (especially in the 1920s and 1930s), modern archaeologists have shied away from making such associations. I think that there are three basic reasons for this reluctance: (1) The more we know about the complexities of the past and the convoluted histories of modern tribes, the more we have realized that such links are difficult to establish with certainty. (2) The associations made by archaeologists earlier in this century are generally seen as naive and simplistic, and although no one has systematically deconstructed these early works, they are frequently cited by members of the general public, and scholars have realized that the job of correcting them would take great energy and diligence. (3) Archaeologists have feared that conducting such research successfully could well result in the loss of collections to tribes identified as descendants. In other words, our success in linking tribes to archaeological cultures might be measured by how much material is repatriated.

In this issue of *American Antiquity* the lead article, “Tepimans, Tumans, and Other Hohokam” by David Leedom Shaul and Jane H. Hill, directly tackles the question of affiliation from the perspective of linguistic evidence. Their analysis is comprehensive and carefully outlines the complexities and the kinds of conclusions one might make. I think this is the kind of research we should encourage. Archaeologists regularly examine a variety of lines of evidence in developing their interpretations and conclusions, but if one looks at the list of evidence acceptable under NAGPRA, we usually tend to ignore linguistics, folklore, and oral tradition. In part this is because most of us were not trained to include such evidence, and we also don't know how to include such evidence in a systematic and reasonably objective manner. We think of oral traditions as just being “stories” or “myths” that cannot be accepted as “true.” Yet, archaeologists working in other parts of the world (Greece comes to mind) have managed to incorporate such data, and there are ways that “scientific” archaeology can do so too. The process of putting together these varied lines of evidence needs to be developed. One obvious way of

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getting such research accomplished is through the cooperation and coordination of efforts of Native American scholars, historians, and archaeologists. Working together, these individuals should be able to develop ways in which multiple lines of evidence can be used in a complementary manner and as checks against each other. The fact that some evidence will be contradictory should not be a problem—we deal with contradictory evidence every day, and in fact, contradictory evidence makes doing archaeology much more interesting. I know that some archaeologists will think that the ideas outlined here sound great, but will never work in practice. Others may think that I am gambling away the store. There is no question that such an approach has risks associated, and it will not work everywhere. However, I don't think we can continue to ignore a significant portion of the available data, and I also think that if we are really concerned about determination of cultural affiliation, it behooves us to take the lead in developing the processes for cooperation and evaluation of different lines of evidence. It is definitely not in the best interests of archaeology to have someone else determine cultural affiliation for us, without our input and participation.

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