

ABSTRACT

The Cosmological Foundations of Power in Northern Mexico: Ritual Dynamics at Paquimé, Chihuahua, Mexico

By
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This research asks how cosmology informs hierarchical relations in non-state societies. I investigate how hierarchy was constituted during the Medio Period at Paquimé, in northern Mexico, and how we might move archaeological interpretations of hierarchy away from wealth-based models. In this work hierarchy is conceptualized as different levels of encompassment. I suggest that hierarchy is based on ritual knowledge and the ability to mobilize important ritual symbols. To answer these questions I conduct cross-cultural comparisons with Mesoamerica and the U.S. Southwest, and an intra-site spatial and contextual analysis of artifacts and architectural features from the late prehistoric site of Paquimé in Chihuahua, Mexico. During the time period of A.D. 1200-1400/1450, known as the Medio Period, Paquimé became one of the largest settlements in northwest Mexico. Despite this fact, the social systems that operated at this time are still largely unknown. Based on theories that demonstrate the house is both a flexible social group and as well as a physical structure, I argue that architecture and the associated material is representative and constitutive of social differentiation. The central hypothesis being, social hierarchy at Paquimé will be reflected in intra-site spatial patterns of key elements of ritual knowledge and practice. Based on cross-cultural comparisons with Mesoamerica and the U.S. Southwest, five variables were identified that would yield information on both social groups and cosmology. Analyses were

conducted on distributions of macaws, shell, turquoise, raised platform hearths, and central posts using Global Information Systems (GIS) software. My research demonstrates the presence of the broad cosmological principle of color/directional symbolism was used to express hierarchical difference. Three levels of intrasite hierarchy were identified. By making ritual central to political negotiations, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the role ritual played in the broad-scale changes seen across the U.S. Southwest/Mexican Northwest during late prehistoric times, as well as broader discussions of how archaeologists view ritual in the prehistoric past.