

# Material Symbols

## Culture and Economy in Prehistory

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## 8. Prestige, Agency, and Change in Middle-Range Societies

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**Abstract:** The development of institutionalized forms of political and economic inequality within so-called middle-range societies has become a major focus of archaeological inquiry. One road to inequality is stipulated by prestige good models. Prestige good models assume a rather straightforward, positive relationship between "elite" control over foreign objects and control over local labor, which in turn translates into differential social power. This essay examines some recent critiques of prestige good models that indicate the need for new ways of thinking about the relationships between wealth, labor, and power in middle-range societies. A theoretical framework is sketched that allows for greater diversity in the positions and roles of the agents who activate human social life and that locates causation less in the activities of individual self-aggrandizers than in historically contingent "class" struggles between diverse social agents. The Chaco Phenomenon of the North American Southwest provides empirical input critical to the development and refinement of the theory.

Recent years have seen intensifying interest in the relationships between human agency, ideology, and social power in so-called middle-range, or transegalitarian societies (Hayden 1995). Motivating this interest is a concern to develop more compelling accounts of social change, especially the development of institutionalized forms of political and economic inequality. Price and Feinman's (1995) edited volume on the *Foundations of Social Inequality* and several papers by Mesoamerican archaeologists in the February 1996 issue of *Current Anthropology* are particularly good examples of this trend. The SIU conference that produced this volume thus provided a very timely, and extremely useful, opportunity to discuss many key theoretical and methodological issues on the cutting edge of archaeological inquiry.

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In this chapter I examine the relationship between political economy, ideology, and the dynamics of change in middle-range societies, using prestige good models as a conceptual entry point. Prestige good models are a useful entry point for a number of reasons. First, because they deal with inequalities of wealth and power in social formations, prestige good models directly address political and economic dynamics. As noted by the contributors to the works cited above, we need to explore complexity in such dynamics. Second, prestige good models engage questions of ideology, since the utility of exotic objects in any social context depends upon people accepting them as things of value, and also because ideology governs the amount of effort that goes into procuring foreign goods. Finally, prestige good models have been widely used across North America to account for trajectories of long-term change and, especially, the development of social complexity (Earle 1994).

My central claim is that prestige good models, while serving as useful guides for research in many areas, make some problematic assumptions about the relationships between material objects, control over labor, and social power in middle-range societies. Those assumptions need to be rethought if we want to better identify organizational variation in prehistory and gain new perspectives on the dynamics that transformed past societies. In the first part of the chapter I briefly review the key claims of the prestige good model and raise some theoretical and empirical critiques that indicate the need for new theory. I then outline an alternative framework for theorizing the political economy of middle-range societies that accommodates several key insights of others working on the problem. I close with a consideration of how such theory is both inspired by, and helpful in making sense of, the Chaco Phenomenon of the American Southwest.

### The Prestige Good Model in Archaeological Theory

The prestige good model is an account of how political "elites"—defined here as individuals who differentially control resources and/or the life chances of other individuals—come to be established and their power maintained via the tactical manipulation of exchange (for summaries, see Baugh and Ericson 1992; Blanton et al. 1996; McGuire 1989; Schortman and Urban 1992). The model assumes that social power stems from the control of valuables necessary for important life transitions such as initiations and marriages. Lineage elders (usually assumed to be senior men) exercise such control, and juniors subordinate themselves to elders in order to obtain socially necessary items. Lineage elders extract surplus (objects and food) from subordinates, which is used by these emergent elites in competition with other lineage elites to build political alliances, expand exchange networks, and extend their power. In this model valuables are *instruments of power*: they are a means to appropriate the labor of subordinates. This system is considered inherently unstable because of the fact that many valuables come from distant sources, precluding lineage elites from exercising direct control over their production and exchange.

Several useful critiques of prestige good models have been presented in the North American literature. Cobb (1993) offers one in his survey of archaeological approaches to the political economy of nonstratified societies. Cobb notes that prestige good models pay insufficient attention to diversity in the roles and meanings of exotic goods. That is, they do not clearly distinguish between when valuables serve as indicators of genuine economic power (i.e., the ability of some to coerce labor out of others) and when valuables simply serve as markers of social status.

Bradley (1992) makes another criticism in her study of shell exchange at Casas Grandes, a fourteenth-century polity in northwestern Chihuahua, Mexico. Bradley argues that there is no attention in many prestige good models to how goods, once procured, are distributed to the general population. I understand her to be asking about the social context within which transactions are made. Are goods redistributed in a social context of group feasting? In a context of individualized exchanges where valuables move against other, perhaps more utilitarian goods? Or does the distribution occur only with the completion of some labor service performed by subordinates for elites? In most prestige good models, the relationship between interacting parties is not clearly specified.

I have also critiqued prestige good models, specifically the way the nature of labor flow from subordinates to elites is theorized (Saitta 1994a, 1994b). Most models assert that the elite-subordinate relationship is exploitative: elites are said to "extract" or "usurp" the surplus labor of subordinates. However, this is not the only way to understand the relationship. It could also be understood as a distinctly nonexploitative relation if we see the labor that moves against valuables as a payment allocated by subordinates to elites as compensation for their work in procuring socially important valuables. In this view the status of the valuables is also different: they are *communal social entitlements* required for reproduction of the collective whole rather than instruments of elite power. As a third possibility, the labor and goods transfers can be understood as reciprocal exchanges of equivalents: subordinates perform labor in return for the valuables provided by elites. In short, prestige good models tend to conflate several different kinds of material transfers. This conflation needs to be redressed because how we understand the transfers influences the way we conceptualize the dynamics of social change. At the very least, we need to be much more precise about what we mean when we speak of the "extraction" or "appropriation" of surplus.

In addition to these theoretical criticisms of prestige good models, there are empirical warrants for rethinking their presumed widespread utility in archaeological interpretation. That is, the models have trouble accounting for archaeological patterns in several areas of North America where exotics are a big part of the archaeological record. For example, patterns at several key Mississippian sites do not easily square with the assumption that valuables served as instruments of power. Pauketat's (1992) work on Stirling phase Cahokia reveals, contra the expectations of classic prestige good models, that complexity and political hierarchy *increased* in the American Bottom as long-

distance exchange intensity in shell, copper, and mica objects *decreased*. Although the evidence for decreasing exchange intensity is still insecure (owing to the lack of good phase affiliations for many Cahokian exotics), Pauketat's observation *may* suggest that minimal political-economic power was associated with the control of exchange goods in that particular place and time. Alternatively, the falloff in exotics, if real, could also simply mean that control over long-distance exchange was being replaced at this time with other means for building and reproducing power (Anderson 1994). Whatever the case, available empirical patterns suggest that the social meaning of Cahokian exotics, and their role in Cahokian political economy, cannot yet be taken for granted.

John Blitz's (1993) work on the Lubbug Creek polity near Moundville perhaps sends a clearer signal about the limitations of prestige good models for interpreting Mississippian political economy. Blitz's distributional study of exotics reveals the widespread availability of fine ceramics, shell beads, and microdrills used for bead manufacture to *both* rural farmstead and political center households. Blitz infers that there was little or no centralization of prestige good exchange, nor much restricted access to exotic goods, at Lubbug Creek. He also documents a greater dispersion of production loci for finished goods than expected. This suggests that mound center households and rural farmsteads may not be directly associated with elite and nonelite statuses, respectively. Blitz is especially provocative in his statement that the Lubbug Creek rural farmer and the mound center political actor were the *same person*, that is, that "the person tending a farmstead maize field in June may be the same individual who consumes choice cuts of venison with kin in a ceremonial building atop a mound in December" (1993:184). In so doing, he alerts us to some conceivably novel organizational relationships in this polity. Minimally, Blitz's work suggests that conventional prestige good models are not applicable to all Mississippian polities.

Some recent work in the American Southwest produces similar results. Bayman's (1995) work on Hohokam mound centers in the Tucson Basin of southern Arizona is one example. Like Blitz, Bayman finds that the production and distribution of valued objects (specifically, obsidian tools) in his study area were more widespread than expected. And, like Blitz, his observations about exchange behavior suggest the limitations of prestige good models as applied to the Hohokam.

In summary, this empirical work suggests that the relationships between foreign goods, labor flows, and social power in precontact North America may have varied in ways for which we still lack good theoretical models. Earle (1994) recently argued that the question of whether emergent, exchange-brokering elites in North America were "first among equals" or, alternatively, incipient exploitative classes has been settled in favor of the latter. However, empirical evidence from specific local areas—such as those just described—indicates that this is still an open question.

## Building Alternative Theories

In keeping with the critiques summarized above, I suggest that we still lack theories of social life that allow us to engage this open question in productive ways. Part of the problem is that materialist theory in archaeology had traditionally insisted on forcing choices between largely opposed ways of thinking about social differentiation and, specifically, the behavior of political elites. Some years ago Gilman (1981) drew a contrast between "functional" and "exploitative" models of elite behavior. This was followed by Brumfiel and Earle's (1987) opposition of "adaptationist" and "political" models of exchange and specialization. Most recently Ames (1995) has contrasted "managerial" and "thuggery" models of elite behavior and noted that the archaeological literature is becoming increasingly dominated by the latter. For example, many interpretive models in *The Foundations of Social Inequality* (Price and Feinman 1995) and the earlier *Factional Competition in the New World* (Brumfiel and Fox 1994) can be characterized as thuggery models. To varying degrees they are committed to the assumption that the political ambition and natural acquisitiveness of a few are the driving force in social change.

Blanton and colleagues' (1996) recent contribution to *Current Anthropology* attempts to break with this dichotomous approach to theorizing elite behavior (see also Feinman 1995). These authors focus on the political and economic variation that exists among societies at every range of societal scale and complexity. Specifically, Blanton and colleagues make a useful distinction between "network" and "corporate" strategies (or modes) for acquiring power. Network strategies produce power differences via the control of long-distance exchange and the cultivation of external political ties. Those strategies are akin to the kinds of elite behaviors stipulated by prestige good models, and they have been given the most theoretical attention. Corporate strategies have drawn less theoretical interest. They produce power differences via the manipulation of local labor and the *home production* of surpluses. They allow for power sharing across different social groups and segments and strive to cultivate a collective mechanical solidarity via *consensus management*.

While Blanton, Feinman, and others seek to avoid oppositional thinking by stressing that network and corporate modes are not mutually exclusive and that societies can cycle from one to the other, they *do* argue that one or the other of these modes will likely predominate in a particular historical context. These authors thus remain loosely committed to the old dichotomies. I would be much more aggressive in arguing for theory that recognizes the conceivably frequent coexistence of these strategies and their governing ideologies. For example, while knowledge of distant places and control of exotic goods are often associated with power in many cultures (an insight that drives prestige good models), in others "the foreign" is associated with threat and danger (e.g., Helms 1992). Theory that allows for the uneasy coexistence of such multiple ideologies and a variety of political-economic agents and strategies (both managerial and self-aggrandizing) in the *same* social context may be just what is needed to account for the variability that we see in the

archaeological record, including the variability that bedevils classic prestige good models. It also seems desirable if we want to generate more complex models of internal social dynamics and causation.

Marx's work in the *Formen* (1964) moves us toward such a theory for middle-range societies. In this work Marx began, however sketchily, a project of thinking through the variety of ways that precapitalist societies could be organized. Gilman (1995) tries to redeem some of Marx's insights in this area where he discusses the utility of Marx's concept of the "Germanic" formation for interpreting European prehistory. Germanic social formations combine features of household productive autonomy, restricted external exchange, and limited surplus production with coalition into tribal assemblies and hereditary, often coercive leadership. Gilman suggests that this interpretive model has been ignored in anthropology because of the "frailty" of those contexts in which the form was documented ethnohistorically and ethnographically, that is, in societies peripheral to established states. Gilman sees the model, when evaluated against his Iberian Bronze Age data, as important for understanding the range of variation in those societies identified as "chiefdoms."

McGuire and I (McGuire and Saitta 1996) have similarly drawn on the Marxist tradition to expand the range of models for interpreting middle-range societies of the North American Southwest. Specifically, we view the Pueblos as complex *communal* social formations that combine the collective appropriation of surplus labor with varying and sometimes very well developed forms of political hierarchy, long-distance exchange relations, productive specialization and, indeed, any of the elements of network and corporate modes. The specifics of time and place govern the particular form that this communal organization will take. In so doing, we try to break with the tendency to view late precontact Western Pueblo society as either egalitarian or stratified. A view of Puebloan elites as communal "subsumed classes" is central to our formulation. That is, we recognize a variety of essentially managerial positions that are supported (via flows of collectively appropriated surplus labor) by the wider commune. Long-distance exchange agents, political functionaries, ritual specialists, and craft specialists can all be part of the subsumed class mix. Historically situated struggles between these classes over the size and distribution of shares of communal labor and its conditions of production—struggles that can be activated by any number of social and environmental factors—in turn create the social dynamic of the communal formation.

Making such subsumed class distinctions is important if only to add texture to models of corporate strategizing. Corporate polities as currently theorized are relatively "flat": the models only vaguely specify "groups and segments" as the key operative agencies in society (Blanton et al. 1996). As Claessen (1996) notes in his *Current Anthropology* commentary on Blanton and colleagues' article, it is hard to accept that corporate polities were everywhere collectively ruled by anonymous members of "tribal" councils. Rather, for any particular case we need to more closely specify the agents, and groups of agents, that had the power to manipulate or leverage economic relationships and ideologies in new ways. And, for any specific case, we must also allow that even the most benign managerial relationships can be fraught with the

potential for tension and struggle, depending upon historical circumstances. It is for help in concretizing such notions that I now turn to one particular empirical case.

### Alternative Theory and the Chaco Phenomenon

The so-called Chaco Phenomenon of the American Southwest is a particularly useful case to consider for help in building and evaluating alternative theories of social dynamics and change in middle-range societies. The Chaco Phenomenon refers to a set of distinctive styles in public architecture and ceramic decoration shared by small agricultural communities distributed throughout the Four Corners area between A.D. 900 and 1100. These shared styles cover an area somewhere between 150,000 and 300,000 square kilometers (Lekson et al. 1988). They overlay other, distinctively local patterns of variation in domestic architecture and ceramics. The center of the Chaco Phenomenon was a group of large, planned, plaza-oriented and multistoried masonry pueblos, or Great Houses, located in Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico. The largest of these Great Houses is over 650 rooms in size. The Great Houses and their associated Great Kivas (regarded by most scholars as loci of public ceremonies) contained many exotic goods, including turquoise, seashells, copper bells, and the skeletons of macaws. At the same time, the Great Houses preserve the fairly uniform room size and "modularity" of smaller, more prosaic pueblo settlements (Johnson 1989). The most distant communities exhibiting the Chacoan architectural style lie 200 miles from the Chaco Canyon core area. These communities are linked to each other, and to the Chaco core, by an extensive network of formally constructed avenues, or "roads," which may total up to 1,500 miles in length (Stein 1989).

The social meaning of many of these Chacoan patterns is currently vigorously debated by Southwestern archaeologists. However, it is precisely this contentiousness that makes Chaco useful for building new theory. That is, it is the ambiguous meaning of the Chacoan record that alerts us to novel organizational relationships. Especially perplexing is the meaning of Chacoan exotics, including both the goods themselves and their distributions. On the one hand are those scholars who argue that the concentration of exotics at Chacoan Great Houses suggests their role as instruments of power within prestige good or tributary political economies (Akins and Schelberg 1984; Neitzel 1995; Tainter and Plog 1994). On the other hand are those who question the empirical reality of such concentrations and argue, alternatively, for a basically egalitarian political economy characterized by reciprocal, down-the-line, or kula-ring type of exchanges (Mathien 1992; Toll 1991; Windes 1992).

Elsewhere, I have offered an interpretation of Chacoan historical development that breaks with such oppositional views and models Chacoan society as one that, like the Germanic formation, is not readily accommodated by mainstream typologies (Saitta 1997). Specifically, Chaco is viewed as a particular kind of communal formation that was integrated by a diverse set of subsumed classes and, given the system's geographical scale and the considerable labor



mobilized at its political center, was organized by both network and corporate strategies. Some form of regional redistribution of collective surpluses also likely held sway. In this model, Chacoan exchange agents and political functionaries are embedded in and supported by the commune, and valuables function as communal social entitlements. It is a model that contrasts with others that emphasize either group "collective interests" or the self-interests of "political entrepreneurs" (Kantner 1996:93) and establishes a context for investigating how these two sets of interests may have combined to shape historical development.

Much of the available empirical support for this model, but by no means all of it, is found in recent observations about the exotic artifact inventories from the large Great Houses and smaller villages that comprise the Chacoan settlement system. Toll (1991:86) points out that exotics in the Chaco system occur at villages as well as Great Houses and that they exist in small, even minuscule, quantities relative to other materials at both kinds of sites (see also Judge 1989:232). Toll suggests that this pattern may even hold for Pueblo Bonito, the largest Chaco core community, where exotics are most densely concentrated. Windes (1992) also questions the concentration of exotics (specifically turquoise) at canyon Great Houses and notes that participation in turquoise jewelry manufacture was "nearly universal" across Great Houses and villages during the eleventh century. If Toll and Windes are right, then the distribution of Chacoan exotics is consistent with their function as communal social entitlements and with a notion of guaranteed access to strategic social resources. This does not mean, however, that the potential for monopolizing control of such resources (a key element of prestige good models), and redefining their social meaning, did not exist.

Even those scholars committed to a view of Chaco as a class-divided society characterized by deep power differentials provide a warrant for thinking about Chaco in this way. Neitzel (1995), for example, marshals evidence to support the notion that Chaco was a complex chiefdom. Her evidence takes the form of strong correlations between the amounts of valuable objects (specifically, turquoise and distinctive Dogoszhi-style black-on-white pottery) found at a site and that site's position in a multitiered Chacoan settlement hierarchy. At the same time, however, Neitzel identifies some interesting anomalies in the spatial distribution of valuables that invite alternative interpretations. Specifically, some small- and medium-sized sites have counts of valuables that fall into the range of the largest sites. Neitzel explores a number of explanations for these anomalies, including one that has the objects functioning in ways other than as instruments or signs of chiefly power, for example, as symbols of the "system as a whole" (Neitzel 1995:410).

Even if it turns out that large Chacoan sites overwhelmingly controlled the production and distribution of exotic goods, it does not necessarily mean that those sites were home to prestige-accumulating, chiefly elites. That is, evidence for differential control of resources and political hierarchy is not necessarily evidence for the kinds of class divisions stipulated by prestige good models or complex chiefdom models. Hierarchy can also serve the cause of communalism (McGuire and Saitta 1996; Saitta 1997). The case for class divi-

sions (and the validity of the prestige good model itself) requires *other* contextual evidence establishing exploitative claims by elites on the surplus labor of producers (i.e., claims that would have compromised the ability of producers to perform the *necessary* labor requisite for reproducing themselves as biological individuals) and nonguaranteed access for these producers to other social reproductive resources. Such a case has not yet been made for Chaco.

In the absence of such a case, there is ample room for exploring other models of Chacoan political economy and other kinds of relationships between Chacoan production, exchange, and consumption activities. The scale and monumentality of the Chaco system (as evidenced by its architectural building programs and famous road system) certainly suggest the existence of elite organizers of labor and differential control of knowledge. The key question concerns the nature and implications of these distinctions. In a paper that moves in some of the same directions as this essay, Nelson (1996) warns against inferring coercive hierarchy from observations about the scale of the Chaco system and offers a notion of Chaco as a "collaborative chiefdom." While we can argue about whether Nelson's contrast of this chiefly form with "coercive chiefdoms" compromises his attempt to break down the dichotomies that have long governed archaeological theory, his emphasis on Chacoan "collaboration and consultation" invites modeling of the (conceivably diverse) subsumed class structure of Chacoan society: specifically, how exchange agents, ritual specialists, political "leaders," and other subsumed class functionaries interacted and how these interactions might be evidenced in the archaeological record.

Some recent thought by Ames (1995) about craft specialization establishes a precedent for the kind of modeling I have in mind. Ames argues that the current tendency to view specialization along an "independent-attached" continuum (Brumfiel and Earle 1987) is conceptually limiting and that craft specialization is better viewed as a "field" with multiple poles. Ames introduces the concept of *embedded specialists* as a third pole in the field. Embedded specialists are not contractually bound to elites (attached specialists) nor do they produce for an unspecified demand crowd (independent specialists). Rather, they produce labor that is integral to the functioning of household or local economies. Ames notes that Northwest Coast specialists could be "hired" by elite and nonelite households alike but stresses that these productive relationships were always noncoercive. In light of this description Ames's embedded specialists would appear to fit the bill as subsumed classes, and it would be interesting to investigate their roles in helping reproduce a very complicated Northwest Coast political economy that appears to have included communal, tributary, and slave relations of surplus appropriation. With respect to the Chaco case, the likely existence of craft specialists in that system, even if only part-time, is generally agreed upon (e.g., Mathien 1992; Toll 1991). However, we still do not know exactly what kind of specialists they were, and more information on the sources and distribution of Chacoan "wealth" products is required to tell

(Toll 1991:103). The point here is that Ames's formulation can help guide interpretation of such data by suggesting some new ways that craft specialists might have related to exchange agents and/or political and religious functionaries.

Success in clarifying such relationships would certainly provide a more fertile context for considering the impacts of well-documented late-eleventh- and early-twelfth-century environmental deterioration and trade route disruption on social organization at the Chaco core. It is conceivable that such historical circumstances activated all sorts of struggles over the production and distribution of Chacoan surpluses, as well as over governing ideologies. New strategies of social reproduction by threatened and/or conflicted agents may have included efforts by some subsumed classes (e.g., ritual specialists—see Aldenderfer 1993—but efforts by others are also conceivable) to use their power to build tributary class relations or to engage craft specialists in new, perhaps coercive ways.

Several Chaco scholars recognize a late-eleventh-century social formation on the brink of a qualitative change in labor relations, political organization, and ideology. Toll (1991:102) detects in late-eleventh-century Chacoan architectural developments "a change in perception" among people concerning the virtues of continued participation in the Chacoan system. He intimates that increasing "elite demands and levels" may have been responsible for the change (1991:106) but does not clarify the nature of these demands. Lekson and Cameron (1993:5) put the change in an ideological light with their suggestion that the late eleventh century may have been "the point at which the symbolism of the Great Houses—which had existed as public structures for more than 150 years—began to change from the center out." Finally, Sebastian (1992:129–130) explores how these changes may have stimulated, or at least been accompanied by, countervailing strategies of producer resistance, including population movement out of the Chaco Basin.

We still need to produce the more specific data that would allow us to evaluate this "class struggle" model of Chacoan social change. This includes better data on, as Toll suggests, the sources and distributions of Chacoan wealth objects, as well as on the origin points and termini of Chacoan roads and the nature of Chacoan building programs vis-à-vis available labor and potential agricultural surpluses. But whatever the dynamics of Chacoan social change for this time period, I do not think that the "end" of Chaco corresponds with an ideological failure or "demystification" as suggested by some advocates of prestige good models (e.g., see Kohler 1993:303–304). The most compelling recent studies of the Chaco Phenomenon view it less as an integrated pan-regional system of exchange and interaction than as a "Big Idea" (Stein and Lekson 1992) subject to local negotiations and manipulations (Kantner 1996; Vivian 1997). Importantly, some of these studies cast the Chacoan Idea as having considerable long-term staying power. The historical continuity of Chacoan ideology is revealed by the persistence of Chacoan architectural design concepts in some parts, and by Chacoan architectural

revivals in other parts, of a "balkanized" post-Chaco Southwest (Bradley 1996; Fowler and Stein 1992; Kintigh et al. 1996; Saitta 1994c; Stein and Lekson 1992). It is also suggested by the role that Chaco plays in contemporary Pueblo ideology (Lekson and Cameron 1995). Lekson's (1997) recent argument about a Southwestern symbolic landscape that linked Chaco to later polities at Aztec and Casas Grandes is a particularly dramatic expression of this notion. Minimally, these studies suggest that the Chacoan social order did not simply turn on the availability of exotic exchange goods and the power of their associated meanings. Instead, they hint that the resources of most interest to Chacoan power-holders (and would-be monopolizers) were much more esoteric in nature. This, in turn, implies that we need something other than kula-ring and prestige good models to describe Chacoan political economy. The models must be able to square the evidence for historical change in the material content of interaction networks with the evidence for powerful historical continuities in thought and action. Thinking nonoppositionally about social differentiation, and in new ways about causality, seems like a good way to begin that project. That is, we should allow that social change in the past may have had less to do with the single-minded activities of accumulators than with the (admittedly self-interested) efforts of a variety of agents to preserve their social positions in changing circumstances—efforts that may have had as their unintended consequences the transformation of the existing social order.

### Conclusion

This essay has used the prestige good model as a conceptual entry point for considering an alternative perspective on the relationships between agency, political economy, and social change in middle-range societies. Theoretical and empirical problems with prestige good models as revealed by work in several areas of North America—problems that include their narrow understanding of the social meaning of valuables and their sometimes poor match with available evidence—suggest the need for new models that link objects, labor, power, and ideology in different ways. However, a number of old theoretical oppositions (e.g., managerial vs. thuggery models of elite behavior) and causal commitments (e.g., "human nature" assumptions about the natural acquisitiveness of the few) still impede the development of new perspectives. So, too, does a laissez-faire attitude about the economic dimensions of human life. With the help of postprocessual archaeologists, we have established the effectivity of the symbolic dimensions of human life and the need for dialectical models linking the material and the symbolic. However, we need to better theorize the political and economic dialectic between people differentially positioned in flows of labor and other strategic factors of production, something to which Marxist traditions of thought are particularly sensitive. Appreciating such diversity can liberate theory-building and help produce more

complex models of the internal dynamics that transformed middle-range societies in the remote past.

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