

THE Archaeology OF
Regional Interaction



RELIGION, WARFARE, AND EXCHANGE ACROSS THE
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THEORIZING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF
SOUTHWESTERN EXCHANGE

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Recent years have seen a renewal of interest in the phenomenon of precontact exchange in the Americas. This is indicated by Schortman and Urban's (1992b) edited volume on power, resources, and interregional interaction and the two-volume set on North and Middle American exchange systems edited by Baugh and Ericson (Baugh and Ericson 1994; Ericson and Baugh 1992). An examination of these volumes reveals a broad consensus on three points about the study of exchange in the Americas.

First, exchange is driven as much by social as by economic necessity. Exchange not only helps to buffer resource stress through various kinds of "banking" strategies, but it also serves the aims of "social reproduction." That is, exchange cements political alliances between interacting groups and provides goods that can be used on a local level to create and signal important status distinctions, as well as meet the requirements of group ritual activities.

Second, exchange is variable across the continent in terms of the kinds of goods exchanged, the social context of exchange, and the intensity of exchange. Exchange systems also wax and wane in scale and complexity depending on the specific circumstances of time and place.

Third, because of the social nature of exchange and its responsiveness to historical contingencies, particular forms (e.g., reciprocity, redistribution) or scales (e.g., bounded, extended) of exchange do not neatly

correlate with other social characteristics or particular levels of social complexity. Rather, any society can display a number of different forms or scales of exchange activity depending on environmental, social, and historical circumstances. In other words, typological and normative approaches to exchange do not work (Plog 1992).

In this chapter I examine the category of exchange models known as prestige goods models, which command interest because they are widely used across North America to account for the development of social complexity (Earle 1994). Further, because of their concern with the transformative potential of differences in wealth and power between individuals and groups, these models speak to the internal dynamics of social formations. Several southwestern archaeologists—most recently Stephen Plog (1995)—have advised us to pay more attention to such dynamics. I will argue that whereas prestige goods models have been useful guides for research in many areas, they make some problematic assumptions about the relationship among material objects, labor flow, and social power in middle-range societies. These assumptions need to be rethought if we want to gain new perspectives on the dynamics that organized and transformed past societies.

First, I briefly review the key claims of the prestige goods model, discuss some theoretical critiques of the model, and review some real world cases in which it has been found wanting. These critiques and cases alert us to the need for new theory. Next I outline an alternative framework for theorizing the political economy of southwestern exchange. The framework invokes teleonomy as a causal principle and taps Marx's (1964) work on variation in precapitalist forms. I close with some thoughts about exchange in the ancestral Pueblo system centered at Chaco Canyon, using current uncertainty about the meaning of Chacoan exchange data as a touchstone for the argument.

THE PRESTIGE GOODS MODEL IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY

The prestige goods model is an account of how political elites—understood here to be individuals who differentially control resources and the life chances of other individuals—come to be established and their political and economic power maintained through the tactical manipulation of exchange (for summaries see Baugh and Ericson 1992; Blanton et al. 1996; McGuire 1989; Schortman and Urban 1992a). 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 seniors to obtain socially

necessary items. Lineage elders extract surplus (objects and food) from juniors, which these emergent elites use in competition with other lineage elites to build political alliances, expand exchange networks, and extend their power. In this model, valuables have status as instruments of power: They are a means to appropriate the labor of subordinates.

This system is considered inherently unstable because many valuables come from distant sources, precluding lineage elites from exercising direct control over their production and exchange. Archaeological expectations of this model include: (1) valuables should be concentrated in elite contexts and should decrease in frequency in nonelite contexts, and (2) the amount of valuables in a prestige good system should directly correlate with the strength of elite control and with elites' ability to monopolize access to these resources.

Several useful critiques of prestige goods models have been presented. Cobb (1993) offers one in his survey of archaeological approaches to the political economy of nonstratified societies. For Cobb, prestige goods models pay insufficient attention to conceivable diversity in the roles and meanings of exotic goods. That is, they do not distinguish clearly between situations in which valuables are serving as indicators of genuine economic power (i.e., the ability of some to coerce labor from others) and those in which they are simply serving as markers of social status.

Bradley (1992) makes another criticism in her study of Casas Grandes shell exchange. She argues that many prestige goods models pay little attention to how goods, once procured, are distributed to the general population. I believe she is 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 well specified.

I have also critiqued prestige goods models, specifically the way the nature of labor flow from subordinates to emergent elites is theorized (Saitta 1994a, 1994b). Most models assert that the elder-junior relationship is exploitative; elders are said to extract or usurp the surplus labor of juniors. This is not the only way to understand the relationship. It could be understood as a distinctly nonexploitative relationship if we see the labor that moves against valuables as compensation juniors allocate to elders for the latter's work in procuring socially important valuables. In this view the status of the valuables is also different; that is, rather than

instruments of elite power they are *communal social entitlements* required for the reproduction of the collective whole. 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 goods models tend to conflate several different kinds of material (goods and labor) transfers. This conflation needs to be redressed because the way we understand the transfers influences the way we think about the dynamics of change.

In addition to these theoretical criticisms of prestige goods models, there are empirical reasons to rethink their presumed widespread utility in archaeological interpretation. That is, the models have difficulty accounting for exchange patterns in several areas of North America where exotics are a major part of the archaeological record. For example, patterns at several key Mississippian sites do not easily square with the assumption that valuables (e.g., shell, copper, mica) served as instruments of power. Pauketat's (1992) work on classic Stirling Phase Cahokia reveals—contrary to expectations of classic prestige good models—that complexity and political hierarchy increased in the American Bottom as long-distance exchange intensity decreased. This observation may suggest that minimal political-economic power was associated with the control of exchange goods in this particular place and time. As Pauketat points out, however, we still lack good phase affiliations for many Cahokian exotics.

Blitz's (1993) work on the Lubbug Creek polity near Moundville is another instructive Mississippian example. Blitz's distributional study of exotic items (including fine ceramics, shell beads, and microdrills used for bead manufacture) reveals their widespread availability to both rural farmsteads and households at the political center. Blitz infers that little or no centralization of exchange or restricted access to exotic goods was present at Lubbug Creek. He also documents a greater than expected dispersal of production loci for finished goods, which suggests that mound center households and rural farmsteads may not have been directly associated with elite and nonelite status, respectively. Especially provocative is Blitz's inference that the Lubbug Creek rural farmer and the mound center political actor were the same person, 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). He thus alerts us to some conceivably novel organizational relationships in this polity. Minimally, Blitz's work suggests that conventional prestige goods models are not applicable to all Mississippian polities.

Some recent work in the American Southwest has reached similar conclusions. Bayman's (1995) work on Tucson Basin mound centers is one example. Like Blitz, Bayman finds that the production and distribution of valued objects (specifically obsidian tools) in his study area were a bit more democratic than expected. And like Blitz, his observations about exchange behavior suggest the limitations of prestige goods models as applied to the Hohokam. Douglas (Chapter 9, this volume) explores additional limitations of the prestige goods model using other data from the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico.

This empirical work suggests that the organization of precontact North American exchange and its linkage to power relations were rather variable. Earle (1994) has 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. Empirical evidence such as that just described, however, indicates that this is still an open question.

BUILDING ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

In keeping with the critiques discussed earlier, I suggest that we lack social theories of exchange that allow us to engage this open question in productive ways. Part of the problem is that traditionally, materialist theory in archaeology has forced choices between 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. More 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 advocated in a recent volume, *Foundations of Social Inequality* (Price and Feinman 1995), as well as in the earlier *Factional Competition in the New World* (Brumfiel and Fox 1994), can be characterized as thuggery models.

Thuggery models often commit to the assumption that the political ambition and natural acquisitiveness of the few are driving forces behind the elaboration of exchange and the intensification of production (e.g., Clark and Blake 1994; Hayden and Gargett 1990). Teleology runs such models; that is, change is the result of organized action with respect to a specific goal that is an integral and explicit part of the activity (Friedman 1979: 254). This view of causality keeps us from exploring the conceivably fertile ground where selflessness and selfishness meet—that is,

where elites may in fact function as first among equals but in some interesting and unpredictable ways. Even the most benign managerial relationships can be fraught with the potential for struggle and change, depending on historical circumstances. We need to forsake the methodological individualist and human nature assumptions of thuggery models and explore some other engines of change, especially ones that privilege negotiated relationships between diverse social agents in concrete historical circumstances.

We can begin to build such alternative models by embracing a view of causality that is teleonomic rather than teleological. The distinction between teleology and teleonomy was made two decades ago by Friedman (1979) in the context of some interesting exchanges with Rappaport (1977) about the utility of the ecological paradigm in anthropology. The distinction still has relevance today. Teleonomy differs from teleology in referring to the programlike nature of an activity in which the goal of the activity is not included in the program (Friedman 1979); instead, it is a more or less predictable result of the program. Or as Friedman states, the difference is akin to that between jumping off a cliff and walking in a straight line off the end of a cliff in the dark. Both moves are characterized by intentionality and agency (elements of theory we do not want to lose), but in teleonomy the intention does not necessarily correspond to the result.

Teleonomy is most easily accommodated by theories that break with conventional evolutionary typologies and, further, allow for the role of historical circumstances in influencing social life. Karl Marx's work on *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (1964) moves us toward theories of social life that are teleonomic in nature. Although many critics have understood Marx's view of causality to be teleological, the way in which he thought about societies—as fully historical entities—is a precedent for teleonomic thinking that has not yet been fully appreciated in anthropology (Roseberry 1997). In *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, Marx began, however sketchily, a project of thinking through the variety of ways precapitalist societies could be organized.

Gilman (1995) tries to redeem some of Marx's work in this area when he discusses the utility of Marx's concept of the Germanic formation for interpreting European prehistory. Germanic 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 may have been ignored by evolutionists because of the "frailty" of those contexts in which the form was documented

ethnohistorically and ethnographically—that is, in societies peripheral to established states. When evaluated against his Iberian Bronze Age data, Gilman sees the model as important in understanding the range of variation in those societies identified by evolutionists as "chiefdoms."

McGuire and I (McGuire and Saitta 1996) have similarly drawn on the Marxist tradition to expand the range of models for interpreting ancestral Western Pueblo societies. Specifically, we view the Pueblos as complex communal social formations that combine the collective appropriation of surplus labor with varying and sometimes well-developed forms of political hierarchy, long-distance exchange relations, and productive specialization. The specifics of time and place govern the specific form this communal organization will take. In so doing, we try to break with the evolutionist 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. The notion of subsumed classes refers to a variety of managerial agents supported in their roles by the allocation of collectively appropriated surplus labor. 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 teleonomic dynamic of the communal formation.

There is nothing particularly radical in this view. Political anthropologists have often lamented the unexplored variability of leadership roles in tribal groups (e.g., Keesing 1991), and we know the funds of power tapped by politico-religious specialists in tribal groups are variable and do not turn exclusively on the control of exchange (e.g., Helms 1992). Feinman (1995) explicitly recognizes this variability in his contribution to *Foundations of Social Inequality*, as do Blanton and colleagues (1996) in their contribution to a collection of important articles in *Current Anthropology* about theories of agency, ideology, and power in archaeology. These authors distinguish between network and corporate strategies (or modes) for accumulating power. Network strategies produce power differences through control of long-distance exchange (and thus are akin to the kinds of elite behaviors stipulated by prestige good models), whereas corporate strategies produce power through control of local labor and manipulation of local surpluses.

But whereas Feinman and Blanton and his colleagues accept that one or the other of these strategies will likely dominate in a particular historical context, I would be more aggressive in allowing for their

frequent and always uneasy coexistence within a single social formation. Helms (1992) notes that whereas in many cultures knowledge of distant places and control of exotic goods are often associated with power (a view implicit in prestige goods models), in others "the foreign" is associated with danger. Allowing for multiple ideologies surrounding the social meaning of nonlocal places and goods, as well as for a variety of managerial positions and strategies in the same social context, may be just what is needed to account for the North American cases, discussed earlier, that bedevil prestige good models. Marx's work can be one guide to building such models, but there are undoubtedly others. Whatever the intellectual inspiration, imagining such variation seems crucial for generating the more complex models of social life and change desired by Plog (1995) and others.

EXCHANGE AND CHACOAN HISTORY

These more complex models require inputs of specific case material to take full form. The Chaco Canyon case strikes me as particularly useful in building and evaluating more nuanced, teleonomic models of Pueblo social dynamics. The utility of the case lies in the still uncertain meaning of the evidence for Chacoan long-distance exchange. On the one side are scholars who argue that the concentration of exotic goods (turquoise, shell, copper, parrots) at Chacoan great houses suggests their role as instruments of power within prestige goods or tributary political economies (Akins and Schelberg 1984; Neitzel 1995; Tainter and Plog 1994). On the other side are those who question the empirical reality of such concentrations and argue alternatively for a political economy characterized by simpler reciprocal, down-the-line, or kula-ring-type exchanges (Mathien 1992; Toll 1991; Windes 1994).

Elsewhere (Saitta 1997) I have offered an interpretation of Chacoan historical development that models Chacoan society as one that—like the Germanic formation—is not readily accommodated by conventional evolutionist typologies. Specifically, Chaco is viewed as a particular kind of communal formation, unprecedented in spatial scale, that was integrated by a diverse set of subsumed classes and—given its scale and the considerable amount of labor mobilized at its political center—was organized by both network and corporate strategies and probably some form of regional redistribution of collective surpluses. In this model Chacoan exchange agents and political functionaries are embedded in and supported by the commune, and valuables function as communal social entitlements. In contrast to models emphasizing either group collective interests or the self-interests of political entrepreneurs (Kantner 1996:

93), this model provides a context for investigating the ways these two sets of interests combine to shape historical development.

Much, but not all, available empirical support for this model 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 in the Chaco system 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, 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 to monopolize control of such resources (a key element of prestige goods models) and to redefine 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 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 Dogozhi-style pottery) found at a site and that site's position in a four-tiered Chacoan settlement hierarchy. At the same time, however, Neitzel identifies some interesting anomalies in the spatial distribution of valuables that invite alternative interpretations. Specifically, the counts of valuables at some small and medium-sized sites fall into the range of the largest sites. Neitzel explores a number of explanations for these anomalies, including one in which the objects function other than as instruments or signs of chiefly power.

Even if large Chacoan sites did overwhelmingly control the production and distribution of exotic goods, this does not necessarily mean these sites were home to prestige-accumulating, chiefly elites. That is, evidence for differential control of resources and political hierarchy does not necessarily indicate 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 divisions (and for the validity of the prestige good model)

requires other contextual evidence establishing exploitative elite claims on the surplus labor of producers (i.e., claims that would have compromised producers' ability to perform the necessary labor requisite to reproduce themselves as biological individuals) and nonguaranteed access for these producers to other social reproductive resources. Such a case has not been made for Chaco.

In the absence of such a case, ample room exists to explore other models of Chacoan political economy and other kinds of relationships among 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 an article that moves in some of the same directions as this one, Nelson (1995) warns against inferring that a coercive hierarchy existed from observations about the scale of the Chaco system, and he offers a notion of Chaco as a "collaborative chiefdom." Although we can argue over whether Nelson's contrast of this chiefly form with "coercive chiefdoms" compromises his attempt to break down the typologies and 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, of 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 he stresses that these productive relationships were always noncoercive. In light of this description, Ames's embedded specialists appear to fit the bill as subsumed classes, and it would be interesting to investigate their roles in helping to reproduce a 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 on (e.g., Mathien 1992; Toll 1991). We still do not know, however, exactly what kind of specialists they were, and we need more information on the sources and distribution of Chacoan "wealth" products to do so (Toll 1991: 103). Ames's formulation can help to guide interpretation of such data by suggesting some new ways craft specialists might have related to exchange agents and political and religious functionaries.

Success in clarifying such relationships would 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. Such historical circumstances could conceivably have 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 or conflicted agents may have included efforts by some subsumed classes (e.g., ritual specialists [Aldenderfer 1993]) to use their power to build tributary class relations or to engage craft specialists in new, perhaps coercive ways. Patterns in Chacoan data from this time period suggest not only elite experimentation with new strategies of control but also countervailing strategies of producer resistance (Saitta 1997).

Whatever the dynamics of Chacoan social change for this time period, I do not think the "end" of Chaco corresponds with an ideological failure or "demystification," as suggested by some advocates of prestige good models (e.g., 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 "Idea" as having considerable long-term staying power. The historical continuity of Chacoan ideology is revealed in part by the persistence of Chacoan architectural design concepts in many parts of the post-Chaco northern Southwest (Bradley 1996; Fowler and Stein 1992; Kintigh et al. 1996; Stein and Lekson 1992) and by the role 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 monopolists) were much more esoteric. This, in turn, implies that we need something other than kula-ring and prestige good models to capture the nature of the Chacoan exchange and interaction network. These models must be able to square the evidence for historical change in the material content of exchange networks with the evidence for powerful historical continuities in thought and action. Thinking in more nuanced ways about social differentiation and more teleonomically about causality seems like a good way to begin that project.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered some theoretical problems and empirical limitations associated with the use of classic prestige good models of exchange revealed by work in several areas of North America. Current critiques suggest the need for new perspectives on the relationship among material transactions, labor flows, and social power in North American middle-range societies. Development of new perspectives is still impeded, however, by the powerful hold of old evolutionary typologies, thuggery models of elite behavior, and teleological notions of causality. By tapping Marx's work on precapitalist social forms, problematizing the behavior of elites, and embracing teleonomy as a causal principle, we can begin to develop more complex models of the social dynamics that organized and transformed the ancestral Pueblo world.

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