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ARTICLES

POWER, LABOR, AND THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE IN CHACOAN POLITICAL ECONOMY

Dean J. Saitta

The organizational structure of the famous Chaco Phenomenon has long been debated by southwestern archaeologists. To better clarify the nature and dynamics of Chacoan organization we need to rethink the relationship between social power and the appropriation of surplus labor in middle-range societies. Drawing on the tradition of anthropological political economy, I outline a theoretical approach that allows for the relative autonomy of power and labor relations in human social life and models Chacoan political economy using a "thin definition" of communalism. Empirical patterns from the Chaco and post-Chaco eras in the northern Southwest are presented in support of a model of Chaco communalism and change dynamics. Suggestions for furthering a political economy of the Chaco Phenomenon that respects the difference or "otherness" of the past are also detailed.

La estructura organizativa del ya famoso Fenómeno de Chaco ha sido ampliamente debatido por arqueólogos del Suroeste de los Estados Unidos. Para esclarecer mejor la naturaleza y dinámica de la organización de Chaco, debemos reevaluar la relación entre el poder social y la apropiación del trabajo sobrante en sociedades medias. En base a la tradición de la economía política antropológica, se desarrolla un enfoque teórico que permite una autonomía relativa de poder y relaciones de trabajo en la vida social humana, el cual modela la economía política de Chaco usando una "definición tenue" de comunismo. Los patrones empíricos de las eras de Chaco y post-Chaco en el Suroeste nortero se presentan en apoyo de un modelo del comunismo de Chaco y de la dinámica de cambio. También se presentan en detalle sugerencias para avanzar una economía política del Fenómeno de Chaco que respete las diferencias del pasado.

The Chaco Phenomenon is defined as a widespread distribution, across the northern American Southwest, of distinctive masonry pueblos, roads, exotic goods, and other material cultures dating A.D. 900–1150 (for reviews see Judge 1989; Lekson 1991; Sebastian 1992a; Vivian 1990). Chaco is widely regarded as the high-water mark of precontact Pueblo (Anasazi) culture and also as one of American archaeology's best examples of precontact organizational complexity (Lewin 1992). A photograph of Pueblo Bonito, arguably the capital settlement of the Chaco sphere, graces the cover of a recent book about the origins of social inequality (Price and Feinman 1995). Although well studied for decades, the precise nature of Chacoan social organization (whether egalitarian, stratified, or something else) and the dynamics of Chacoan social change are still vigorously debated by southwestern archaeologists.

In this paper I argue that to better clarify the nature of Chacoan organization and change dynamics we need to rethink the relationship between social power and the appropriation of surplus labor in middle-range societies. A concern for this relationship has been central to many recent considerations of such societies in both Europe and the Americas (e.g., Arnold 1993; Blanton et al. 1996; various contributors to Price and Feinman 1995; Webster 1990). Specifically, I argue that we need to disaggregate power and labor relations and allow each a relative autonomy—that is, some degree of independence—in constituting social forms. Too often archaeologists conflate differential social power (of the sort that accompanies political hierarchy) with direct and even coercive control over labor (exploitation). In other words, we assume that power holding correlates with, or at least strongly implies, the ability

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to extract surplus labor for one's own benefit. One consequence of conflating power relationships with specific forms of control over labor is that we miss *variation* in the ways ancient societies were socially integrated, as well as variation in the social dynamics ("internal" tensions and struggles) that transformed them (Saitta 1994a, 1994b). And, where we miss such variation we miss an opportunity to better explain the puzzling empirical phenomena—Chaco foremost among them—that confound archaeological interpretation in the American Southwest and elsewhere.

In the first part of the paper I justify my claim that power and labor relations have a relative autonomy in social life. I outline a "thin definition" (Cullenberg 1992) of specifically communal social formations to allow for this relative autonomy. In the second part I summarize the key archaeological features of the Chaco Phenomenon and current frameworks for explaining those features. In the third part I present an alternative view of Chacoan social organization and change dynamics, one informed by a thin definition of communalism. I use archaeological evidence from the Chaco (A.D. 900–1150) and post-Chaco (A.D. 1150–1250) eras in the northern Southwest to support the argument. My aim is not to "prove" conclusively this case, but rather to frame new interpretive possibilities and research directions. In the conclusion I summarize these contributions and offer some suggestions for developing a political economy of the Chaco Phenomenon that better respects the difference or "otherness" of the past.

Power, Labor, and the Communal Formation

My argument for rethinking the relationship between power and the appropriation of surplus labor is broadly informed by the tradition of anthropological political economy. Roseberry (1988) has reviewed this tradition and detailed how political economy can benefit from a more thoroughgoing emphasis on history, ideology, and the "lived experience" of real people (Roseberry 1989). Archaeologists responding to this work have become increasingly aware of power, history, and ideology as important concerns in studying the past (see Cobb 1993; contributors to Price and Feinman 1995). Scholars contributing to the development of an archaeological political econ-

omy have challenged many conventional wisdoms about the nature and limits of sociocultural variation. They have also rethought the meaning of terms such as complexity, hierarchy, exploitation, and inequality. These concepts are used interchangeably, and far too loosely, in current theory (see also Nelson 1995).

My argument in this paper is informed by this work, as well as by recent debates within radical political economy, over why socialism has failed (e.g., Cullenberg 1992; Ruccio 1992). These debates have been particularly intense since the so-called "collapse of 1989," or the dissolution of "realsocialismus" (Bernbeck 1995). These debates may seem an unlikely source of theoretical insights of use to archaeologists, but I believe they have some significant things to teach us. For some scholars, socialism has failed because socialists overestimated the significance of power relations in human life. It has become clear that even significant changes in power relations—including the wholesale democratization of political life—can still leave social class divisions and structures of exploitation intact. For others, socialism has failed because socialists have underestimated the complexity of capitalism as an economic form, and this in turn has compromised the success of radical movements for change. Under capitalism power holders do not always extract surplus labor, extractors of surplus do not always own property (i.e., means of production), and property owners do not always hold power (Resnick and Wolff 1986). That is, power, property, and labor relations can vary independently of each other. Moreover, individuals can hold multiple and even contradictory positions within these social relationships. It is thus not always clear what the key strategic alliances necessary for transforming capitalism should look like. Do what you will with the radical politics informing such debates; minimally, they reveal the complexity of human social arrangements and particularly the analytical dangers of conflating flows of power, property, and labor.

It is reasonable to expect a similar relative autonomy of social processes to characterize the noncapitalist, middle-range societies that interest many archaeologists, i.e., those social forms falling between bands and states (Gregg 1991). Ethnographic and archaeological variation in

these societies has been explored by Feinman and Neitzel (1984) and the various contributors to Price and Feinman (1995), among others. These studies point out the fundamentally communal nature of middle-range political economies. In communal societies means of production are held in common, and access to strategic factors of production is guaranteed. Most importantly, social surplus labor (required for care of the sick and infirm, replacement of strategic factors of production, and maintenance of socioceremonial life, among other activities) is collectively appropriated. Primary producers participate in decision making about the amounts of surplus produced, its form (products or labor-service), and its conditions of production. As established by the work cited above, such conditions of production can be quite variable. Communal relations of labor flow can correlate with a number of different ways of dividing labor, organizing work, producing goods, redistributing products, exercising power, and regularizing access to positions of authority.

These observations about the variability of social processes in middle-range societies point to the theoretical utility of a thin definition of communal forms. A thin definition of communalism is an antidote to more utopian definitions that correlate collective appropriation of surplus with equal access to resources and power. With a thin definition of communalism no necessary correlation exists between communal relations of labor appropriation and the various other social processes that organize human life. Just as capitalist labor appropriation does not always require the existence of wealth and power inequalities between interacting parties, communal labor appropriation does not require the absence of such inequalities. In communal social forms *equal* access to resources and power is not required; what matters is the maintenance of *guaranteed* access to socially determined portions of surplus labor or what might be termed "communal social entitlements." These communal entitlements can include subsistence goods as well as the exotic prestige goods necessary to validate important life events and transitions (Saitta 1994b).

A thin definition of communalism can also accommodate formal political hierarchy as well

as other kinds of specialized social positions. What matters is not the degree of hierarchy or specialization, but rather the specific relationship between these phenomena and the appropriation of surplus labor. Political hierarchy, for example, can be crucial to the reproduction of communal labor relations if power holders function to provide their social and cultural conditions of existence. It is possible to imagine situations where even institutionalized, inherited status differences can serve to guarantee access to resources and the maintenance of communal relations of production. In such circumstances political elites function as "communal subsumed classes"—they receive cuts of communally appropriated labor for performing various political, economic, and cultural activities that sustain communal relations of production.¹

Ritual specialists and craft specialists can also function as communal subsumed classes if they receive shares of communally allocated surplus labor in return for their service. Ames (1995), for example, begins to clarify the role of craft specialists as communal subsumed classes where he distinguishes "embedded" specialists from the more widely recognized "independent" and "attached" specialists (Brumfiel and Earle 1987). Whereas independent specialists produce for an unspecified, variable-demand crowd and attached specialists for particular elite patrons, embedded specialists perform labor that is integral to the functioning of household and local economies. Embedded craft specialists can also be conceptualized as "communal" craft specialists (Saitta 1994b).

Although southwestern ethnographies and ethnohistories tend to be silent on the topic of surplus appropriation, accounts can be found of pueblo elites performing, extracting, distributing, and receiving surplus labor in ways that suggest their role as communal subsumed classes. McGuire and Saitta (1996) review some of these accounts and outline how pueblo communalism works under conditions of resource abundance and scarcity. Judith Habicht-Mauche, in an unpublished manuscript excerpted by Yoffee (1994:354), uses information from the eastern pueblos to further clarify what I see as the communal subsumed class activities of southwestern elites. These activities include organizing and

scheduling religious ceremonies, coordinating communal hunts and agricultural tasks, supervising communal labor projects, and negotiating alliances with external groups. We might add mediating disputes, organizing exchange, and redistributing resources and people to this list. While Habicht-Mauche uses ethnographic information as a basis for conceptualizing southwestern societies as "complex tribes" (i.e., entities that fall between egalitarian and stratified societies), her description of leader duties is compatible with a thin definition of communal social formations and, specifically, with a view of pueblo elites as communal subsumed classes.

Finally, a thin definition of communal social forms allows for the coexistence of communal and noncommunal relationships within a single society. Societies are often mixes of different kinds of labor relationships found at different institutional "sites" in the social order. For the middle-range societies of interest here, such sites might include the household, kin group, sodality, and community-as-a-whole. The coexistence of multiple economic forms in a single society is not allowed by much current theory in the Southwest. McGuire (1989) for example, argues that tributary relationships never characterized the precontact American Southwest, opting instead for the pervasiveness of a "kin-ordered" mode of production (Wolf 1982). This formulation precludes the possibility that tributary relations existed alongside communal relations in several areas for at least short periods of time and that impulses to the formation of tributary relations were even more frequent than that. A thin definition of communalism can accommodate such possibilities; the only stipulation for describing a society as communal is that *most* of its surplus labor is collectively produced and distributed. The analytical challenge then becomes to determine how communal and noncommunal labor relations coexisted and with what consequences.

In summary, a thin definition of communalism is theoretically useful because it allows for variation and complexity in *all* of the social processes that organize group life in middle-range societies. It expects that, under some circumstances, egalitarian politics and/or forms of productive specialization can accompany fundamentally

communal relations of surplus flow. It also expects that communal and noncommunal labor relationships can coexist in the same social formation. These expectations, in turn, help produce some useful ideas about "internal" sources of social tension and change. Although communal subsumed classes work for, and depend on, the commune for material support, they can also be conflicted by their class positions and at times find themselves at odds with the commune, especially if they simultaneously serve the aims of communal and noncommunal labor relations. By allowing that middle-range societies can be socially integrated and dis-integrated in a variety of ways, a thin definition of communalism offers more possibilities for change than allowed by conventional functionalist and marxist models. In such models political elites are cast as either managers or accumulators of surplus, with variability in elite social positions and roles rarely explored. Investigating these, and other dimensions of variability in middle-range political economies, is required if we are to make sense of puzzling phenomena such as Chaco. It is to the Chaco case that I now turn.²

Chacoan Archaeology and Interpretive Theory

Although general agreement exists about the content of the Chacoan archaeological record, at present we have multiple interpretations of that record and little consensus about the precise nature of Chacoan political economy. I consider each of these topics in turn.

Features of the Chaco Phenomenon

There are four characteristic features that define the Chaco Phenomenon (for a useful summary see Cordell 1994). The first is the existence of two different kinds of contemporaneous settlements within the Chaco Canyon core area. These settlements are known as great houses and villages. Great houses are planned, multistoried constructions having C, D, or E shapes. They average about 200 rooms in size, with enclosed plazas containing large, circular, semisubterranean public spaces called great kivas. Great house construction was planned in such a way that major blocks of rooms were added at a single time. On the other hand, villages are much smaller, single-

storied pueblos ranging between 20 to 40 rooms in size and lacking great kivas. Villages were built more haphazardly than great houses, with individual rooms added as needed instead of in planned stages. However, villages employ some of the same construction techniques as great houses and have even been viewed as smaller versions of them (Truell 1986).

A second feature of the Chaco Phenomenon is the association of Chacoan sites with objects indicating widespread exchange, interaction, and, perhaps, specialist production. These objects include turquoise and shell jewelry, copper bells, skeletons of macaws, and cylindrical vase-shaped jars. Chaco exotica are found at both great houses and villages, although a wider variety of items is associated with the great houses. Exotics aside, essentially the same kinds of utilitarian material cultures are found at the two community types: assemblages of black-on-white ceramics, gray corrugated cooking wares, and lithic materials. Perhaps the starkest difference between great house and village assemblages is in the number of human burials associated with each. Villages have yielded burials in numbers proportional to the estimated size of their resident populations. Conversely, burials at great houses are extremely rare. Although containing several hundred rooms and evidence of two centuries of use, great houses can contain as few as 20 burials. Among the burials found in great houses, however, are some of the richest in the entire Pueblo world.

A third feature of the Chaco Phenomenon is the distribution, well beyond Chaco Canyon proper, of great house structures known as "outliers." More than 50 of these structures have been mapped. Outliers are built in masonry styles similar to those characterizing Chaco Canyon great houses. Outliers have multiple stories, enclosed plazas, great kivas and/or tower kivas, and ceramic assemblages similar to those found in canyon great houses. They are often encircled by linear earthen mounds or berms, referred to by Stein and Lekson (1992:96) as *nazha*, a Navajo term meaning "to spiritually surround." Outlying great houses tend to be quite variable in terms of overall size, number of stories, floor plan (ranging from simple rectangles to combinations of straight and curved components), and number of

construction events. They also vary in terms of their settlement context. Some outliers are isolated structures, while others stand in the midst of small residential villages whose architecture and artifacts have a distinctly local character. Finally, some Chaco outliers developed simultaneously with Chaco Canyon great houses during the peak growth period of the mid-to-late 1000s, while others were established during the later years of Chacoan development. The full geographical extent of the Chacoan system of outliers is still unknown, but estimates run as high as 300,000 km². Similarly unclear is the nature of the relationships between outlying great houses and their associated residential villages, and between outliers and great houses in the Chaco core.

The fourth feature of the Chaco Phenomenon is a network of prehistoric roadways connecting different elements of the system. These roads vary in form and quality of preparation. Some are cut into bedrock, others are simply created by brushing aside loose soil and vegetation, while still others are lined with masonry borders. Roads also vary in their width: major roads average 9 m wide, while secondary roads average about 4 m wide. The most striking feature of all the roads is their failure to conform with topographic contours. Instead, they run very straight, with any change in direction occurring abruptly and usually at a great house. Some roads connect outlier communities to resource areas or other outliers, others connect outliers to the canyon core, and still others exist as short segments within the landscape of a single great house. Estimates about the full extent of the road system vary. Conservative estimates recognize a total road system length of about 250 km, while other estimates put the total length closer to 3,000 km.

Interpretive Models

At least six kinds of models for interpreting the Chaco Phenomenon currently exist. Together these models comprise a rich, stimulating body of thought. One model has Chaco as an exchange or redistribution center that functioned to level out productive shortfalls across a regional network of interacting communities (Judge 1979; Marshall et al. 1979; Powers et al. 1983). A second views Chaco as a political home to chiefs, patrons, or

other privileged elites who exercised economic control over a wider domain (Akins 1986; Kantner 1996; Neitzel 1995; Schelberg 1992; Sebastian 1991, 1992a; Tainter and Gillio 1980). Chaco has been viewed as a largely nonresidential ceremonial or ritual center that fulfilled the ideological needs of dispersed populations (Judge 1989; see also Toll 1985). A fourth interpretation has Chaco as a cluster of agrarian settlements differentiated along ethnic lines, with the great house–village dichotomy reflecting such differences (Vivian 1989, 1990). Chaco has been interpreted as the capital of a militarist and expansionist tribute state (Wilcox 1993). Finally, Chaco has been viewed as part of a pan-Pueblo cosmography, or what Stein and Lekson (1992:91) call a “Big Idea.”

Chaco scholarship can be categorized in another way that crosscuts these six categories. Specifically, we can distinguish between those scholars who recognize class divisions and those who do not. Among the former, Wilcox (1993) makes the argument for strong class divisions (i.e., coercive tributary relationships), while Sebastian (1992a) and Kantner (1996) make the argument for somewhat weaker class divisions (e.g., patron-client relationships or leader-follower relationships that have the potential to turn coercive depending on circumstances). Those scholars who do not recognize class divisions view Chaco as basically an “egalitarian enterprise.” This group would include Vivian, Toll, Judge, and at least some of the cosmography theorists.

Several recent overviews of Chaco research examine these alternative models for their theoretical and empirical validity (see especially Sebastian 1992a and Vivian 1990). Arguments have been made showing that *all* existing models are suspect in one way or another, although as Cordell et al. (1994) point out, the “critical tests” that would allow a definitive evaluation of alternatives have not been performed. That key need notwithstanding, I harbor, with others, serious doubts about the reality of strong class divisions at Chaco. The material inequalities evident in the Chacoan record—i.e., the differences in architectural scale, artifact inventories, and mortuary practices between Chaco great houses and villages—are not necessarily inconsistent with a

fundamentally communal economics, politics, and ideology, especially if one commits to the relative autonomy of social processes. We know that egalitarian ideologies can mask political-economic inequality (e.g., Feinman 1992; Hodder 1991a); why not allow that communalism can accommodate such inequalities?

Consequently I am drawn more to the egalitarian alternatives, but it is often unclear what social integration and references to “complexity” mean in these models (see also Yoffee 1994). And, the tendency in some of this work to extend egalitarianism to all aspects of Chacoan social life is worrisome. There is ample empirical evidence that “egalitarian” societies are far from it. Worldwide ethnographies and ethnohistories reveal egalitarian contexts rife with inequalities based, minimally, on age, gender, and residence (e.g., Flanagan 1989; Paynter 1989; contributors to Price and Feinman 1995). It seems reasonable to expect that past societies were structured by similar inequalities and, more likely, by novel forms of social differentiation and exclusion. Assumptions about egalitarianism, if taken too far, can mask structural variation and deny a context for theorizing organizational tensions and struggles. It may be that both broad interpretive perspectives on Chaco (class-divided and egalitarian) overlook the conceivably radical “otherness” (Hodder 1991b) of Chacoan political economy. In the next section I use a thin definition of communalism and more specific lines of evidence to produce a different model that, given sustained testing alongside the alternatives, can perhaps illuminate this radical otherness.

Power, Labor, and the Dynamics of Chaco Communalism

The Chaco communalism that I have in mind is of an unprecedented sort that lacks a good ethnographic analogue. Specifically, I view Chaco as a form of community recently discussed in the abstract by Ruccio (1992:19): one “conceived in multiplicity and difference in an open social reality,” and held together by a sense of community (a “being in common” rather than a common being—see Nancy 1991) that thrived on and celebrated social difference rather than subordinating difference to regulation and control.

This conception resembles in broad outline the model of a "corporate polity" recently discussed by Blanton et al. (1996:5-7). For these authors, a corporate polity allows for power sharing across socially and ethnically diverse groups and seeks to cultivate a collective mechanical solidarity via "consensus management" and adherence to a "corporate cognitive code." In the realm of Chaco scholarship this conception is most akin to Judge's (1989) and Toll's (1985) interpretations of Chaco as a ritual locus for collective consumption by different, farflung social groups. It also dovetails with the views of cosmography theorists, especially Stein and Lekson's (1992) concept of a Chacoan "Big Idea" that served to integrate ethnic and cultural diversity across the Pueblo world.

This conception does not, however, imply a view of Chacoan organization as simple and non-hierarchical, and here is the difference with views of Chaco as an egalitarian enterprise (Vivian 1989). I recognize political hierarchy at Chaco but the relationship between hierarchy and other aspects of social life is of a particular sort. Specifically, and in keeping with distinctions made above, I define Chacoan hierarchies as "communal" and "subsumed" rather than "sequential" or "simultaneous" (Johnson 1982; Vivian 1989). The problem with these latter, information-theory concepts of hierarchy is that neither specifies the relationship between power differences and the appropriation of surplus labor. Simultaneous hierarchies (i.e., those based on nonconsensual decision making), for example, could sustain either communal or noncommunal labor relations. Alternatively, the notion of communal subsumed hierarchy implies a particular relationship between power holding and the appropriation of surplus labor. As noted above, people in communal hierarchies receive cuts of collectively appropriated surplus in return for performing activities that allow communal relations of production to exist. This conceptualization also does not imply that Chacoan organization lacked social tensions and conflicts. In fact, internal "class struggles" over the appropriation and distribution of surplus labor (as well as over the distribution and use of social power) may have provided the ultimate impetus behind Chacoan social change. I further explore this point below.

What is the evidence for this notion of Chaco as a communal enterprise founded on difference but bound by a "being in common," "corporate cognitive code" or integrative "Big Idea?" The Chaco data are complicated but multiple lines of available evidence warrant a plausible argument that, of course, must be subjected to further evaluation. Several kinds of information from both the Chaco (A.D. 900-1150) and post-Chaco (A.D. 1150-1250) eras in the northern Southwest provide support for a model of Chaco communalism, as well as a model of organizational change driven by historically contingent, internal dynamics of the communal formation.

Chaco-Era Patterns

Lekson et al. (1988) discuss several lines of evidence from Chaco Canyon great houses that point to a limited residential population at the Chaco core and, in turn, Chaco's status as a ceremonial center serving a communal collective of outlying peoples. These include (1) the existence of relatively few intensively used habitation rooms at core great houses, suggesting a very small resident caretaker population, (2) the very substantial, "overengineered" quality of great house architecture, suggesting that great houses were built to minimize upkeep requirements, (3) the existence of storage rooms that are accessible only from outside the great house, suggesting their provisioning function, and (4) the episodic nature of deposition in great house trash mounds, suggesting intermittent use (e.g., for collective feasting) by large numbers of people. Lekson (1984a) had previously noted that the quantities of labor, and level of organization, required for great house construction events would not be out of line with that required for other communal labor projects among pueblo groups. And Johnson (1989) has noted that great houses preserve the fairly uniform room size and architectural modularity that characterize smaller, more prosaic pueblo villages. While Lekson et al. (1988:109) are careful to suggest that the Chaco core was much more than a communal ceremonial center, they do not specify, in political and economic terms, the kind of "unprecedented complexity" represented there. I believe that this complexity falls well within the range allowed by a thin definition of communalism.

Information on Chaco-era roads—specifically the roads as described by Stein (1989) and Roney (1992, 1993)—has special resonance vis-à-vis a model of Chaco communalism. Their observations that Chaco roads (1) do not consistently run to economically important resource areas, (2) do not always lead to Chaco Canyon or constitute, for that matter, a coherent regional system, (3) do not show the greatest labor investments in expected areas (e.g., where topography is most difficult), and (4) lack evidence of associated construction debris and campsites are striking. If these observations are valid, then Chaco roads are difficult to square with the movement of tribute-extracting armies or labor-bearing client populations as stipulated by class division models. Roney (1992) develops the argument for communal, nonutilitarian use by arguing that the roads reinforced mutual rights and reciprocal obligations vis-à-vis local flows of social labor. Again, however, the precise relationships organizing Chacoan labor investments in roads is not explicated. Roney sees the meaning of Chacoan roads to be variable and idiosyncratic: they could have functioned as raceways, ceremonial avenues, or cosmographic expressions (Roney 1992:130). This might be expected given the ethnic and cultural diversity likely encompassed by the expansive Chaco network.

Chaco-era data on “exotic” artifact inventories from great houses and villages also support an argument for Chaco communalism. Many models have stressed the greater variety and density of Chacoan exotics at great houses and, by extension, their function as elite residences (Akins and Schelberg 1984; Schelberg 1992; Tainter and Gillio 1980; Tainter and Plog 1994). However, Toll (1991:86) points out that exotics 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, 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 (see also Neitzel 1995:405–409 for a discussion of certain “anomalies” in the spatial distribution of turquoise and exotic ceramics that may further support this interpretation).

Even if it turns out that great houses and villages differ significantly in quantities and densities of exotics, this still would not mean that great houses were the residences of coercive exploitative elites. Evidence for inequality (differential access to some resource) and hierarchy is not necessarily evidence for class divisions; Bonito elites could still have functioned as communal subsumed classes, and exotics as communal social entitlements. The case for exploitative elites requires evidence establishing that access was not guaranteed to life-sustaining resources across a population and that elites had direct claims on the labor of producers (specifically, claims that would have compromised the ability of producers to perform the *necessary labor* requisite for reproducing themselves as individuals). Such a case has not yet been made for Chaco. In the absence of such a case, the communal alternative remains plausible.

In theory, some of the best data for evaluating arguments about the presence/absence of social class divisions and interpersonal exploitation should be found in mortuary practices and, especially, in human health profiles. Significant differences in mortuary practices and health patterns have been documented between Pueblo Bonito and village sites in the canyon (Akins 1986; Akins and Schelberg 1984; Nelson et al. 1994). As noted above, Pueblo Bonito displays the richest burials discovered anywhere in the Chacoan world, most notably two male burials, each with thousands of turquoise pieces from room 33. Demographic and health measures also indicate that individuals from Pueblo Bonito lived longer and were better nourished than their village counterparts (Nelson et al. 1994).

However, legitimate questions can be asked about the significance of this variation (Sebastian 1992b:26; Toll 1991:103–104). Burials from canyon great houses are still so rare, and so much is still unknown about the circumstances under

which burials were deposited (and archaeologically recovered), that perhaps we should not rule out other kinds of explanations for observable patterns. If, for example, Pueblo Bonito burials are individuals drawn from a wider "user group" that also included village and outlier dwellers, then they may represent an accumulation of people from throughout the wider Chaco region who died just before or during periodic ceremonial aggregations and who were accorded "status" mortuary treatment in great houses because of the timing and/or circumstances of their death rather than strictly because of their social position. Such a scenario might also explain why the Pueblo Bonito health profile is not that different from the profile of more geographically dispersed populations living in the northern Southwest. As Nelson et al. (1994:101) point out, health at Pueblo Bonito was only slightly more disrupted than health among the more isolated, autonomous, and presumably egalitarian groups occupying Black Mesa. One way to begin clarifying this issue might be to simulate what a burial population at a large aggregation site only periodically occupied under conditions similar to those found in the northern Southwest should look like. We might also consider whether such a scenario could account for certain other characteristics of the Pueblo Bonito burial sample, such as its disproportionately few infants.

If we allow that the user group of great houses was a democratic collective of individuals drawn from small villages and outliers located throughout the wider Chaco region, then we could very well have a situation in Chaco Canyon akin to that which Blitz (1993) proposes for Mississippian mound centers developing at roughly the same time in the American midcontinent. Blitz in fact critiques the conventional two-class "elite-commoner" model of Mississippian social structure, where he presents evidence from the Moundville area suggesting 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" (Blitz 1993:184). Activities at Chaco Canyon great houses involving the collective use and distribution of sumptuary goods, and the collective consumption of imported food, may have

helped integrate the diverse populations participating in the Chacoan sphere in a similar fashion. Great house plazas, great kivas, and exterior trash mounds certainly would have been appropriate public arenas for the kinds of "cosmic renewal" rituals that Blanton et al. (1996:6) view as critical for the maintenance of corporate cognitive codes and social relations.

It would be a stretch to argue that all Mississippian and Chacoan farmers enjoyed equivalent access to positions of social power and authority. Toll (1991:106) nicely frames the issue with his comment that "some form of elite probably existed" at Chaco and that the task is to determine its "nature" and "size." I would add that we also need to determine the specific sources of elite status and the precise nature of elite support. On the model proposed here, elites are communal and subsumed: they receive communally allocated shares of surplus labor and perhaps other perquisites in return for brokering access to exotics and other communal entitlements, redistributing resources and people, organizing ceremony, and so forth. However, these communal elites could still have used their subsumed class positions to initiate, under certain conditions, significant social change.

To summarize thus far, information on Chacoera architecture, roads, artifact inventories, burial practices, and health patterns provide tentative support for a model of Chacoan political economy as a fundamentally communal enterprise. While I have not theorized the precise nature of this communalism (e.g., the variety of forms that surplus labor took, the ways that land was distributed and producer work groups organized, aspects of differentiation within producing groups and Chacoan subsumed classes, etc.), the model directs our attention to diverse agents, roles, and interests, and the problematic relationship between political hierarchy and surplus flow. The empirical evidence supporting the model consists of broad patterns in available data and is mostly circumstantial. The argument does, however, establish an analytical baseline and contains ideas amenable to further testing. In the next section I further develop the argument by expanding it to include other kinds of information from the post-Chaco era in the northern Southwest.

Post-Chaco-Era Patterns

Information from the post-Chaco era of A.D. 1150–1250, or what Fowler and Stein (1992) term the “Post-Chaco Interval,” may be especially important for clarifying the organization of the Chaco Phenomenon during its heyday. The end of the Chaco era is usually interpreted by theorists of class divisions (and many others) as involving an organizational “collapse” or “decline” triggered by environmental change and population displacements (various contributors to Adler 1996; Kohler 1993; Lewin 1992; Wilcox 1993). Minimally, a return to greater organizational simplicity is stipulated (LeBlanc 1989). However, what is becoming increasingly apparent across the A.D. 1150 threshold are powerful continuities of thought and action that may indicate the *persistence* of Chaco-inspired communalism, albeit in reorganized, and perhaps even more complex, forms. The topic of reorganization in Chaco prehistory was first broached by Judge (1989) and later developed for the post-Chaco era by Fowler and Stein (1992) and Lekson and Cameron (1995). The discussion here extends those treatments.

Fowler and Stein (1992:116–117) note that Chaco-style roads continue to be built in the Chaco region after A.D. 1150. These roads connect noncontemporaneous settlements: the earlier Chacoan great houses and the later “big houses”—large walled communities surrounding a central plaza that by A.D. 1300 come to dominate the northern Southwest. Noncontemporaneity of road-connected settlements poses problems for models of Chacoan class divisions, for which traffic in resources and people is vital for achieving large-scale, centralized political and economic integration at a single point in time. On the other hand, noncontemporaneity would be fully consistent with the model of Chacoan communalism proposed here, one that recognizes a powerful, unifying ideology with the capacity to endure through time.

Fowler and Stein’s (1992:116–118) interpretation of roads as “time bridges” (“symbolic umbilicals” or “tubes” of sacred space) for linking different eras via the transfer of “ritual essences” is especially provocative in this regard. On the view advocated here these essences would help

reproduce, in a reorganizing post-Chaco world, the ideological conditions that sustained Chaco-era communalism. This idea—certainly one in need of greater empirical support—may strike some as far-fetched. However, we know that societies clearly do more than traffic in resources and people—they also traffic in cultural meanings (Hodder 1991a; Marcus and Fisher 1986:77–110). If noncontemporaneity can be established for a critical mass of road-connected sites, then Fowler and Stein’s case, and my argument that communalism characterized both the Chaco and post-Chaco eras, would be greatly strengthened.

There are post-Chaco-era patterns in architecture that also support a model of Chaco communalism while simultaneously complicating class division (tribute and cliency) models. Fowler and Stein (1992) note that the construction styles of post-Chaco big houses clearly extend the Chaco great house tradition—they are “new interpretations of old architectural forms” (Fowler and Stein 1992:116). Architectural developments at the margins of the old Chaco sphere—in southwest Colorado and west-central New Mexico—are similarly intriguing for the support they lend to a model of Chacoan, and post-Chacoan, communalism. Bruce Bradley (1993:72) has argued for a mid-thirteenth-century Chacoan “spiritual revitalization” in southwest Colorado at the Wallace Ruin and suggests that such a revitalization may also be evidenced by the large, D-shaped public structure at Sand Canyon Pueblo (Bradley 1996:244–247). The structure’s D-shape emulates that of the classic great houses in Chaco Canyon. It thus may have served as a metaphor for the Chaco core great house, providing meaning important for maintaining communal relations of production. Indeed, the entire Sand Canyon Pueblo may be socially modeled on the Chaco-era great house (Lekson and Cameron 1993), a suspicion warranted by even the most cursory examination of the pueblo’s D-shaped ground plan (see Bradley 1996:245). These notions are compelling because at roughly the same time in the Zuni area of west-central New Mexico, D-shaped ritual structures were being built at multiple room block, early aggregated settlements (Saitta 1991, 1994c). The form and distribution of D-shaped structures can probably

be explained in any number of ways. However, it is worth asking whether a broadly similar kind of Chacoan revitalization was happening here. If not a revitalization, then at least an effort to retain and employ, via architectural design, traditional Chacoan symbolism in the interest of solving local integrative problems.³

What, specifically, were these local integrative problems? And what was the specific rationale for employing Chacoan design concepts in their solution? Although there is some question about the magnitude of mid-1100s population movements, even modest displacement and resettlement could have posed integrative problems for newly aggregated communities or those experiencing immigration. Minimally, such problems would have involved the renegotiation of social group boundaries, the rules and terms for producing and allocating communal surplus labor, and social group ceremonial obligations. The rationale for employing Chacoan design symbolism to solve such problems conceivably lay in the “multicultural” character of things Chacoan. The geographical scale of the Chaco network almost certainly implies interaction between ethnically, linguistically, and culturally distinct groups (Cordell 1984; Stein and Lekson 1992:87; Upham et al. 1994:183–188; Vivian 1990). What people shared across these cultural boundaries—their “being in common,” to recall Nancy’s (1991) phrase—was the Chacoan “Big Idea.” The Big Idea would have been especially useful in a post-Chaco era characterized by population displacements and relocations. In such a context the Big Idea, expressed in architectural design and composition (Stein and Lekson 1992), would have provided something to which all newly co-residing groups could relate. It would have helped to reintegrate social diversity, defuse political tensions, and sustain communalism under new historical conditions of social upheaval and reorganization. Lekson and Cameron (1995:194–195) provide ethnographic evidence for the integrative power of the Chacoan Big Idea where they report the significance that Chaco has to different groups of contemporary pueblo people. Drawing on information provided by the tribes, Lekson and Cameron note that the Hopi, Zuni, and Acoma worldviews take in “most of the old Chaco world” (Lekson and Cameron

1995:194). Their information suggests that Chaco never was “abandoned,” that it never did “collapse.” Instead, “Chaco and its history remain in today’s pueblos” (Lekson and Cameron 1995:195).

History, Contingency, and Chacoan Social Change

This discussion of post-Chacoan social dynamics, of course, raises the question of *why* communal political economies of the northern Southwest reorganized. What accounts for the “end” of the Chaco era?

The causes of change are still poorly understood. Late eleventh-century environmental changes must be part of the story (Judge 1989). Droughts and accompanying productive downturns for this time are well documented, but they cannot tell the whole story (Feinman 1992). We need to consider how environmental change created problems for specific social agents and induced particular social tensions and struggles (see also Dean 1992). As sketched here, Chacoan subsumed classes, including political functionaries, ritual specialists, and whatever full- or part-time craft specialists might have existed (Mathien 1992:47–48; Toll 1991:102–103), are those social agents facing the biggest existential problems because they depend on the commune for material support via the distribution of communally appropriated shares of surplus labor. And, within this set of subsumed classes, ritual specialists are perhaps most vulnerable since deteriorating climate would have undermined their cultural legitimacy as well as their economic support.

Aldenderfer (1993) suggests as a general rule that ritual specialists, because they are in a position to manipulate legitimizing ideologies, are those social agents in middle-range societies most favorably situated to initiate social change. As a response to declining subsumed class incomes and eroding cultural legitimacy created by the environmental and productive downturns of, especially, the 1080s and 1090s, ritual specialists at Chaco could have used their positions to build the noncommunal tribute and/or cliency relations discussed by class division theorists. That is, they sought to become exploitative extractors of surplus labor as well as subsumed recipients of labor.

The massive great house building spurts of the 1075–1115 period in the Chaco core—spurts that doubled the labor investments of previous years (Judge 1989:224; Lekson 1984b:60–62)—conceivably reflect such efforts. This building occurred in a context of fluctuating environments and varying productive yields (Dean et al. 1994:65; Sebastian 1992a:111), an observation that alerts us to its socially conditioned nature. Several scholars (Stuart 1991b; Tainter 1988; see also Lewin 1992) see the frenzied building of the late 1000s as a sign of economic stress, structural weakness, and impending societal collapse. The frenzy has yet to be fully specified in social terms, although Sebastian (1992a) poses some alternative interpretations. The most intriguing of these interprets the construction as a “desperation measure” employed by great house leaders to preserve long-standing patron-client relationships (Sebastian 1992a:130). That is, architecture became a medium of competition between patrons to attract and retain client groups.

Alternatively, I view the construction as an attempt by subsumed communal elites to create, for the first time, a radically new, class-divided social order. Specifically, architecture at the Chaco core was turned from a medium for building and celebrating communal relations of production to a medium for exploiting labor and manipulating mass psychology in the interests of creating and sustaining tributary class relationships. This change would have been spearheaded by Chacoan ritual specialists and, perhaps, other threatened subsumed classes. Although most rooms built during this time qualify as “storage” rooms (Judge 1989:224), Johnson (1989:376) notes that what gets built in the context of elite-nonelite struggles over labor “is of little consequence as long as the result is stable and large” and ideologically justifiable to the builders (see also Sebastian 1992a:126).

Comments by other Chaco scholars support this notion of a late-eleventh-century Chaco system on the brink of a qualitative change in labor relations, political organization, and ideology. Toll (1991:102) sees the major growth phase of 1080–1110 as indicating “a change in perception” among people concerning the virtues of continued participation in the Chacoan system. He inti-

mates 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 this key period 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.”

Such efforts likely would have met with at least some popular resistance and struggle. Popular resistance is conceivably reflected in the late Chaco-era archaeological record by the cessation of periodic deposition events in great house trash mounds and also by the decline of village site populations across the San Juan Basin (Sebastian 1992a:129–130). People stopped coming to Chaco in large numbers, and some moved out of the basin entirely. Sebastian’s (1991) discussion of the late Chaco-era (ca. 1100–1130) “secularization” of great houses is also intriguing for what it implies about popular resistance. Secularization is evidenced in part by the intensification of domestic activities within rooms, the appearance of trash-filled rooms, and the enclosing of great house plazas with arcs of rooms. Sebastian (1991:131–132; 1992a:148–149) discusses two “virtually opposite explanations” for these changes: they reflect either the increasing power of great house leaders (now able to turn clients into retainers) or their declining power and consequent retreat from systemwide involvement. Either possibility, for Sebastian, could have been conditioned by the productive downturns of the late 1000s, but she favors the latter (1992a:138).

I do not regard these as mutually exclusive interpretations; in fact, both probably contain elements of truth. On the model of change presented here, ritual specialists at this time were losing power and economic support, and they attempted to compensate by using their shaky but still-sustainable position to change the terms and conditions of surplus labor flow (Toll’s “increasing elite demands”). The room arcs and enclosed plazas thus reflect strategies employed by ritual specialists (and perhaps other subsumed classes) to consolidate tributary control over labor in the context of wider social struggles over its appropriation and

distribution. The “boxy” McElmo towns built in the canyon at this time—structures that depart from the classic D-shaped great house architectural plan and viewed by Lekson (1984a) as specialized storage structures—may also reflect subsumed class strategies to consolidate new forms of control over labor and/or its products. It might be fruitful to look at other late architectural developments in the canyon, such as the construction of bi-wall structures and the distinctive tri-wall structure at Pueblo del Arroyo, with the dynamic of class struggles over labor flow, and the special predicament of subsumed classes, in mind.

For whatever reason, tributary relations were never consolidated at the Chaco core. Contrary to some beliefs (e.g., Johnson 1989), I do not think that this failure was a function of the inability of southwestern environments to produce the requisite agricultural surpluses. While tribute takers must of course be cognizant of environmental potential, would any elite interested in their own social reproduction, especially when threatened with a loss of material support, necessarily worry about environmental constraints on surplus production? As presented here, social constraints are central: primary producers actively resisted elite impulses to transform the communal order, the effects of both the impulses and the resistance rippled outward, and the Chaco system was thrown into reorganization. But we do not see the total abandonment of the Chacoan Big Idea even though it may have been manipulated by ritual specialists for the purpose of building noncommunal tributary relations of production. As discussed above, the Big Idea continued to be used to organize communal life in new historical circumstances.⁴

Summary

It is worth emphasizing the differences between this model of Chacoan organization and change dynamics and others that have been offered. In the model proposed here, Chaco was an unprecedented communal enterprise that bound together a regional network of small pueblo communities via the local (and probably some regional) redistribution of resources,⁵ communal consumption of resources, and collective appropriation of social labor for great house and road construction. In the Chaco sequence, class divisions threatened

very late rather than relatively early. The architects of these strategies were ritual specialists rather than generic political “elites” or “leaders,” although other subsumed class agents may also have been involved. Impulses to the development of noncommunal relations in the Chaco core were produced in response to a historically contingent crisis of communalism, i.e., a complex struggle over communalism’s political, economic, and cultural conditions of existence, and not by a natural competition for power or by benevolent environments (e.g., Kantner 1996). The crisis came about because of environmental changes of the late 1000s, complicating the social reproduction of a specific group of agents: Chacoan ritual specialists. This crisis activated strategies of tribute taking and associated attempts to ideologically legitimize such strategies, as well as strategies of producer resistance. These strategies are revealed in part by architectural and settlement patterns of the late 1000s and early 1100s. The scenario can be expressed in linear terms in the following way:

historical (socioenvironmental) change \subset crisis of communal labor appropriation \subset impulses to the formation of tributary relations \subset strategies of domination and popular resistance \subset reorganized communalism informed by ideological continuity

It should also be noted that this model of communal crisis and struggle is different from McGuire’s (1989) prestige-good model of southwestern social change, which Kohler (1994) finds helpful in understanding the “demise” of the Chaco system. In writing about the abandonment of the San Juan Basin in A.D. 1280–1300, McGuire invokes a model whereby a productive crisis, conditioned by environmental deterioration, compromised elite power and “demystified” its legitimizing ideology. These events paved the way for conflict between producers and elites, social disintegration, and the development of a new ideology. By extending McGuire’s model to Chaco, Kohler implies, with others, that the end of Chaco was simultaneously the end of Chacoan political organization and the Chacoan Big Idea. Alternatively, the place Chaco occupies in contemporary Puebloan ideology, as revealed by

Lekson and Cameron's (1995) work, is compelling evidence for powerful historical continuities in thought and action. And, it is testimony to the need for new interpretive models that integrate the evidence for change with that for continuity.⁶

Conclusion

This paper has presented an interpretation of Chacoan organization and change dynamics based in a tradition of anthropological political economy. It is distinctive to the extent that it links Chacoan and post-Chacoan realities via concepts of class, agency, historical contingency, class struggle, and reorganization. Such linkages are made possible by allowing the relative autonomy of power and labor processes and by employing a thin definition of communalism.

Although faithful to broad patterns in available data, more research is needed to substantiate this alternative model of Chacoan organization and change dynamics. Several key questions must guide the search for relevant evidence:

- What forms did surplus labor take in the Chacoan political economy? Agricultural products? Labor service in road/great house construction? Both forms? Other forms?
- Who were the significant subsumed class agents in Chacoan political economy (e.g., ritual specialists, political functionaries, craft specialists)? How can we best identify these agents and their roles?
- What data available for the last few decades of the eleventh century suggest excessive (or new) demands for surplus labor that might, in turn, implicate attempts by subsumed classes to establish tributary relations of production? What is the evidence for possible conflicts and struggles between different subsumed classes threatened with a loss of support? And what kinds of alliances, coalitions, and factions might have linked people with different class (and nonclass) positions as a consequence of late eleventh-century environmental and social changes in the Chaco region?
- What data from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries suggest the uneasy coexistence of communal and tributary class processes and forms/strategies of producer resistance to the establishment of tributary relationships?

The chances of answering these questions, and of clarifying the nature of Chacoan organization generally, are improved if we make some other intellectual commitments beyond those to the relative autonomy of social processes and a thin definition of communalism. One commitment recognizes that Chaco is still very much a theoretical problem, not just an empirical one requiring more data and better methods for its resolution (Doyel 1992). While the calls for additional data and, especially, critical empirical tests of existing models are well taken (Cordell et al. 1994), we may not have all the relevant models in hand for making sense of Chacoan data. It would thus seem unwise to rule out a priori any plausible interpretation of Chacoan patterns. New accounts, including those often disparaged as "interpretive essays," "historical sketches," or "accommodative arguments," can liberate new thought by encouraging comparison and critique across paradigms and models. This in turn can help with the definition and refinement of critical empirical tests.

A second commitment recognizes the limits of ethnography as a guide to building and evaluating interpretive theory. Tainter and Plog (1994:180–181) dismiss Chaco "revisionism" (the term applied to those accounts that view Chaco as a nonresidential ceremonial center) by arguing that it does not square with known ethnographic realities and also violates expectations for what would constitute "rational" human behavior (see also Sebastian 1992b:26; Tainter and Gillio 1980:107). Although ethnographic background knowledge is indispensable to archaeological inference (and informs the model of communal dynamics outlined in this paper), it is prudent to keep in mind that cross-cultural regularities in tribal social life are themselves historically contingent. They may, in fact, reflect the common overdetermination of tribal organization by expanding nation states (see also Cordell et al. 1994:175; Upham 1987). Ethnographic comparison—no matter how systematic and expansively cross-cultural—can still limit our imaginations and, at worse, condemn us to discovering the present in the past (see also Doyel 1992; Feinman 1992). The "comparative archaeology" recommended by Cordell et al. (1994) would seem to

offer a better guide for grasping the otherness of the past than the ethnographic record or a priori presumptions about human rationality. Comparative archaeology compares archaeological records from around the world both synchronically and diachronically in an effort to identify different boundary conditions for social formations (Cordell et al. 1994:177). I have already called attention to some possible parallels between the Chacoan and Mississippian records that may give us some new insights about both phenomena. Closer scrutiny of these records from a comparative standpoint may reveal other interesting similarities and differences.⁷

A final commitment is to a more thoroughgoing appreciation of Chaco's specific and conceivably unique status as a historical phenomenon; i.e., its "historicity." It is becoming commonplace in archaeology to accept a role for contingent historical factors in shaping processes of change. To learn new lessons about the past, however, we may need to resist the urge to treat specific cases as exemplars of regularities we think we have established about the long-term dynamics of social formations. Chaco has often been used in this way, especially by "collapse" theorists.

Tainter (1988), for example, considers the Chacoan collapse as one of the three best known in history, along with the Roman and the lowland Mayan. In his view, all three societies experienced "declining marginal returns" on their investments in complexity, making each susceptible to collapse from internal decomposition or external threat. Stuart (1991a:12), for another example, likens Chacoan history to that of the West where he sees Chaco as a "metaphor for the story of our own times in modern America." Specifically, Stuart sees the late eleventh-century Chacoan building frenzy as "quite similar, in principle, to the behavior of American society during the Great Depression" (Stuart 1991b:13). That is, Chacoan "public works projects" were efforts to absorb excess labor in hopes of dealing with a deepening economic recession. The efforts failed, and collapse ensued. Finally, Lewin (1992:195) sees in Chaco the same cycle of growth, instability, and collapse that has plagued complex systems throughout history, the former Soviet Union being the cycle's most recent casualty. Chaco's story is

presented as another case of history repeating itself, another example of a society "that a historical event pushed into collapse rather than to new heights of complexity" (Lewin 1992:196).

What links these accounts is their emphasis on pathology in complex social formations, i.e., what can go wrong (and inevitably does) where complexity is understood to imply political competition, economic intensification, and geographical expansion. While there is virtue in seeking generalities and linking cases across time and space, these ruminations are never innocent exercises. They are informed by particular philosophical ideals and values. In my view, there is just as much theoretical and empirical reason to see Chaco as a departure from the rhythms and regularities of world history as to see it as an exemplar of them. Chaco's trajectory was different from that of ancient states and civilizations and possibly even exceptional on a global scale (Yoffee 1994:352, 354). Chaco may be one of our best exceptions to the generalization that increases in societal scale and complexity are attended by the erosion of communality and the rise of class divisions. It may also stand as unique testimony to the power of a shared valuation of community, i.e., to the unifying power of a shared Big Idea capable of crosscutting ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Of course, Chaco could also just be our best-studied example of a class of phenomena that remains relatively unknown (e.g., see Blanton et al. 1996 on corporate polities; Johnson 1989 on sequential hierarchies). The point here is simply that Chaco conceivably holds out other, very different lessons that are relevant to, and can inform, the social values and dynamics of our own times.

This discussion takes us to the political tie between past and present. Wilk (1985) has explored the ways in which the past can be used as "charter"; that is, as a set of guides for how contemporary society might organize itself differently to cope with various existential problems. It is intriguing to think about how a scientifically grounded account of Chaco might be used as a charter for critically rethinking such issues as communalism's forms, limitations, and potentialities or, alternatively, existing strategies for coping with ethnic diversity and conflict. That, however, is another paper, whose writing depends

on a change in the culture of American archaeology (and its view of science) that would make frank discussion of the political tie between past and present a more legitimate part of archaeological discourse. In the meantime, Chacoan archaeology will continue to puzzle, to provoke, and to challenge the capacity of anthropological theory to grasp both its social meaning and its wider implications for our understanding of human behavior.

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Notes

1. The concept of class, as used in this context, refers to a person's relationship to the process of producing and distributing social surplus labor. In this sense the concept is applicable to all societies. What distinguishes societies is the extent to which a class division characterizes the relationship between producers and appropriators of surplus. Communal societies, unlike tributary and capitalist societies, may be said to lack a class division because most if not all producers of surplus are simultaneously the appropriators of surplus. Communal subsumed classes—communal elites—are producers/appropriators of surplus labor who also receive and distribute surplus labor. The key distinctions of class analysis, including different kinds of class agents, roles, interests, and struggles, are outlined in Saitta (1992) and discussed more fully in Saitta (1994a, 1994b).
2. Bernbeck's (1995) study of middle-range societies in sixth millennium B.C. Mesopotamia moves in a similar direction as that charted here. Bernbeck also makes an argument for respecting the relative autonomy of politics and economics. His comparison of the Hassunan and Samarran societies shows that an egalitarian politics can coexist with, and support, very different forms of household cooperation, labor processes, family structure, and relations of production. I understand Bernbeck's analysis as a contribution to understanding variation in the form of communal political economies. My argument in this section has extended Bernbeck's point by suggesting that the communal economic arrangements he describes could also be supported by an *inegalitarian* politics, and that such a politics could support communal and noncommunal class relationships simultaneously.
3. This argument about the ideological function of Chacoan design concepts parallels Stein and Lekson's (1992:96–97) arguments about the meaning of the earthen berm or *nazha* surrounding Chaco-era outliers. For Stein and Lekson the *nazha* are physical metaphors for the walls of Chaco Canyon, important for reinforcing the Chacoan "Big Idea" at hinterland communities. Post-Chaco D-shaped structures may have functioned in the same way as the Chaco-era earthen berm: to reproduce a Chaco-inspired ideology important for maintaining local communality. Kintigh (1994) and Kintigh et al. (1996) also advocate the idea that post-Chaco architectural developments served as ideological supports for new social arrangements. They do not, however, specify the nature of these arrangements except to intimate that they may have been more complex than those of the Chaco era. Their argument also differs from Fowler and Stein's, and the one made here, in viewing the post-Chaco use of Chaco symbolism as an appropriation of the past, rather than as evidence for long-term political and ideological continuity.
4. This argument has focused on change dynamics for the Chaco core. A complete understanding of Chacoan social change must consider core-outlier relationships in more detail. These relationships were likely very complicated given the well-documented variability, and decidedly local character, of outlier artifact assemblages (Sebastian 1992b:37; see also the contributions to Adler 1996). In thinking about Chaco core-outlier relationships, I am inclined to

the position sketched by Judge (1993), who, using an idea of Sebastian's, talks about outliers being "captured" by the Chaco core in the sense of being interested in, and impressed by, the politics and ideology emanating from there. The word "capture" strikes me as too strong, however. Alternatively, recognizing a process of "emulation" whereby people at outliers participate in communal life at the Chaco core while retaining significant political and economic autonomy—and *always* the capacity for resistance—seems more appropriate. Outliers likely affected core dynamics in different ways, and core dynamics likely had different effects on outliers. Studies of outliers like those of Stein and Lekson (1992), Warburton and Graves (1992), Mobley-Tanaka (1993), and Kantner (1996) are critical for clarifying outlier organizational structures, core-outlier relationships, and long-term dynamics of change.

5. Although good evidence for the redistribution of ceramics (Toll 1984) and lithics (Cameron 1984) is lacking, the likelihood that at least some kinds of resources (e.g., dried meat, pinyon nuts) were redistributed within the Chaco sphere is now generally agreed upon. Debate continues regarding the large-scale redistribution of basic subsistence resources such as corn. Critiques of large-scale redistribution focus on the high energy cost of redistributing such resources over large distances (e.g., Lightfoot 1979; see also Sebastian 1991). Counterarguments emphasize that at least some roads may have reduced food transport costs (Tainter and Gillio 1981:111–112), and that calculations of energy cost must consider the frequency of the behavior in question, i.e., infrequent distribution of corn could have easily occurred within much of the Chaco region (Toll 1991:101). Perhaps most importantly, critiques of large-scale food redistribution overlook the fact that particular arrangements for mobilizing labor and products—and the willingness of people to participate in them—also depend on cultural and historical context. I do not have a problem seeing people regularly transporting basic subsistence resources (and themselves) over great distances if there is a perceived payoff, which in the Chaco case was largely a political and ideological one. And, contra Wilcox (1993), it strikes me that long-distance flows of corn into the Chaco core could just as easily have been regularized within the context of a communal feasting and redistribution structure as within an exploitative set of tribute or client relationships. Why should the energy costs of corn transport be prohibitive for communal feasting but not for tribute taking by Chacoan elites? Thus, even now there seems little good reason for ruling out the periodic, large-scale, and fundamentally communal redistributions of basic subsistence resources first suggested by Judge (1979).

6. In their most recent paper on Chaco, Stein and Fowler (1996) emphasize this point by noting the "constant ties

between the ancestral and the living" in pueblo communities. And, in opposition to notions of a Chacoan "collapse," they more closely specify their interpretation of Chaco's end as involving a "ritual retirement" and "planned renewal" of integrative facilities undertaken on a community and a regional scale. The present paper owes much to Stein and Fowler's formulation but seeks to locate the cause of this retirement and renewal in a context of social tension and class struggle, rather than systemwide, consensual decision making.

7. An analysis of Cahokian archaeology from the perspective offered here (Saitta 1994b) yields interesting similarities to, as well as differences from, Chaco and suggests the utility of a comparative archaeology. The common ground beneath Chaco and Cahokia lies in their timing (the key developments in both areas happen between A.D. 1000 and 1150), and in material evidence suggesting that their respective cultural "climaxes" or "peaks" were actually crisis-ridden preludes to reorganization conditioned by internal social dynamics (see Pauketat 1992 on Cahokia). The early 1100s secularization of public/ritual space noted above for Chacoan great houses is also evident at Cahokia (Saitta 1994b). On the theory developed here, both developments are byproducts of struggles within, and the reorganization of, communal political economies.

The differences between Cahokia and Chaco are just as interesting and likely reflect differences in the nature of these social dynamics. A stronger case can be made at Cahokia than Chaco that "prestige goods" functioned as communal social entitlements, and there is also much better evidence at Cahokia (e.g., from Monks Mound and Mound 72) for the firmer establishment of tributary relations. Also, organizational change at Cahokia seems to have had much less to do with environmental deterioration than with changes in the wider social environment, specifically changes in long-distance exchange relations that may have limited the number of exotic items moving into the American Bottom after A.D. 1050. These changes may have set communal social struggles in motion by undermining the position of communal subsumed classes charged with regulating exchange and distributing its products. There is much more work to do on the problem of Cahokia-Chaco connections, including their convergences, divergences, and issues of causality. The point here is that a comparative archaeology can help us illuminate variation across space in the nature of communal political economies and in the processes which transform them.

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