

Radding

Bountiful Deserts

Sustaining Indigenous Worlds in Northern New Spain

Common understandings drawn from biblical references, literature, and art portray deserts as barren places that are far from God and spiritual sustenance. In our own time, attention focuses on the rigors of climate change in arid lands and the perils of the desert in the northern Mexican borderlands for migrants seeking shelter and a new life. Bountiful Deserts foregrounds the knowledge of Indigenous peoples in the arid lands of northwestern Mexico, for whom the desert was anything but barren or empty. Instead, they nurtured and harvested the desert as a bountiful and sacred space. Drawing together historical texts and oral testimonies, archaeology, and natural history, author Cynthia Radding develops the relationships between people and plants and the ways that Indigenous people sustained their worlds before European contact through the changes set in motion by Spanish encounters, highlighting the long process of colonial conflicts and adaptations over more than two centuries. This work reveals the spiritual power of deserts by weaving together the cultural practices of historical peoples and contemporary living communities, centered especially on the Yaqui/Yoeme and Mayo/Yoreme. Radding uses the tools of history, anthropology, geography, and ecology to paint an expansive picture of Indigenous worlds before and during colonial encounters. She re-creates the Indigenous worlds in both their spiritual and material realms, bringing together the analytical dimension of scientific research and the wisdom of oral traditions in its exploration of different kinds of knowledge about the natural world. Published in Cooperation with the William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, Southern Methodist University.

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