Chapter 4: Region & State (ver. 2.0)
Secondary States: Chaco Altepetl

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1. INTRODUCTION

In *A History of the Ancient Southwest* (Lekson 2009) and elsewhere (Lekson and Peregrine 2004), I urged a continental context for North American archaeology, transcending conventional culture areas and recognizing much larger, continental-scale dynamics. Sites, districts, regions and culture areas, to be sure, remain as analytical units; I argue that we will perceive and understand those units differently from a continental perspective. In this article, I show how a continental perspective might help resolve one of American archaeology's thornier problems: Chaco Canyon, the 11th – 13th century Pueblo regional center (e.g., Lekson 2006, Mills 2002, Plog 2012).

In summary: Chaco Canyon was an urban or near-urban regional center – probably a regional capital – and therefore notably anomalous in Southwestern prehistory. Archaeology currently offers a range of highly contradictory interpretations of Chaco, framed in concepts considered appropriate to the Southwestern region and its "intermediate" (i.e., non-state) societies, past and present – in particular, Pueblo societies. By enlarging the field-of-view to the continent at Chaco's time, a range of previously un-considered models and parallels become available. Small Mesoamerican city-state polities (*atlepetl*) "fit" the Chaco data far better than other current interpretations, framed in Southwestern terms. This is not to say that Chaco was the creation of Mesoamericans; rather, it seems likely that Chacoan leadership was effectively part of the great civilizations to the south. Chaco Canyon was a major event in Pueblo prehistory, but Chaco was not itself "Puebloan;" modern and ethnographic Pueblo societies and their worldviews crystalized after 1300 in *reaction against* Chacoan socio-political formations. Chaco's world – the world it knew and of which it was a part –was the Middle Postclassic Period. Chaco was a small secondary state, paralleling in socio-political structure the *altepetl*, on the far periphery of Mesoamerica.

Beyond resolving an important regional conundrum, recognition of Chaco as an essentially Mesoamerican socio-political form suggests questions and answers about (1) American anthropological archaeology's central methods; (2) assumptions basic to American anthropological archaeology; and (3) the proper context of North American prehistory. These three themes will be addressed after the presentation of the problem and possible solution of Chaco.

Unless otherwise indicated, all dates are CE.

2. CHACO: A FAILURE OF SOUTHWESTERN ARCHAEOLOGY?

Chaco Culture National Historical Park, in Chaco Canyon NM, is a World Heritage Site and one of the most famous archaeological sites in the United States. Its principal features are "Great Houses": massive stone masonry buildings covering up to 0.8 hectares, standing up to five stories tall, with up to 650 large rooms (Figure 1). There are seven major Great Houses at Chaco (Penasco Blanco, Pueblo del Arroyo, Pueblo Bonito, Pueblo Alto, Chetro Ketl, Hungo Pavi and Una Vida), and scores of smaller structures (including Wijiji, Tsin Kletzin, Kin Kletso and other very substantial buildings of the so-called "McElmo phase," which I interpret as storage facilities; Lekson 1984, Lekson and others 2006; but see Van Dyke 2004 and Wills REFS). Impressive on their own architectural merits, Great Houses' archaeological significance comes from their context: Great Houses appeared surprisingly early in the southwestern sequence (beginning mid-9th century and fully developed by the 11th century; elsewhere towns of comparable size did not appear until the 13th and 14th centuries); and they differed dramatically from the normal domestic structures of their times ("unit pueblos."). Both points require clarification.

Proto-Great Houses began almost a century before Chaco in southwestern Colorado (Wilshusen and Van Dyke 2006; Windes 2007), where several were built and abandoned in a generation. That is, proto-Great Houses were not short-lived structures. Chaco's three earliest Great Houses, in contrast, were encompassed in larger and ever larger constructions over many decades, requiring remarkable quantities and co-ordinations of labor. Pueblo Bonito, for example, was begun in the mid-9th century, completed in the early 12th century, and maintained through most of the 13th century (Windes 2003). Starting around 1020, Chaco's three original Great Houses were joined by four comparably large Great Houses and a mass of other constructions, creating a concentration of monumental buildings unique in the Southwest. Chaco's Great House architectural tradition continued through the 13th century both at Chaco and at a successor center, Aztec Ruins (Lekson 1999; Reed 2008). As discussed below, Great Houses were not pueblos – that is, they were not farming villages; the characteristically puebloan aggregated town-forms appeared centuries later, in the 13th and 14th centuries, after Chaco (an argument summarized in Lekson and others 2006).

Great Houses were doubly remarkable when contrasted to the normal domestic architecture of their times. Domestic architecture in Chaco Canyon and its surrounding region were decidedly not "great." Often called "unit pueblos" because of their repetitive pattern of six-rooms-and-a-kiva, normal (non-"great") houses were modest affairs of basic but sufficient fabric (mud, jacale, rough stone masonry), small rooms, low ceilings, and short use-lives (Figure 1). The total floor area of a typical unit pueblo was approximately equivalent to the floor area of the single largest room at Pueblo Bonito. The contrast between Great Houses and unit pueblos was (and is) stark.

Great Houses represent a small fraction of the architecture of their time; it is impossible to quantify architectural mass, but it is probably not too far off to suggest that, regionally, Great Houses were 1%, unit pueblos 99% -- with much of the modern implications of those ratios. Great Houses are statistically quite rare, but they are the central matter of Chaco. Archaeologists quibble that Great Houses are somehow over-emphasized (e.g., Plog REFS), but absent Great

Houses, there would be no Chaco National Park and no "Chaco Phenomenon" – the term coined by Cynthia Irwin-Williams (1972) for Chaco's apparently insoluble riddle. Stephen Plog in a widely-used textbook called Chaco "…a paradox that for decades has caused southwestern archaeologists to scratch their heads" (Plog 1997:102).

It's not for lack of data! There was a time – forty years ago – when Chaco was indeed mysterious and unknown. In the early 1970s, the major sources on Chaco were limited to summary reports on turn-of-the-century excavations at Pueblo Bonito and other sites, mostly published long after the original field work (Judd 1954, 1959, 1964; Pepper 1920); and a under-appreciated 1964 report on excavations at Kin Kletso, which contained the first real synthesis of Chaco archaeology (Vivian and Mathews 1965, Bannister 1965). In 1973, Paul Martin and Fred Plog in a key textbook of that time declared about Chaco Canyon:

> "In spite of the great towns that developed there and the interest that the region has attracted, less is really known of the area than almost any other southwestern district. It is amazing that so little work has been done there and so few significant reports published." (Martin and Plog 1973:108)

That was changing, even as Martin and Plog's book was published. That same year, 1973, was the first year of major excavations by the National Park Service's (NPS) Chaco Project. When fieldwork officially ended in 1980, a dozen sites had been excavated and as many more tested, along with extensive surveys and ancillary studies. The Chaco Project produced twenty monographs and several scores of papers and chapters (Lekson 2009; Mathien 2005). That solid base of NPS archaeology has been amplified and augmented by many subsequent non-NPS projects in the canyon or in its region (summarized by Mills 2002; see also summaries of Wills and Crown's on-going Chaco Stratigraphy Project at http://www.unm.edu/~chaco/about.html). If forty years ago we knew little about Chaco, today we know a lot; see, for example, the online Chaco Research Archive (www.chacoarchive.org). Pound for pound, Chaco today may be the best-known archaeological thing in its weight class, anywhere. Chaco is now very well studied indeed, and its significance widely acknowledged. Stephen Plog, again: "since the completion of the National Park Service's multiyear Chaco Project … Chaco has dominated discussions of this region more than ever" (Plog 2012:449).

Yet, it Chaco could be considered a failure of Southwestern archaeology. We know so much about Chaco, yet we agree so little – effectively, not at all – about what Chaco was. Historian Daniel Richter, trying to make sense of Chaco, recently complained that "the surviving physical evidence leads archaeologists to wildly different conclusions," most particularly "about the degree to which Chaco Canyon was politically stratified" (Richter 2011:17). Some see this chaotic situation as a positive thing, and perhaps in some ways it is: "Many archaeologists find Chaco as stimulating puzzle. The challenge of understanding the Chaco system has encouraged creativity and a diversity of perspectives… " (Cordell & McBrinn 2012: 202). But I am not alone in seeing Chaco as a failure: Chaco was clearly a key (*the* key?) historical event in Pueblo prehistory, yet archaeology cannot say with any certainty or consensus *what Chaco was*.

W.H. Wills recently complained of the mutual exclusion of interpreters (if not interpretations) dealing with Chaco. Speaking specifically of cosmological interpretations, he insists that

"research in Chaco requires less intellectual isolation and more constructive debate" (Wills 2012:480). A worthy goal but difficult to achieve: I tried to corral a representative sample of Chacoan scholarship in a large collaborative research program (Lekson 2006), and the results were not conclusive, but only a representative sample of the range of interpretations, which many critics felt was still too narrow (i.e., did not, perhaps, encompass their views).

A summary account of every published or current interpretation of Chaco would be far too long for a journal article. I narrow the question to socio-political formations, a fairly basic dimension of any ancient society: what was Chaco socially and politically? Even at this basic level, there is no consensus. Severen Fowles observed, ruefully: "…there is little agreement on the nature of Chacoan leadership. Some interpretations present the canyon as a pilgrimage center managed in a relatively egalitarian fashion by resident priests (Johnson 1989; Renfrew 2001; Yoffee 2001). Others claim that at its apex Chaco was a secondary state dominated by an elite who resided in palaces, extracted tribute, kept the masses in place through threat, and occasional practice, of theatrical violence (see Lekson 1999, 2002, 2006a; Wilcox 1999)" (Fowles 2010:195). He concludes "Chaco polarizes contemporary scholarship…" (Fowles ibid). And there is a third "pole" in Chacoan studies: Chaco as essentially Puebloan. That is, while Chaco appears anomalous it can best be understood in terms and concepts derived from the ethnology of modern Pueblos Indian societies (discussed below). There are other axes in Chaco's N-dimension interpretive space, but those three seem, to me, most prominent: (1) Pueblo; (2) Pilgrimage; and (3) Polity. These names aren't meant to be exclusive or pejorative; they are simply a way to handle Richert's "wildly different" array of archaeological Chacos. So: Chaco as Pueblo, Chaco as Pilgrimage, and Chaco as Polity. Note that these three categories are not necessarily exclusive. "Pilgrimage," specifically, could be an element of "polity;" however, as presented, Pilgrimage is not a part of Pueblo, nor are Pueblo and Polity compatible.

3. CHACO AS PUEBLO

"Chaco as Pueblo" refers to interpretations which explicitly appeal to Pueblo ethnography, often combined personal knowledge of Pueblos, which are then projected back on Chaco. This strategy has very deep roots in southwestern archaeology, beginning with its earliest organized research; its popularity has waxed and waned over the decades (Fower 2000; Lekson 2009), in incarnations variously termed the direct historic approach, ethnographic analogy, and more recently "up-streaming" (REFS). Today, it is common to use information from the Pueblo ethnographies to interpret archaeological sites and contexts of considerable antiquity. Edgar Hewett provides an early version:

> "…the domain of pure archaeology, the realm of pick and spade, the place, in another fine phrase of Lummis, 'where the stones come to life.' This would seem to be a realm of the unknown and unknowable. It would be if not for the dwindling communities … [the modern Pueblos], living in the gloaming of a long past, ordering their lives by the teachings of nature and the wisdom of the ancients, perpetuating in culture and cult the essentials of the ancient life: in a real sense existing as contemporaries of their ancestors.' (Hewett 1930:180)

Hewett's comments, while accurately depicting the situation at the turn of the 19th century, were somewhat (but not entirely) anachronistic in the 1930s. A rejection of uncritical analogy and reliance on Native "myths" in the 1930s constituted the first "New Archaeology" in the region (Fowler 2000:XX). Yet the Pecos System established in 1927 framed Southwestern archaeological systematics as progressive, incremental and teleologically leading from simple beginnings (in earlier Basketmaker I, II, and III periods) steadily upwards and onwards to modern Pueblos (in subsequent Pueblo I, II, III, and IV periods). Suggestions that the past might have seen climaxes and collapses (e.g., Pueblo III = "Great Pueblo Period;" Pueblo IV = "Regressive Pueblo Period;" Roberts 1935) were summarily rejected.

"Chaco as Pueblo" continues Hewett's notion of "contemporary ancestry" – that Pueblo life as known ethnographically mirrors the past, "perpetuating in culture and cult the essentials of the ancient life." But "Chaco as Pueblo," as practiced, is not simple "up-streaming": it's not a question of pasting a Pueblo present on the Chacoan past (although there is much of that), but more about a general sense of Pueblo *weltanschauung*, which I have come to call the "Pueblo Space" – the anthropologically-informed variant of the Santa Fe Myth of Pueblo worldview. The historical development of "Pueblo Space" goes far beyond archaeology, to the Gilded Era invention of the Southwest and Santa Fe Myth by journalists, politicians, boosters, ethnologists, and – yes – archaeologists: figures such as Charles Lummis, Adolph Bandelier and Edgar Hewett were central to the creation of the American Southwest and the initial formulation of "Pueblo Space," subsequently embellished in the first half of the 20th century by popular authors, artists and taste-makers such as Frank Waters, Fred Harvey, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Ernest Blumenschein, William Lumpkins, John Gaw Meem, and many others. (Architecturally, it became "Pueblo Revival Style," with assumptions and idealizations of Pueblo world view; Wilson 1997.) That story is far too long to tell here, but the history of the Santa Fe/Pueblo Myth, Pueblo Revival Style, and Pueblo Space constitutes a genre in regional intellectual history (e.g., Bernstein 2010; Fowler 2000; Weigle and Babcock 1996; Weigle and Fiore 2008; Lekson 2009). And, of course, Pueblo Space is still in play: Hippies in the Sixties, New Agers in the Seventies and Eighties, and commercial concerns in the Nineties and Zeros add or refine elements. Pueblo Space as currently presented in Santa Fe is a cumulation of all these: to be slightly glib but mostly accurate, Pueblos are seen as happy, peaceful, egalitarian, ritually-centered, unchanging, green, and so forth (Lekson in prep.). Pueblo Space is perhaps most important as what Lewis Binford termed a "framework of reference" – the basic archaeological assumptions about particular times and places in past. I report from personal experience that interpretations of the ancient Southwest that much exceeds the Pueblo Space are considered extraordinary claims, requiring extraordinary proof.

"Chaco as Pueblo" refers to this frame of reference for thinking about Chaco and other ancient sites. Chaco can differ from modern Pueblos, of course – but it cannot be *very* different. The Pueblo Space defines the boundaries of reasonable discourse on Chaco, for example the strong emphasis on Pueblo spirituality and egalitarianism (Mills 2002; Vivian 1989). Abstract anthropological concepts such as Levi-Strausian "house societies" are welcome as long as they fit within or very near Pueblo Space. As we shall see in "Chaco as Polity", anthropological concepts that stray too far from that space are not welcome. Stephen Plog (2011:396) recently observed, for the larger Southwest: "The archaeological record of the Southwest varies tremendously, yet somehow interpretive frameworks almost always conclude that sociopolitical

organization was corporate and consensual" – that is, safely within the Pueblo Space. The Pueblo Space is strangely attractive both within and beyond archaeology, and for most of my career, it has framed popular and Park Service interpretations of Chaco. Chaco was a pueblo, or pueblos.

"Chaco as Pueblo" is the clear heir of an earlier age's ethnology (which originally subsumed archaeology), and later the Direct Historical Approach, ethnographic analogy, and other forms of "up-streaming" (REFS, Carmack 1972)—all of which selectively drive the present back into the past (these methods are logically problematic and methodologically suspect; time does not flow from present to past, but from past to present). Included within "Chaco as Pueblo" there are, of course, interpretations which are straight-ahead up-streaming, taking from ethnographies the sodalities, medicine societies, moities and all the social apparatus of modern Pueblos and applying them directly to Chaco (e.g., Ware and Blinman 2000). Others are more selective in their invocation of the present but still argue that Chaco was essentially valley of Puebloan farming villages (e.g. Vivian 1990; Wills 2012b).

The major problem with interpretations of Chaco that invoke Puebloan socio-political forms and other elements of Pueblo Space is that Pueblos, after Chaco's era, nothing in the Pueblo Southwest looked remotely like Chaco. Consider the brief description of Chaco, above. Nothing like that was ever seen again in the Pueblo area. No Great House/unit pueblo dichotomies, no massive organization of labor, no regional centers – these things are simply absent in the Pueblo world after 1300. Archaeologically, it is very difficult to maintain Chaco as purely Pueblo; it was unusual, exceptional, phenomenal. Thus, few if any contemporary archaeologists sustain Hewett's simple view of Chaco as Pueblo. Vivian (1990) and Ware (Ware and Blinman 2000) and others acknowledge hierarchy beyond that seen in modern Pueblos, but understood in Pueblo terms: for example, ritual power (Mills 2002), congruent with Pueblo Space.

Whatever its archaeological fate, Chaco as Pueblo remains the prevailing popular view. An example, from notable archaeologist Brian Fagan. Fagan wrote an Oxford University Press book, *Chaco Canyon* (Fagan 2005), as an element of the Chaco Synthesis Project (Lekson 2006). Fagan concluded: "…the key to Chaco society lay in a number of common features of modern Pueblo ceremonial, such as seasonal commemorations, which probably apply with equal relevance to earlier institutions" (p. 188). "The story of Chaco as revealed by archaeology is a tale of people adapting constantly to the challenges of a demanding and unpredictable environment, of societies where agriculture and religion went hand in hand. This was not a world of great empires and states, nor of powerful chiefs … Rather, Chaco is a story of housholds and kin-groups living in a multi-layerd cosmos, where realms of the living and the supernatural passed insensibly one into the other. Ritual knowledge, ritual choreography lay at the center of community life, spiritual truths that were guarded jealously among a few and passed carefully from one generation to the next. Human existence depended on the meticulous performance of elaborate rituals and dances…" (p. 229). Sounds pretty much like Pueblos…or, rather, the Pueblo Space.

Fagan's is a popular book (and a very good one) and not a scholarly book, but what of that? It currently is in almost twice as many libraries, world-wide than *The Archaeology of Chaco Canyon* (Lekson 2006), the summary document from the Chaco Synthesis (581 vs 313,

respectively; WorldCat, Aug 5, 2012). I am not arguing its academic impacts; rather, I want to establish that that "Chaco as Pueblo" – as summarized by Fagan, and in more nuanced, academic versions by Vivian, Ware and others – is a real and significant theme in interpretations of Chaco.

4. CHACO AS PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage has captured the archaeological imaginations and probably represents the current mainstream academic understanding of Chaco. "Pilgrimage" is one – perhaps the most specific – of a range of interpretations that see Chaco as something highly unusual, something other than Pueblo (but NOT a polity) – but almost invariably within the Pueblo Space. I originally characterized my second group of Chaco interpretations as "Chaco as Uniquity" – a real word, which means a unique, exceptional thing – but in the interest of alliteration and fair representation, I'm going with "Chaco as Pilgrimage," since that clearly is the most popular of this range of uniquitous interpretations. In fairness, I briefly visit the wider ranges of "uniquities" before taking on pilgrimage.

Interpretations of Chaco as something possibly unique or perhaps un-sighted in American archaeology came first, or mainly from scholars with expertise in other parts of the ancient world, who were invited by Southwestern archaeologists to bring "fresh eyes" to bear on Chaco (we've been conflicted over Chaco for quite a long time). They brought their formidable powers to bear on Chaco, and for the most part (as we shall see) they recognized that Chaco was indeed unusual. To some extent, however, they worked under restraints: they had to respect Pueblo Space, particularly the received wisdom that the Southwest was "intermediate. Perhaps the first "outsider" was Gregory Johnson who, at an early 1980s summit meeting of southwestern senior scholars, declared: "the Chaco data can support a basically egalitarian interpretation" in the then-unfamiliar form he called "sequential hierarchy." Johnson went on: "we have garden variety 'chiefdoms' and 'early states' stacked ten deep under the lab table, but elaborate sequential hierarchies may have been a rare phenomenon" (Johnson 1989:386). Other outstanding "outside" scholars followed with intriguing interpretations of Chaco. Lord Colin Renfrew (2001) saw Chaco as a "Locus of High Devotional Expression," based in part on European thinking that the past could be profoundly different – but still highly spiritual in Pueblo ways. Norman Yoffee (2001; Yoffee andn others 1999) proposed Chaco as "Rituality," a term he credits to Dick Drennan. Yoffee's rituality included elements of non- or trans-Puebloan leadership (my term, not his), but centered Chaco on ritual – a core element of Pueblo Space. Other "outsiders" offered more conventional interpretations (and we shall meet several of them later); but Johnson, Renfrew and Yoffee are highly influential among the group I here term "Chaco as Pilgrimage" – indeed, they are invoked by Severn Fowles (above) as underwriting the pilgrimage argument.

The idea of "Chaco as Pilgrimage" seems to have begun with H. Wolcott Toll's unpublished dissertation (Toll 1985; an argument presented in part in Toll 2001 and elsewhere). James Judge (director of the NPS Chaco Project) expanded the idea of pilgrimage (Judge 1989), inspired by Toll's ideas and Judge's admittedly loose reading of David Freidel's (1981) "pilgrimage fairs" in the lowland Maya area. According to Freidel (1981:378, as quoted by Judge 1989:241), regularly scheduled pilgrimage fairs could account for "the distribution of goods above the local

level …channeled through religious sanction. … elite members of society responsible for the organization, size, and geographic reach of the festivals and fairs would be in a position to control and tax the distribution … if the rationale behind the fair was the festival, then the overall structure of the system would have to be a widely shared religion." Freidel's model attempted to account for apparently complex Maya economies, and the then-current interpretation of Maya cities as "empty ceremonial centers." Based on ethnographic "up-streaming," E. Z. Vogt had earlier suggested that the ancient Maya were basically egalitarian, with the great ruins representing ceremonial centers (Vogt 1961). Freidel's was one of the last attempts to defend "empty ceremonial center," which was even then were falling before evidence of dense permanent habitation. Judge acknowledged that "…we would not assume a one-to-one correspondence between the situation in Yucatan and that in the San Juan Basin" (Judge 1989:242). Nevertheless, Judge felt the Maya model had merit "to show how dispersed residences may have been integrated into a single socioeconomic system through the vehicle of periodic circulation of people under a ritual principle…" (Judge 1989:242). Thus the origins of the Chaco pilgrimage center came from a fairly elastic reading of a Maya model, itself based in part on a now discredited view of Maya cities as empty ceremonial centers. Chaco may be the last empty ceremonial center left standing: we don't have many other empty pilgrimage/ceremonial centers in ancient North America. The most famous pre-Columbian pilgrimage centers of the south, such as Cholula, were bustling cities, not empty canyons; and, as with modern Pueblos, many Mesoamerican pilgrimages were to natural features, not architectural centers. NOTE 1

Chaco as Pilgrimage (with associated feasting) is a strong theme – perhaps the "mainstream" – in current interpretations of Chaco (e.g., Toll 1984: Bernardini 1999; Potter 2000; Kantner REFS; Schachner 2011; Judge and Malville 2004; Malville and Malville 2001). Stephen Plog and Adam Watson recently noted that "it is no exaggeration to say that in most models outlines in the last few decades, Chaco Canyon has been regarded as the ritual center of the Pueblo region from at least A.D. 1030 to 1130…More specifically, many formulations suggest Chacoan great houses served as settings for large periodic gatherings, perhaps pilgrimages, involving feasting, fairs, and major ceremonies…" (Plog and Watson 2012:449, in a negative review of the pilgrimage model).

Largely unacknowledged in the rush to pilgrimage is how very unusual Chaco as Pilgrimage would be – indeed, as presented, Chaco as Pilgrimage would be almost unique: a vacant ceremonial center, an idea once popular but now discredited for the Mayan and Andean regions (for an entertaining summary: DeBoer and Blitz 1991:54 – where Lekson et al 1988 is cited as the first application of the idea to Chaco!). Chaco as Pilgrimage revives the notion of vacant ceremonial centers, which now stalk zombie-like through the Chaco literature.

Kim Malville and Nancy Malville's (2001) interpretation of Chaco pilgrimage is perhaps the fullest exposition of the idea as it is now understood. Citing great pilgrimage centers in the Old World such as Mecca and Varanasi (both bustling cities), they go on to describe several Indian pilgrimage centers including (most significantly) Pandaharpur where "some 600,000 pilgrims converge on an otherwise sleepy town with a population of 1,000" (Malville and Malville 2001:329) – that is, a vacant ceremonial center, comparable in scale to Chaco. But Mecca, Varanasi, and Pandaharpur pilgrimages all occur in the context of states, as expressions of

sometimes competing state religions. Malville and Malville avoid that difficulty, and conclude: "The symbiotic linking of pilgrimage, periodic festivals, and entrepreneurial activity [markets] provides a means for integration of an extended population. If groups of people voluntarily visited Chaco Canyon to attend period festivals and religious ceremonies, the surrounding area could have become culturally integrated without any exercise of administrative control, force or political power" (Malville and Malville 2001:339) – thus keeping Chaco more or less Puebloan.

Indeed, "Chaco as Pilgrimage" respects the Pueblo Space. Pilgrimage is an important part of modern and ethnographic Pueblo life, which makes pilgrimage attractive to archaeologists pondering Chaco. Pueblo pilgrimages, however, are typically undertaken by small group of people, going to distant sacred places – usually peaks, springs, lakes and other natural features and seldom if ever settlements (Fox 19941:37-39; Schachner 2011). "Unlike the Chaco case, many locations of Pueblo ceremonies – particularly those distant from year-round habitations—likely have sparse archaeological signatures" (Schachner 2011:432); that is, no Chacos. Thus, Pueblo pilgrimage is nothing like the Chaco as Pilgrimage Mecca-like model – or even the Pandaharpur situation. In today's Southwest, mass pilgrimages to Catholic holy sites (such as the Easter Week pilgrimage to the small town of Chimayo) reflect Catholic pilgrimage in Spain and Mexico – not the Pueblo practice of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage centers as posited for Chaco are *rara aves*, but – like the ivory-billed woodpecker – not entirely absent from North America. Hopewell's remarkable earthen monuments may well have been vacant ceremonial centers (an idea originally proposed by Olaf Prufer and expanded by Pacheco 1996 and Dancey and Pacheco 1997). Constructed between 200 BCE and 500 CE, the enormous geometric earthworks of Hopewell are truly a phenomenon. Compared to Hopewell, Chaco's mysteries are minor and (as we shall see) fairly easily resolved.

The "function" of Hopewell earthworks can be understood negatively: what were they not? The earthworks were not habitations (an idea first offered by Lewis Henry Morgan 1881); they were not forts; they were (mostly) not cemeteries. The prevailing interpretation is that Hopewell earthworks were empty ceremonial centers, the focus of periodic ritual gatherings or pilgrimages (papers in Jones in press). Wesley Bernadini (2004), accepting the ritual/pilgrimage functions of Hopewell earthworks, argued that they functioned as "village surrogates" for widely dispersed populations; that is, "focal points for a surrounding community," as has been suggested archaeologically for "Neolithic henges and enclosures of Europe, Woodland Period mounds in the eastern United States, and great houses and great kivas in the American Southwest" (Bernadini 2004:331). But…

> "Ethnographic or historic analogs to a dispersed settlement system organized around morphologically redundant monuments are difficult to identify. Examples of ceremonial precincts composed of multiple monuments are typically associated with more socially complex societies, such as the religious centers of ancient Greece, Delphi and Olympia. However, at least one additional archaeological relative of the Scioto Valley Hopewell core is know from North America: Chaco Canyon. Comparison to the Chaco case is instructive, as it suggests the degree to which a relatively non-hierarchical regional ceremonial system can be organized around a central ritual precinct." (Bernardini 2004:351)

Bernadini lists parallels, equating the "close morphological similarity" of major Great Houses to Hopewell mound groups. "Like Hopewell earthworks, Chaco great houses show little sign of residential use and appear to be An example: Wesely Bernardini (2004) explicitly appealed to Chaco to underwrite the "rituality" (not his term) interpretation of Hopewell:

> "Ethnographic or historic analogs to a dispersed settlement system organized around morphologically redundant monuments are difficult to identify. Examples of ceremonial precincts composed of multiple monuments are typically associated with more socially complex societies, such as the religious centers of ancient Greece, Delphi and Olympia. However, at least one additional archaeological relative of the Scioto Valley Hopewell core is known from North America: Chaco Canyon. Comparison to the Chaco case is instructive, as it suggests the degree to which a relatively non-hierarchical regional ceremonial system can be organized around a central ritual precinct." (Bernardini 2004:351)

Bernadini lists parallels, equating the "close morphological similarity" of major Great Houses to Hopewell mound groups. "Like Hopewell earthworks, Chaco great houses show little sign of residential use and appear to be largely ceremonial constructions" (p. 351) and the very largest of Chaco's monuments "approached the scale of individual Hopewell earthworks" in labor (p 351). The spatial scales of Chaco's "Regional System" and Hopewell's core were also roughly comparable (p. 352). "Thus, a middle-range society precedent certainly exists for a regional ceremonial system organized around a central ceremonial precinct on the scale encompassed by Hopewell geometric earthworks." (p. 352). And, of course, Hopewell "roads" find ready parallels in Chacoan "roads" (e.g., Lepper 2010). "Thus, a middle-range society precedent certainly exists for a regional ceremonial systems organized around a central ceremonial precinct on the scale encompassed by Hopewell"; that is: Chaco (Bernardini 2005:352). Chaco as Pilgrimage has become the "go-to" analogy for Hopewell rituality, in a rather circular logic of cross-reference (e.g. Hively and Horn 2010b:207; see Jones in press and Lekson in press). We have two – and only two – of these rare birds, Chaco and Hopewell, and each makes the other conceptually possible. "Chaco as Pilgrimage" is a rather special case – the most popular, to be sure – of Chaco as uniquity. As such, it is an extraordinary claim, and demands extraordinary proof. As Bernardini notes, that proof is "difficult to identify," and parallels to Hopewell's vacant ceremonial centers with their vast empty monuments help make the case.

But, what if Chaco Great Houses were not "largely ceremonial constructions"? What if Chaco Great Houses were, in fact, *great houses*: residences of great people, of elites? That interpretation is strongly supported by the data, discussed in the next section. Parallels between Hopewell and Chaco fall apart if we do not assume, a priori, that Great Houses were in some yet-to-be-defined way "ceremonial." A constant yet all but unanswered question of all Chaco as Pilgrimage scenarios: *what were Great Houses?* Hopewell's vacant ceremonial centers were huge, empty, geometric monuments similar to European and enclosures. Great Houses weren't that; nor, I will argue, was Chaco.

5. CHACO AS POLITY

The third category of Chaco interpretations is "Chaco as Polity." That is, Chaco had a formal, hierarchical political structure – in pointed contrast to Chaco as Pueblo. Chaco as Polity cannot co-exist with Chaco as Pueblo, but Polity is not necessarily contradictory to Pilgrimage. Every pilgrimage or uniquity model of which I am aware, however, deliberately down-plays or minimizes political complexity – for example, Johnson's sequential hierarchies and Malville and Malville's insistence on the absence of "administrative control, force or political power", noted above. Chaco-as-Pueblo interpretations which admit some form of leadership at Chaco (e.g., Mills 2002; Earle 2001; Nelson 1995) almost uniformly insist that authority was derived from ritual and ceremony – not political power (a distinction important to me [Lekson 2009], but not to all scholars; e.g. Sebastian 2009).

The key data underwriting my interpretation of Chaco as Polity are architectural, writ very large: Great Houses, the built environment of Chaco Canyon itself, and Chaco's region. I have argued and hopefully demonstrated elsewhere that the major Great Houses at Chaco were elite residences, indeed palaces (Lekson 2006, 2009; see also Wilcox REFS). The remarkable "clustering" of major Great Houses, monuments, and Unit Pueblos in Chaco Canyon, as an architecturally coherent, dense development has long been recognized by a number of scholars (reviewed in Lekson and others 2006). Chaco's centrality to and primacy over a very large region is now widely accepted (papers in Kantner and Mahoney 2000; for a critique, see Kantner and Kintigh 2009). Abundant mortuary and artifactual data support the interpretation of Great Houses as elite residences and of Chaco as a regional center.

I wonder at archaeologists who ask, where are your data for elite residences and regions? The architectural data could not be clearer – Great Houses vs. unit pueblos. Pueblo Bonito, a Great House: 7,000 tons of data, standing 30 feet tall over an area the size of a major-league baseball field. And across the canyon, the humble BC sites, strings of unit pueblos. The total floor area of individual unit pueblos is less than many single rooms at Bonito. How can doubters NOT see that? For the region (and Chaco's centrality) the fact of "outliers" was established by the weight of the data: the truth is out there, you can go and see it. The road system – much larger than minimalist prunings – and the line-of-sight communication networks show that Chaco was at the center of a region. The issue is, what kind of region? What do these very robust data mean?

These data are well known, and are generally if uncomfortably accommodated by Chaco as Pueblo and Chaco as Pilgrimage models except, most notably, Great Houses as elite residences or palaces. Chaco as Pueblo sees Great Houses as pueblos: farming villages. Chaco as Pilgrimage makes Great Houses "largely ceremonial" – in a maddeningly non-specific, perhaps purposefully vague way. I use this provocative language because I have to see a coherent, much less convincing, account of how Pueblo Bonito with its 650 rooms, for example, was merely a monument. Pueblo Bonito was decidedly NOT Newark, nor was it Stonehenge: Bonito was a massive building begun as an easily recognized (through architecture) impressively large domestic structure, which thereafter was expanded and ramified into something more – but in its architectural heart and history, an elite residence (see, for example, Neitzel 2003).

Still, Chaco as Polity currently is a minority position. Among active players, Lynn Sebastian (1992, 2009), David Wilcox (1993, 1999, 2012), and me (Lekson 2009). And of course others, including an old but honored guard of scholars who see Chaco as an outpost of Mesoamerica, and *ipso facto* complex (e.g. Riley 2005).

Gordon Vivian was perhaps the first to suggest that Chaco was outside the Pueblo Space, or at least reaching escape velocity: "The continuation of the direction taken by the Chaco group would have carried it even farther out of the stream of development that culminated in the Rio Grande [Pueblos]. … all imply a growing measure of specialization, social control, and interpueblo control. The elaboration of these institutions with ever-increasing control, specialization, and centralized authority was simply not compatible with the 'slant' or 'form' that directed the destiny of the Desert Culture – Basketmaker – Rio Grande continuum. … In this light then, the highest developments in the Chaco were cultural experiments or deviations that failed as they strayed from the main course of Northern Pueblo history" (Vivian and Matthews 1964:115).

Vivian's prescient view was largely ignored. Chaco as Pueblo prevailed. Chaco as Polity re-entered the fray decades later, amid the Grasshopper-Chaves Pass debates of the 1980s. After Vivian, suggestions for Chaco as Polity were made in the Processual era, at a time when neo-evolutionary schemes were about the only available language for pre-state polities. Chaco was deemed a "chiefdom" (e.g. Schelberg 1984), or assigned "managerial elites" (Plog 1983).

If Chaco as Pueblo is heir to up-streaming, the lineage behind Chaco as Polity clearly comes from the neo-evolutionary days of Big Men and Chiefdoms (see Pauketat 2007 for an argument against chiefdoms which I much appreciate). When the subject was first broached (e.g. Schelberg 1984), those terms were the only tools available to build with. Chaco became a "chiefdom," at least for a while. While most recent political formulations eschew those antiquated terms, they are not entirely behind us: Timothy Earle (2001) saw Chaco as a chiefdom:

> "Although many aspects of the Chaco Canyon phenomenon fit comfortably within a Pueblo culture tradition, other unusual characteristics suggest a moderately complex, regional organization that conforms broadly with the definition of a chiefdom" (Earle 2001:26)

Specifically a "corporate (group oriented) chiefdom" (p. 28), minimizing the personal political power of leaders: "these leaders were mainly faceless…[a conclusion based in part on the fact that] no elite residences, except perhaps for the great houses themselves, have been identified" (p. 28). (Indeed; on the invisibility of Great Houses, more below.) Earle interprets Chaco famous exotics and "wealth" as fundamentally ceremonial: "the objects probably distinguish significant moments and roles in ceremonial events" (p. 31) and not as elite objects of a "wealth-financed" chiefdom.

Although chiefdoms as an evolutionary stage still have strong partisans (and an admirably robust literature), I am more sympathetic to the approaches of Norman Yoffee (2005) and Timothy Pauketat (2001, 2007), for whom the historical context of a polity is as important as its place on

an evolutionary schema. First figure out what something was, in historical context; then generalize from that information, if possible, to larger questions and answers. Consequently, I came late to Chaco as Polity. I considered Chaco's Great Houses and concluded on the evidence that they were elite residences and clear markers of a stratified class society; in 1984, I wrote: "Chaco was never a Toltec empire, but it must have been more complex than the modern Pueblos. By my reading of the architecture, somewhere near the lower end of the gap between Pueblo and Toltec is a reasonable place to look for Chaco" (Lekson 1984:273). Where, exactly? The options available in those days were bands-tribes-chiefdoms-states; and I wasn't happy with those off-the-rack anthropological notions. Something more than a chiefdom but (by inculcation) certainly not a state: we of my academic generation were taught as an axiom that there were no states north of Mexico – as were generations before and after. It was simply silly to think of Chaco as a state. But Chaco was more than a chiefdom, surely. There was no rung on the neo-evolutionary ladder for more-than-chiefdom/less-than-state. I didn't know what Chaco was, so I did not say.

Thus, interpretations of Chaco as Polity range from chiefdoms, to purposefully vague and unspecified hierarchy (Lekson 1988; Nelson 1995; Sebastian 1992), to a tributary state (Wilcox 1993, 2005). We have considered chiefdoms above and we will return to Wilcox's tributary state below. First let us consider the middle ground: unspecified hierarchy. Surely this has the same problems as unspecified rituality, against which I railed above? In very influential works, Lynn Sebastian (1992) and Ben Nelson (1995) both rejected conventional categorical measures of sociopolitical structure – specifically, the neo-evolutionary schema of those times – and analyzed Chaco as variably and dynamically complex. Sebastian thought that a "problem with previous studies of political complexity at Chaco is dependence on evolutionary typologies. Was it a chiefdom? Was it a tribe? … I chose to side-step the issue of assigning Chaco to some political type…" (Sebastian 1992:143). Note her omission of "Was it a state?" – not the result of my ellipsis, but Sebastian's original wording. Ben Nelson compared Chaco and La Quemada (a Classic Period Mesoamerican city-state, located at the northern extreme of its region and sometimes implicated in Southwestern prehistory), looking at several different measures of complexity. Chaco outscored La Quemada in almost all measures, yet Nelson rejected the obvious conclusion (Chaco was a city-state) because his understanding of Chaco was heavily influenced by Chaco-as-Pueblo interpretations of Chaco's "architectural symbolism" and by the data of that time which indicated La Quemada had and Chaco lacked "institutionalized use of force" (Nelson 1995:614-615). Architectural symbolism focused on Chaco's kivas ("implying a group structure which is consensual rather than confrontational," p. 614). Institutional force seemed evident at La Quemada, with its "ubiquitous displays of human bone" (p 615), but evidently absent at Chaco – an absence dramatically reversed several years after Nelson's article (Turner and Turner 1999; Le Blanc 1999; Lekson 2002). Thus, the conundrum" "While Chaco Canyon was organized at a larger scale, La Quemada seems to have been more hierarchically structured" (p. 614). Nelson concluded, famously, that we should not ask "when comparing two polities…'How complex were the relative to one another?' [but] …instead we should be asking 'How were they complex?'"(p. 614). An important ancillary conclusion: "These comments on scale are not intended to suggest elevating Chaco Canyon to a state, but that the scalar conception of La Quemada, as well as other northern Mesoamerican settlements such as Alta Vista, needs to be downsized" (p. 214) That is, if Chaco is bigger than La Quemada and we know that Chaco was not a state, where does that leave La Quemada?

I suggest that both Sebastian's and Nelson's analyses – both very useful and rightfully influential – were crippled by the *a priori* assumption that Chaco was not a state and, therefore, state-level models were not allowed. With many indicators pointing to that position on the neo-evolutionary ladder (whatever its faults), analysts chose to discredit the instruments of measurement – the readings must be wrong. I met much the same problem in my unpublished dissertation (Lekson 1988): Chaco scored impressively on several measures of complexity and it looked rather state-like; but the obvious conclusion that Chaco was, in fact, a state was almost literally inconceivable. Why?

In recent publications, I have questioned the axiom of "No States North of Mexico" as a relic of colonial bias and early (racist) anthropology (Lekson 2009, 2010). Why Cahokia, the great 11th and 12th century Mississippian city, should not be considered a state confounds me completely (cf. Milner 2006; see also Pauketat 2007, 2010). "State" is not a status maker, like World Heritage designation. The use of the term "state" simply recognizes a certain level of political and economic complexity – not necessarily a neo-evolutionary outcome – which allows sites like Cahokia and Chaco to benefit from the intellectual and empirical tools developed for state-level ancient societies. That is, they can be full members of a well-studied class of human societies, rather than unique anomalies or mysterious "phenomenon." My motives are not simply "social climbing" for Chaco and its archaeology and its archaeologists. Rather, I firmly believe that we will only understand Chaco, and resolve its "wildly different conclusions" if we cease treating it as a freak of nature or an aberration, and consider it thoughtfully in the context of its times: Postclassic Mesoamerica and Middle Mississippian. That happens, below.

6. LOOKING FOR CHACO IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES?

Lynn Sebastian (2009) provides one of the clearest reviews of the problem. She notes:

"…during the past hundred years and especially in the last thirty, we have gained much descriptive knowledge of what Chaco was. … But when it comes to explaining how and why all of this came about, how Chacoan society was organized and functioned, sometimes we seem no farther along than when the Chaco Project started more than thirty years ago. (Sebastian 2009:404)

In her prescription for the Chaco conundrum, Sebastian (Sebastian 2009:411) repeats a cogent argument she made earlier:

"If Chaco fit neatly into some straight-forward organizational 'box' based on common patterns we see in the modern or historical world, we would have found that box by now. This doesn't mean that it was some unique specimen never seen before or since in the world; that is theoretically possible, but statistically unlikely. What is more likely …is that we haven't looked at enough boxes yet" (Sebastian 2004:99)

And, eschewing states, she then looks at sub-Saharan Africa for possible analogues (Sebastian 2009:412-419). I believe the appropriate "box" (= model) can be found far closer in geographic,

temporal and even causal space – but not in the Southwest strictly construed, nor at levels of sociopolitical complexity heretofore considered appropriate for the Southwest.

Perhaps our failure to pin down Chaco tells us something important. Perhaps this range of thinking tells us that southwestern archaeology lacks the tools and the intellectual traditions to handle what Chaco really was. Our interpretive chaos reflects the fact that Chaco is off our charts. It's beyond our ken, outside our interpretive space. But that does not mean that Chaco was unique or sui generis.

I dismiss "Chaco as Pueblo" because (after Chaco and Aztec) Pueblo peoples never built anything remotely like Chaco: that is, an urban regional center. Never again was there one site or settlement central to a region. Indeed, Pueblos are famous for their political independence (from each other, and occasionally from colonial powers). Modern Pueblo ethnography and traditional histories surely have something to say about Chaco, but modern Pueblo socio-political organizations probably do not. The epochal changes after 1300 CE made another Chaco almost impossible.

"Chaco as Pilgrimage" seems more likely – or, at least, less obviously wrong. Pilgrimage cannot be ruled off the court, nor can sequential hierarchy, Locus of High Devotional Expression, or rituality—these interpretations suggest that Chaco was something unusual, perhaps unique, even sui generis. (Parallels with 5th century Hopewell are not intended to suggest historical connections to 11th century Chaco!) That's certainly possible: we should allow the past to surprise us. Hopewell certainly surprises. On logical and perhaps evolutionary grounds, we might expect more novelties early in history or at the beginnings of regional sequences. Chaco was not *de novo*; it came near the end of southwestern prehistory (1000-1300). And Chaco (presumably unlike Hopewell) was clearly at the margins of enormously longer, much more complex histories: Mesoamerica. While it is possible that Chaco cooked up something new under the sun, it seems more likely that Chaco reflected earlier and contemporary tried-and-true sociopolitical formations, rather than some new thing at the end of the sequence. Pilgrimage partisans must acknowledge that "Chaco as Pilgrimage" – although it may remain close to Pueblo Space – is an extraordinary claim, requiring extraordinary proof. If we find more likely, historically-attested, less-exceptional models which better fit the data, then vacant ceremonial centers will not constitute a strong argument. Uniquity is possible – but, by its very nature, uniquity is highly unlikely!

"Chaco as Polity" – I am fairly certain Chaco can be usefully considered a polity. It may—or may not—have been a pilgrimage center, also. First things first: what sort of polity? We can fall back on old neo-evolutionary schemas, repackaged in more flexible modern formulations. Or we can look at historically and geographically related cases – look at Chaco's actual context, in its time. Discard processual, evolutionary frameworks of "the development of complexity AT Chaco" and turn Galton's Question on its head, and make "diffusion" a virtue. I recall an aged and honored ethnologist (now deceased) who, after a conference paper in which I suggested we might need to look beyond Pueblos to understand Chaco, angrily demanded: what better place to look to understand Chaco than the ethnographic Pueblos? At the time I was abashed – this was long ago, when I honored my elders. Now I am one. So today I would reply: not Zuni or Hopi, but Mexico and Mesoamerica. It is no longer news that Chaco and Chaco's Southwest were

deeply engaged with societies to the south. What sorts of polities were contemporary with Chaco? Do they offer useful insights? As we shall see, they do.

Our failure with Chaco, I think, tells us we have not thrown our nets out far enough. We have not looked at enough boxes. It turns out that Chaco may be pretty easy to understand – and not that big of a deal – if we just go beyond the Pueblo Space, conceptually and geographically. And not that far beyond: Mesoamerica.

7. WHICH MESOAMERICA?

There can be no question that Chaco was deeply engaged with the south, with Mesoamerica. Instead of looking at Chaco in a prochronistic Puebloan framework (Chaco as Pueblo) or inventing/imaging a unique Chacoan ceremonial/ pilgrimage center (Chaco as Pilgrimage), we can seek insights from Chaco's actual historical context: 11th and 12th century Mesoamerica. But where to begin? Of course the most famous Mesoamerican polities were empires. Chaco's exact contemporary was Tula of the Toltecs, quite possibly an empire (Diehl 1983; or not: Kristan- Graham and Kowlski 2007). The better-known empires of the Aztecs and Tarascans came later, immediately after the end of Chaco and Aztec (that is, ca. 1300; Lekson 2009).

Chaco was a very small apple to Tula's very large orange: Tula probably differed from Chaco much as Chaco differed from later Pueblos. Thus Tula is perhaps not a very promising source of comparative insights. Moreover, Tula was in the highlands of central Mexico. It is generally assumed that the Southwest's most direct contacts were with West Mexico and western Mesoamerica (Lekson 2009:114; e.g. Nelson 2006, Wilcox 1986). Therefore, I initially investigated the Tarascan and trans-Tarascan areas (Lekson 2009:191-192; e.g., Pollard 2003, Gorenstein and Pollard 1983, papers in Townsend 1998). Accounts of the Tarascan empire were, like Tula, not promising: that empire was highly centralized and authoritarian, more so, perhaps, than the Aztec Empire (e.g. Pollard 2003b). Unlike the Aztec emperor, who loosely presided over a bureaucracy of priests and lords, the Tarascan ruler or *cazonci* was a powerful autocrat "who shared power with no one" (Gorenstein and Pollard 1983:1). Aztecs subsumed local polities keeping their ruling lineages more or less intact (more on this, below); again unlike the Aztecs, the Tarascan *cazonci* appointed his own people to rule conquered territories (Pollard 2003?). The large, highly centralized, authoritarian, Tarascan empire did not seem like a likely model for Chaco; nor did the somewhat looser, later Aztec empire. And of course both Tarascan and Aztec empires were somewhat later than Chaco.

Scalar differences eliminate Toltec, Tarascan, and Aztec empires as sources of interpretive insight. Dr. Gerardo Gutierrez, my colleague at the University of Colorado, suggested looking instead at the myriad small local polities ("city states") which had been incorporated into those larger empires: the sociopolitical unit termed *altelpetl* (plural, *altepeme*) in Nahua (Gutierrez 2003; Lockhart 1992:Chapter 2; Fernandez Christllieb and Garcia Zambrano 2006). "Altepetl" means "the water(s), the mountain(s)" – a reference to its land base (Lockhart 1992:14). The altepetl or city-state was the basic sociopolitical unit over much (most?) of Postclassic Mesoamerica.

As we shall see, the altepetl model "fits" Chaco very closely, the main differences being spatial (but not demographic) scale, and the apparent absence at Chaco of several Mesoamerican ideological institutions, in particular deities commemorated atop pyramids. I will argue that that Chaco was the altepetl form, expressed in southwestern idioms. The altepetl was probably not created by Mesoamerican intruders (although it is highly likely that Mesoamericans visited Chaco, and vice versa). Rather, when Chaco built a political system, it referenced the sociopolitical entities with which it was familiar, or with which it co-evolved: that is, the altepetl or Mesoamerican city-state.

Chaco's was a world of city-states, and empires. Chaco was not an empire but it certainly looked like an altepetl or city-state. The altepetl model avoids the prochronisitic pitfalls of the Pueblo Space and has logical merit over uniquities such as pilgrimage centers. Altepetl was a real form, a common form, and part of Chaco's world. We can be confident that the leaders who created Chaco knew of the altepetl or city-state form; they did not know – they could not know – Pojaque or Pandaharpur.

8. WHAT'S AN ALTEPETL?

Altepetl is not without controversy. To simplify the debate, I contrast Lockhart's altepetl with Michael Smith's "city states" – both describing the same phenomenon: small Mesoamerican polities. These small polities were constituent of but emphatically not empires. At risk of over-simplification, Lockhart works mainly from documents; Smith augments documents with archaeological data. Lockhart writes history specific to Nahua of the Aztec and early Colonial periods; Smith's research is in the service of more global, comparative goals. Lockhart's analysis was mainly directed at "Nahua After Conquest" but he suggest a pre-conquest altepetl form (Lockhart 1994:XXX); Smith question the validity of colonial period socio-political formations to Middle Post-classic or even early Late Post-classic periods (Smith 2008:90-91). Lockhart calls these polities altepetl; Smith calls them city-states. Other differences of interpretation are discussed below.

Before describing the altepetl sociopolitical structure, it should be noted that many Mesoamerican scholars prefer not to use the Nahua term, instead labeling these units "city states" (Charlton and Nichols 1997; Smith 2008), since the central cluster was typically called a city by the Spanish. There are, of course, one could quibble and questions the applicability of that Old World political category – city-state – to Mesoamerican cases (e.g. Yoffee 2005), but those terminological debates do not negate the importance of data and information gathered under the rubric "city state" (especially by Michael Smith, below). For those of us outside the Mesoamerican fray, one man's altepetl may be another man's city state. I will use the term atlepetl and sometimes atlepetl/city-state here, and it should be noted that the socio-political structure it described also characterized many non-Nahua areas of Mesoamerica (discussed below).

I divide my discussion into two halves: Altepetl in Theory and Altepetl (City-State) in Practice. For the former, I rely primarily on Lockhart; for the latter, primarily Smith.

8.A. Altepetl in Theory

James Lockhart (1992) provided the key analysis of altepeme, based on codices and other textual sources, in *The Nahuas After the Conquest* (especially chapter 2, p. 14-20). Lockhart describes a theoretical altepetl, with arrangements dictated by theology and numerology; as we shall see, real altepeme varied significantly from this theoretical ideal. According to Lockhart, the "minimum requirements …are a territory; a set (usually a fixed canonical number) of named constituent [territorial] parts; and a dynastic ruler or tlatoani (pl. tlatoque)." (Lock p. 16) The "constituent [territorial] parts of the atlepetl…" were "*calpolli*, a term meaning literally 'big house'" (Lockhart 1992:16); that is, territorial subdivisions were defined by the structure (palaces) of noble families who controlled or ruled those subdivisions. The palace or "noble house" itself was called a *tecpan* or *tecalli* (Hodge 1997:212).

Lockhart provides an intriguing and influential diagram of how an atelpetl worked, conceptually (Lockhart 1993:Fig. 2.1, reproduced here as Figure 2). Note that this diagram was meant to be only approximately cartographic. Rather, Figure 2 unites aspects of territorial organization (division into eight calpolli) with the ideal system of rotating rulership among the highest noble families. Lockart indicates clustering of tecalli or palaces in the center of the diagram; this will be discussed further below. Note that each tecpan or palace – or, rather, the noble families residing in those palaces – was equivalent within its class. That is, on Lockhart's diagram, the tecpan in calpolli #8 was equivalent to the tecalli in the central cluster, although of course the palace of the overall ruler, the tlatoani, was administratively if not architecturally more important. Figure 2 is a diagram, not a map, but its basic structure can be applied to archaeological situations.

Territory and boundaries may almost certainly less rigid than in modern nation-states. Michael Smith argues that the atelpetl was defined by relations of people, and not territory (Smith 2008:91; see also Gutierrez 2003). "Territorial boundaries were important for *atelpetl* definition, but they clearly were subordinate in importance to the social relationships that defined tribute and service obligations between lord and subject" (Hirth 2003:73). "An altepetl consisted of a legitimate king – the tlatoani – and a population of nobles and commoners subject to the king. In physical terms, the altepetl was made up of a capital city, a series of smaller settlements (towns, villages and isolated farmsteads, and the farmlands worked by the polity's population." (Smith 2008:89). These relationships are diagrammed by Hirth (Figure 3) and Gutierrez (Figure 4).

All authors seem to agree that the altepetl was a tributary system. Commoners owed tribute to their immediate noble lords; those lowest tier nobles owed tribute to higher noble familes; the higher noble families owed tribute to the noble family ruling the capolli, and those families owed tribute to the *tlatoani* ruling the altepetl. But tribute from individual commoner families was not oppressive or onerous: a few bushels of corn, a few weeks's labor on noble fields or houses, and of course military service in times of war. "Tribute was provided by mobilizing labor from domestic households on a rotational basis for both private and public (cuatequitl) services. Tribute consisted of domestic services and payments of agricultural and craft goods by the individuals who had produced them." This was organized through the 3-tier cuadrilla system. "The smallest administrative unit was a grouping of 20 households … The second level of

cuadrilla hierarchy was …the group of five centecpantin (20 households)…At the top of the cuadrilla system was the calpixque who coordinated the units 100 tribute households…" (Hirth 2003:75).

Thus, the altepetl structure assumes and requires clearly defined classes of nobles and commoners. "Elites [nobles] were organized through the 'noble house' (*tecpan* or *tecalli*)" – that is, palaces – while "craft specialists and traders may have formed intermediate social categories" between nobles and true commoners (Hodge 1997:212; see also Hodge 1997: 211-212). "*Calpulli* are often characterized as internally stratified groups of people who lived together, held their land in common, shared a common ethnic or group identity, and engaged in corporate civic and religious activity. Each *capulli* had a small administrative precinct that could contain a small temple, civic buildings like a and an elite residence" or tecpan. Not all of these features were adopted at Chaco; the pyramid/temple may be represented at Chaco (Stein and others 2007), but absent at secondary centers. Importantly, the *telpochcalli* was a house and school for young men (Hirth 2003:75), a function worth considering for of Chaco's Great Kivas.

The altepetl landscape was divided in complex ways among the multiple noble families, each of which had one or more tecpan in its calpolli. Ideally, the number of calpolli were fixed by canonical numbers (for example, 8) (Lockhart 1992:16); each calpolli had its own leader or lord, often dynastic, and each constituted a distinct (and often discontinuous) territory within the larger altepetl. Each calpolli "in turn were divided into what may be called wards (no indigenous term emerges) of (roughly) twenty, forty, eighty, or a hundred households, each ward having a leader responsible for land allocation, tax collection, and the like." (Lockhart 1992:17)

The "king" (tlatoani) was a central leader elected by a council of the highest nobles, and the office theoretically rotated among those families. "The fixed order of rotation of the calpolli was the life thread of the atlpetl" (Lockhart 1992:17). The succession of tlatoani apparently shifted from noble family to noble family, by vote of the nobles, ensuring that son would not inherit power from father – at least, in theory. This system successfully "decentralized" authority, and prevented the rise of any individual noble family in central rulership. The tlatoani himself was the head of his own calpolli, and ruled directly ONLY that unit, from his *tecpan* or palace (Lockhart 1992:18).

Each altepetl had a central cluster of palaces and other civic structures, typically founded at a key place: the site of the initial settlement of the territory, or a notable battlefield, or an otherwise "important" place (REF). Importantly, most (but not all) noble families clustered their palaces around that central spot. This central cluster is a matter of interpretive debate: was it a city? "A key aspect of altepetl organization is that all the major institutions – administrative, religious, and economic – were concentrated in the capital city" (Smith 2008:90) – but not all scholars agree. Lockhart stresses that the atelpetl consisted of BOTH the central cluster of tecpans and the territories around them; together, central cluster and countryside formed the atelpetl, with its territorial divisions (calpolli). Lockhart (1992:19-20) notes that the term "city" may impose a Western view of capitals and peripheries, and insists that altepetl encompassed both town and country, indivisible. Archaeologically, altepetl landscapes appear to have a central city and multiple secondary centers, but Lockhart notes that "outlying" major palaces were equivalent, socially and politically, to families in palaces in the central cluster (Lockhart 1992). Smaller

secondary palaces were a part of that landscape; they housed lesser noble families which administered subdivisions of larger calpolli.

Lockhart, Gutiérrez, and others maintain that this cluster did not constitute a separate city, an urban center to a rural hinterland. Rather the central cluster was constituted of multiple palaces, each corresponding to an individual calpolli. Thus there was no urban/rural split: the calpolli was the unit, and the cluster almost an epiphenomenon. Michael Smith, Kenneth Hirth and Mary Hodge disagree, and prefer the term "city state" to describe the altepetl and similar non-Nahua polities; thus the central cluster necessarily becomes a city (discussed further in Chapter 3). For the present argument, this disagreement does not greatly matter; it is the scheme or structure that is of interest, more than the actual function of its constituent parts.

For the present, I follow Gutiérrez's summary: "The concept of "*altepetl*" does not correspond to "city;" rather it refers to the total political-territorial unit of a particular ruling lineage. The *altepetl* may contain locations that present urban characteristics and have "cities." In those cases, a Mesoamerican city is understood to include a concentrated population, political-economic institutions, the ruling lineage, *and* the total territory of the *altepetl*. In pre-Hispanic Mexico, there is no urban-rural dichotomy. If we were to look for a spatial dichotomy, it would be based on the *pilli-macehualli* relationship—the ruler versus the ruled—and how this relationship determined and dominated the landscape. I believe much of the archaeological data requires reinterpretation based on autochthonous categories. This should not be done mechanically, as it requires the identification of local and chronological variations of the *altepetl*. Despite the variations, given the widespread use of *altepetl* as a political-territorial-ideological structure in Postclassic societies, we need to examine its roots, which undoubtedly lie in the Classic and Formative periods." (Gutiérrez 2003:115)

8.B. The Altepetl (City-State) in Practice

Several differences in analytical approach by Lockhart and Smith were summarized above. More substantive differences are discussed here. The scale and the morphology of Smith's city-states and Lockhart's alteptl are very similar, with some important differences. One key difference between Smith and Lockhart involves the term "city:" Lockhart is very positive that the central clusters of altepetl were NOT cities, by his definition (Lockhart 1992:XX); Smith insists that they were cities, by his definition (Smith 2008). Further, Smith (2012:PC) notes that Lockhart's altepetl lacked a central king-figure, which Smith believes were essential parts of pre-Contact Nahua polities; but my reading of Lockhart suggests an apical kingship (tlatoani), rotating and less powerful than perhaps Smith's vision for city-states.

Both Smith and Lockhart note that altepetl could be territorial and/or non-territorial; that is, "in many cases members of an altepetl lived in a single continuous territory. In some cases, however, the subjects of neighboring kings lived interspersed with one another to such a degree that it is impossible to draw discrete territorial boundaries" (Smith 2008:91; see also Gutierrez REFS). The defining characteristics, however, were not geographic, but socio-political: relations of tribute or tax between commoners and specific noble families, and hierarchical upwards among minor and major nobles (Lockhart 1992:XXX).

"City-states" have been studied globally, as an anthropological category (Griffen and Thomas 1981; Hansen 2000, 2002; REFS). Notably, most city states develop in multiples: that is, the competition of multiple city-states is part of the dynamic that creates and sustains the form (e.g Renfrew and Cherry 1986). City-states as an anthropological category do not develop in isolation, but rather as elements of a landscape of similar city-states. At best, the Southwest might have hosted two such contemporary entities: Chaco and Sedentary Hohokam (Lekson 2009:XXX). A key argument, developed much later in this paper, is that Chaco was not "developing" anything; Chaco was adopting a form developed elsewhere, to the south. The right form in the wrong place, perhaps?

How big was an altepetl/city-state – center and countryside? I look at two dimensions – population and area – for entire polities and for central settlements.

According to Hodges, the total population of the altepetl or city-state averaged 12,000, and ranged from as small as 2,026 to 40,430; the size of the territory averaged 75 sq km, and ranged from 20 sq km to 228 sq km. "The distance between the urban centers and rural communities in the city-states …averages 7.1 km—a walk that could be made in a few hours…" (Hodge 1997:218-219). Smith notes that "a typical altepetl in the Basin of Mexico had a population of 10,000 to 15,000 and covered an area of 70 to 100 square km, while in Morelos most altepetl had 5,000 to 10,000 people in an area of 50 to 80 square km." (Smith 2008:90).

And the central clusters/capital cities? Michael Smith (2008: Table 6.1) summarizes the sizes of capitals and second largest settlements, from which I extract the following information: Excluding the huge imperial capitals of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco, twenty Aztec "capital cities" ranged in population size from as few as 600 to 23,000. Eleven were 5,000 or less, and seven were 3,000 or less; that is, one-third of the "capitals" were 3,000 or less in population. The median population size was 4,750. Median area of the central cluster/capital was 108 ha, with a median population density of 50/ha. Those figures provide a sense of scale for an altepetl central cluster/capital: less than 5,000 people living in an area of about half a square mile.

For the second largest "city" in the polity, Smith found that the median population size was only 465, or about 7% of median size of the capital; that is, capitals were an order of magnitude larger than second largest cities. Figures in Hodge 1997:218 for the most part agree with Smith's: "urban center" population ranged from 1,000 to 25,000 "…although at least one city-state (Tenanco) in the study area had no urban center (it probably had only elite residential precints)."

The alteptel model presented above was derived from historic codices and Aztec era records and sites. These sources, of course, date several centuries after Chaco. However, it is widely accepted that altepetl-like polities were present much earlier in Mesoamerica. Charlton and Nichols (1997:169) date the occurrence and predominance of the altepetl/city-state in central Mexico "between the fall of Teotihuacan (ca. A.D. 650/750) and the arrival of the Spaniards in A.D. 1519." That is, political/territorial structures similar to altelpetl were ubiquitous throughout the Post-Classic, and the form probably emerged over much of Mesoamerica at least as early as the Epi-Classic. "Conditions were perfect for the appearance of cities [city-states] during the Epiclassic because city-states flourish under conditions of political turmoil or in the absence of larger centralizing processes. The waning of Teotihuacan power between A.D. 600-650 created a situation where local elites could exert their authority and new centers of power could be built."

(Hirth 2000b:280-281.) Kenneth Hirth (2000b:272-273) convincingly applies Lockhart's altepetl model to a medium-sized Epiclassic (650-900 CE) polity (9,000 to 15,000 people) (Figure 3). Note that formation of cities and city-states was elite-driven; that is altelpetl formations were created by noble families (see also Nelson 2000).

Smith (2003) Table 4.1 shows the form beginning in the Epi-classic in Mixteca, Tarascan zone, Highland Jalisco (and elsewhere, further south), alongside larger Classic and Early Post-Classic states in central Mexico (ie., Tenochtitlan, Tula, Cholula). From the Middle Post-Classic on, the form was ubiquitous across Mesoamerica: "…the twelfth century A.D. was time of far-reaching change in most parts of Mesoamerica. One of those changes was the development of city-state cultures in many areas." (Smith 2003 Small Polities p. 36) Hirth (2003:61) argues that, beyond central Mexico, the form (known by non-Nahua names) was everywhere in Oaxaca, Mixteca, Huaxteca, Yucatan and the Maya highlands (Hirth 2003:61, 67-69). "The limited evidence available from other regions of Mesoamerica in Postclassic times suggests that city-states were the predominant political form in many or most areas" with the possible, problematic exception of the Tarascan area (Smith 2000a:592).

Significantly, Smith (2003:Table 4.1) indicates that the Mixtec area was ALWAYS altepetl/city-states, from Epi-classic through the Post-Classic and Contact. This may be of interest because, according to John Pohl, much southwestern turquoise entered Mesoamerica through the Mixtec region, specifically through the coastal city of Tututepec (Pohl 2001).

Gutierrez suggests even greater antiquity of the altepetl form: "Given the widespread use of *altepetl* as a political-territorial-ideological structure in Postclassic societies, we need to examine its roots, which undoubtedly lie in the Classic and Formative periods." (Gutiérrez 2003:115; see also Hirth 2003:65-67).

What of western Mexico? Of perhaps particular interest to the problem at hand, unfortunately the early Postclassic political situation of the Tarascan core, the Trans-Tarascan area and West Mexico are not well known. I have discussed the highly centralized nature of the Late Postclassic Tarascan empire above; before that, it seems likely that the Tarascan and Trans-Tarascan areas were characterized by altepetl/city-states. "With the exception of the Tarascan core zone around Lake Patzucuaro in Michoacan, the political situation in Postclassic western Mexico is poorly known. That Patzucuaro Basin was divided into several competing polities that resemble city-states, but the expansion of the strongly-centralized Tarascan empire based in Tzintzuntzan appears to have destroyed the city-state system in this area." (Smith 2000a:592). Pollard (2003a) suggests the presence of city-states in the Trans-Tarascan zone, based in part on Weigand's 1991 work. However, Wigand questions the application of Nahua-based polity models in the region, by Brand (Hndbk Mid Amer Ind 1971) and others. Weigand paraphrased (Brand 1971; Schondube 1974 & 1986): "postulates that each valley was self-contained, that the pueblos therein were by and large independent from one another, and that the organizational and demographic levels were generally low. Ecological pockets determined this isolation and fragmentation." Weigand p. 197 cites with approval Octavio Paz (1970, 1972) critique of "punta de vista Nahua" (Nahuatl point of view) – a parallel to the Four Corners Hypothesis in which "the entire course of Mesoamerican culture history is interpreted as slowly but inevitably focusing on the Central Valley of Mexico"

For the westernmost, trans-Tarasacan polities, Weigand (1993:210-211) concludes: "Sources reveal a wide range of organizational principles at play in the zone. The following comments are abstracted from the 1759 *informes* of de Avila (1976), de Leyva (1976) and de Aguero (1976) and the 1584 *informe* of Gallegos (1976). The power at the apex of the political structure had a dual organization, with one element much more embedded in ceremonialism than the other. Political leaders of subject settlements were not represented in what appears to have been a council of elders. Political power was probably passed along agnatic lineage lines, though a generation would be skipped if no suitable candidate existed. When the Spanish made contact with Tonala, a woman (variously called *reina* or *caica*) in authority was empowered to lead a military resistance against the Spanish. … Apparently, the subpolities of the larger territorial unites were ruled by self-generated local lineages rather than by governors appointed from a controlling center. This contrasts with the Tarascan procedure of imperial appointment of many governors…"

Importantly, the altepetl/city-state was NOT present in the Andean and South American civilizations (Kolata 1997; Wilson 1997). That is, historically the altepetl/city-state form appear to be Mesoamerican – and perhaps North American.

In summary: the altepetl/city-state typically consisted of perhaps ten (or less) noble families occupying palaces with rotating kingship, secondary nobles in smaller palaces, and between 2,000 and 40,000 commoners in a hierarchical tributary relationship. An altepetl covered an area of about 75 square km. Its central "city" had from less than 1,000 to perhaps 5,000 people in about 100 ha; secondary centers were an order of magnitude smaller. "Cities" were defined by civic architecture and monuments, and by geographically clustered noble houses or palaces (tecpans) each of which controlled groups of commoner families either localized in territorial calpulli but sometimes complexly scattered throughout the altepetl.

9. SO…WHAT *WAS* CHACO?

Interpretations of Chaco generally cluster around three themes: Chaco as Pueblo, Chaco as Pilgrimage, and Chaco as Polity. While Chaco is unquestionably affiliated with and historically antecedent to modern Pueblos, I do not believe that Chaco will be understood by appeals to ethnographic or modern Pueblos. Certainly, Chaco will not be understood *solely* in those conventional contexts. Chaco may or may not have been a pilgrimage center, a sequential hierarchy, a Locus of High Devotional Expression, or a ritualty. Those interpretations require us to understand Chaco as something exceptional within its historical and continental context. To accept those exceptional readings, we must be sure that less exceptional, more likely alternatives have not been overlooked. (Note: this is NOT parsimony, at least parsimony properly applied; see Lekson 2009:12-14.) There is a strong candidate for a more likely alternative. The sociopolitical institutions, built environment and regional structure of Chaco were remarkably similar to one of the most common, wide-spread sociopolitical structures of Chaco's time: the Mesoamerican altepetl (my combination of Lockhart, Hirth and Gutierrez: Figure 5). The parallels and similarities are so close that the altepetl polity model seems far more likely for Chaco as Polity than either the Pueblo or Pilgrimage models. Chaco, I think, was an

altepetl/city-state – the form (if not all the content) of the basic Mesoamerican political unit, adopted on the northern frontier and transformed by local idioms and ideologies.

Chaco looks like an altepetl: a central cluster of Great House palaces, interspersed with commoner houses at Chaco Canyon (the city of the city-state); and a regional, hierarchical settlement of commoner/farmers and secondary palaces linked back to Chaco Canyon Great Houses by roads. Clearly, there were noble families and commoners. Clearly, no one noble house dominated all others. Less clearly, there was a tributary hierarchy: many have pointed out that much came into Chaco while little went out (contrary to chiefly redistribution models; Judge 1979, 1989?). David Wilcox has developed – independently of any Mesoamerican models – a model of Chaco as a tributary system (Wilcox 1993, 2005). Others have argued for markets (discussed above). As discussed above, the demographic scale of Chaco as a city and its region compares well with Mesoamerican atelpetl/city-states.

There are several notable differences between the idealized Mesoamerican altepetl and Chacoan reality: first, ethnic identity; second, missing building types; and third, absence of peer polities. A fourth and more important difference is geographic scale. These differences are discussed below.

Atelpetl is usually understood as an "ethnic state" (Lockhart 1992:14); that is, the population of the altepetl recognized a common ethnicity or identity. However, Charlton and Nichols 1997:169 note that this identity might be fictive, or operational: the "city state" had "a recognized single ethnic identity (although often with a multiethnic composition)." Chaco was almost certainly multi-lingual, perhaps multi-ethnic.

As noted above, most altepetl central cluster/capitals had a temple (pyramid) and market (Lockhard 1992:18). Chaco has no obvious pyramid (but see Stein et alia 2009); markets are uncertain. It seems likely that this ideological component of Mesoamerican polities did not translate into the Southwest and Chaco; the absence of pyramids and the gods they housed suggests that it was the political form and not the cosmologies of the south which were adopted by Chaco's leaders. It has been suggested, from time to time, that Chaco's southwest had markets (Abbott 2000, Kohler and others 2004), but the data are not conclusive. It is noteworthy that markets were far from ubiquitous in Mesoamerican altepetl centers: looking at the Aztec data, out of 38 city-state centers in the Basin of Mexico, [only] 18 had official marketplaces…" (Hodge 1997:212) That is, about one half of these altepetl capitals actually had markets; and major daily markets were only held in the huge cities of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco. However, I argue elsewhere (Lekson 2009:132-133) that Chaco had a bulk-goods economy (see also Earle 2000) for which markets would seem a likely or even necessary institution.

Altepetl/city-states existed in the context of other altepeme, as "peer polities." Chaco had no peer on the Plateau, at least during its rise and height – Aztec began ca 1110 and Wupatki around 1145. Chaco was opposed, geopolitically, by Hohokam (Lekson 2009). Was Hohokam a peer-polity? Lekson (2009) says yes, Neitzel (2010) says no. As noted above, peer-polities are invoked in the origin and development of city-state systems. Mesoamerica *evolved* the altepetl form; Chaco merely borrowed it, and adapted the form to Southwestern realities. Thus, the

absence of peer-polities may be more relevant to Chaco's end than its beginning: that is, the sociopolitical form could be taken out of context, but it could not be sustained out of context.

Chaco was a large altepetl: its region surely encompassed several tens of thousands of people. Recall that the largest Aztec altepetl (ignoring the huge imperial capitals) had about 40,000 people, while most had between 10,000 and 15,000 people. Chaco's region was probably closer to 40,000 than to 10,000 in population. However, the scale of population is comparable: the differences are not order-of-magnitude. The major difference comes in geographic scale: the average altepetl was 75 square km; estimates of Chaco's region ranged from 40,000 to 100,000 square km. I believe the difference between Mesoamerican altepetl and Chaco's region reflects profoundly different agricultural productivities between Mesoamerica and the northern Southwest. The compact altepetl of Mesoamerica reflects the high productivity of agricultural lands in central Mexico; the same political structure is necessarily "spread out" over the much less productive, patchy agricultural environment of the northern Southwest. Comparable populations were concentrated in Mesoamerica, and spread out at Chaco – perhaps stretched to the elastic limits of the altepetl form. Chaco invented new technologies to tie and bind populations spread over vast areas: roads and line-of-sight communication networks ensured the coherence of the altepetl form over the Chacoan region.

Importantly, I do not suggest that Chaco was the creation of Mesoamerican noble families (although that possibility should not be entirely discounted). Elite families in the Northern San Juan and Chaco expressed their status in proto-Great Houses of the 9th and 10th centuries. That is, elite families can be recognized in the northern Southwest before Chaco. In the early 11th century at Chaco, those proto-Great Houses became palaces.

Perhaps more importantly, the altepetl is/was real, and historically and geographically connected to Chaco. It does not represent an anthropological theory or schema (unlike neo-evolutionary classifications, or "house societies"); it does not represent a novel entity or uniquity (Locus of High Devotional Expression, rituality); it does not represent an exceptional claim (pilgrimage center). The altepetl form comes from Chaco's own time and place: the Postclassic and North America. The altepetl was the basic sociopolitical structure over much (most) of Mesoamerica before, during and after Chaco's time. Elite families in proto-Great Houses would probably have known of it; noble families in Chaco's palaces almost certainly would have been familiar. (These are assertions, speculations; but they are far more likely and realistic than the altenative, that Chaco elites were somehow ignorant of the South.) If, as I think is evident, a structure similar to an altepetl rose at Chaco, it replicated, mimicked, or evolved alongside the key sociopolitical structure which dominated the key region of North America -- Chaco's continent, its world. It is, in a word, more *realistic* than any of the competing interpretations – it is historically and geographically grounded.

I am not picking patterns out of HRAF, nor am I engaged in neo-evolutionary typology. Rather I am looking to Chaco's time and place – approximate time and approximate place – and seeing close parallels between Chaco and atlepetl or city-state models of Mesoamerica. Francis Galton (Darwin's cousin) confounded anthropologist Edward Tylor by asking if cross-cultural similarities Tylor posited as evolutionary patterns could, instead, be explained by diffusion or common histories; that is, historical connections. How to control for history? Galtaon's

Problem (as it came to be called) spurred a series of statistical solutions, but I think instead it may be useful to turn Galton's Problem on its head, and see historical connection as a methodological virtue, not a vice. Chaco and Mesoamerican city-states were historically connected; we must reconfigure Chaco and ancient North America in that light.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Fred Plog and Paul Martin noted four decades ago that Chaco obviously was important, but "… less is really known of the area than almost any other southwestern district" (Martin and Plog 1973:108). Today, we know a lot about Chaco. Too much, perhaps: we can't digest all that data, and we can't agree on what it means. Chaco is not my only or even principal interest, but Chaco has occupied a fair amount of my time. Over four decades, I've turned or returned a half-dozen times to Chaco research at Salmon Ruins (Irwin-Williams and Shelley 19890; Reed 2006), Pueblo Alto (Windes 1987), Chaco Outliers (Powers and others 1983), Bluff Great House (Cameron 2008), Chaco Synthesis (Lekson 2006), and Chimney Rock (Todd and Lekson 2011). And from time to time I thought about all those data. After more than a few false-starts, near-misses, and dead-ends, by George…I think I got it!

I've convinced myself, at least, that Chaco was, in sociopolitical form and structure, a small Mesoamerican city-state, an altepetl. Or it was trying to be. It wasn't a Pueblo. It may or may not have been a pilgrimage center – but it surely wasn't ONLY a pilgrimage center. Chaco was a political capital of a short-lived secondary city-state. This is a conclusion, not an assertion; the difference is very important. My conclusion comes from an argument (i.e., analysis) from evidence (i.e., data).

My conclusion may be wrong, but it should not be summarily dismissed as impossible, immaterial, inappropriate. We have our notions of what works and what does not work in the ancient Southwest; I've referred to those notions as "Pueblo Space." Chaco – and the ancient Southwest – should be constrained by the Pueblo Space. In Chaco's world there were hundreds of short-lived secondary city-states and precisely zero ethnographic Pueblos. We must try to understand Chaco in its own times and on its own terms, and then move forward to see if or how modern Pueblos developed, historically, from the "an eleventh century Pueblo regional center"—to use the careful, common-denominator euphemism titling a recent Chaco edited volume.

In the course of my work with Chaco, I've also reached some conclusions about American anthropological archaeology in North America. Parse that: "American anthropological" means the kind of archaeology we teach and practice in US and Canadian academic departments and in anthropologically staffed CRM and public institutions. "North America" means America north of Mexico or, more properly, north of Mesoamerica. Both are moving targets: Mesoamerica's northern boundary shifted through time, and there was a time not so long ago when the U.S. Southwest was the north third of the Mexican nation state. In sum, I mean the prehistory American archaeologists practice on the past of California, the Southwest, the Plains, the Mississippi Valley, and the Southeast – and all areas between and above. I've come to the rather depressing conclusion that over the past century-plus of anthropological archaeology in North America, we have not been getting the story right. Not just the details, but the master narrative, particularly for life after corn. We've built a vision – almost a mythology – of Native

America's past that won't hold up, because we built our vision on late 19th century colonial foundations and those foundations, frankly, are rotten (Lekson 2010). I conclude with three observations on the state of American anthropological archaeology in North America: methods, assumptions, and contexts.

(1) American anthropological archaeology's methods

Through an accident of history – that would be colonialism – the archaeology of North America was subsumed by natural rather than human history. Colonial mentalities questioned whether Native Americans north of Mexico *had* history, in any meaningful sense (Wolf 1982). Thus American anthropological archaeology was conceived as a science studying natural history, not as history studying humanity.

Through the first half of the twentieth century, archaeology was subservient to ethnography; whatever "history" might have happened, it would be best known from analysis of the modern cultures thorugh ethnographic record, supported perhaps by sketchy archaeological finds. By mid-century, archaeology established a North American past that could never be known from ethnography (for example, PaleoIndian), and systematized that past as "culture history." "Culture history" in American archaeology ordered taxonomic units in time, and did not pretend to narrative. New Archaeology and its successor, Processual archaeology, eschewed history – in in a narrative sense – altogether: history was background noise to be controlled for the discovery of ahistorical processes. American anthropological archaeology is, at heart, scientific. The "historical turn" of the late twentieth century barely impacted American anthropological archaeology north of Mexico. Under-theorized notions of contingency and path-dependence appeared to encompass a degree of historicity into what remains a fundamentally scientific discourse – a bit of "history" coming in through the back-door (e.g., Nelson and Hegmon in press).

Archaeologically-based (pre)history which cleaves close to scientific certainly is almost certainly false history, seriously mis-representing the past. While this may strike the reader as epistemologically heretical, logically this must be true: our data are a small and uncertain sample of a narrow range of past actions and activities; staying "close to the data" – a surrogate for scientific certainty – inevitably under-narrates the past as it happened. If we insist on testable, scientific certainty, we will certainly get the story wrong – misplaced parsimony run amuck (Lekson 2009:12-14).

We must learn to think like historians. What does that mean? We must think in narrative terms – this caused that – and we must become comfortable with uncertainty. We must wean ourselves away from scientific certainty in areas where science is not appropriate – such as human history. There is a whole discipline over in the humanities that deals with human history. History is not presented as hypotheses with test implications nor – ever – with scientific certainty. History is presented as arguments, persuading through interpretations of data. Scott Hancock, a historian at Gettysburg College, recently explained his field:

> "I am a revisionist historian. Every historian is one. We can examine the same events, documents, or statistics and reach starkly different conclusions about why things

> happened. Disagreement and revision, however, often produce consensus." ("African Americans had no friend in Lincoln," NY Times Sept 16, 2012, Sunday Review, p. 5)

There is a place for science, but it's not in the writing of narrative history. Science generalizes, history particularizes. A good historian, however, is as rigorous and systematic as a good physicist; but a good historian does not pretend to do science. History will never be as precise as science, but history will almost certainly be more accurate in some domains – that is, more accurate in representing the rich historical past of the Americas – than the minimalist narratives we construct from scientifically-attested sequences. If we can step over the post-structural rabbit hole and avoid the looking-glass of mere philosophy, it should be possible to write histories of ancient America without the crippling epistemological relativism of some British and Continental archaeologies. I cannot offer a fully developed program – I'm still working on it – but it may be possible to regain the theoretical edge American anthropological archaeology has surrendered to Bourdieu and Heidegger.

(2) Basic assumptions of American anthropological archaeology

The prehistory of America north of Mexico labors under a heavy inheritance, brought down from epi-colonial times and the "birth" of American anthropology: Lewis Henry Morgan's assertion that states never existed in North America (his term was "civilizations;" Morgan 1877; see Harris 1968:180-188; Trigger 2006:177-179). While Mesoamerican archaeology paid little or no heed to Morgan (Bernal 1980:142-144), his assertions remained highly influential in anthropological thinking north of Mexico, and particularly thinking about ancient Naïve American societies north of Mexico (Lekson 2010) – creating, in effect, a "glass ceiling" over state-like societies such as Cahokia and Chaco. Even today, it is difficult or impossible for an archaeologist to suggest that Cahokia was a state or state-like (Yoffee, Fish and Milner 1999; see also Pauketat 2007, Kehoe 1998), not on arguments of data but simply the deep history and sociology of the field. Even more so for Southwestern societies – "whom we can't even pretend formed states" (Yoffee, Fish and Milner 1999:262).

Why? Or rather: why not? I submit that biases, inherited by us from Morgan through the academic generations before us, make it almost "impossible" to conceive of Native societies north of Mexico as state-level polities. If Chaco as a "short-lived secondary city-state" makes your brows rise and your blood boil, you may be part of the problem. Chaco may NOT have been a short-lived secondary state, but it should be given its chance to be whatever it really was.

Certainly the data from Chaco and Cahokia could support such interpretations, if we let them. Both could be usefully seen as states, or at least evaluated and interpreted in frameworks that admit the possibility of states. Does this matter? Is this simply pyramid-envy or professional social-climbing? I don't think so. I hope I have shown, above, that much can be learned by considering Chaco alongside state-level polities of Mesoamerica. But more importantly, recognizing Chaco and Cahokia and other societies north of Mexico as possible state-level polities allows us to expand the significance of archaeology in America north of Mexico. I do not claim that Chaco or Cahokia were independent "case studies" of some general process of evolution of complexity. Rather, I see Chaco as an extremely well-studied example of a secondary state. Secondary states are states which formed on the margins or in the historical

wake of primary states (Joffe 2002; Marcus 2004; Parkinson and Galaty 2007; Shelach and Pines REFS; Spencer and Redmond 2004). The half-dozen primary or "archaic" states – China, Mesopotamia, Indus, Mesoamerica, Andean, and so forth) have long been the focus of archaeological interests in the state; for just as long, secondary states have been largely neglected, which is odd since they constitute the vast majority of complex polities in pre-history and pre-modern history. We know much about individual cases, but little about the range and depth of ancient secondary states. Some were large, most were small and, of those, few had all the trappings of statehood we demand in primary or "archaic" states or their nation-state successors. What would a small secondary state look like? Probably a lot like a Mississippian chiefdom. I submit that we have very good data on a continent full of secondary states – or polities that could be useful to the study of secondary states. I won't quibble with definitions and criteria; if, by your definition, Cahokia is not a secondary state, the obvious and interesting question is: why not? It was trying hard, but if it didn't make your cut, what's up with that? That is an interesting question with implications far beyond the Mississippi Valley.

I submit that in America north of Mexico, we have one of the richest records of secondary states available for study. Not only Chaco and Cahokia: from the Chumash one the Pacific to the Calusa on the Gulf, "complex" North American societies demand re-evaluation as secondary states – if we can get over the biases imposed by Morgan's and American anthropological archaeology's glass ceiling. (Yes, I include complex hunter-gather societies; why not?)

(3) The context of North American prehistory

To do this will require historical sensibilities about time – even in savage America, one thing really did lead to another – and a more cosmopolitan conception of space. "Cosmopolitan" as "global" – NOT sensu Lynn Meskell or Helen Gurley Brown. Ancient societies of the Americas generally denied the global tendencies of their Old World counterparts. While the transnational and cross-cultural dynamics of ancient and pre-modern Old World societies are by now a commonplace of history (e.g., Bentley 1993; Chanda 2008; Christian 2004; Curtin 1984; McNeil and McNeil 2003;); but historians – taking their cue from archaeology – apparently do not expect that condition for New World polities (but see Raat 2012). This creates key apparent differences between Old and New Worlds, explored in influential books such as Jared Diamond's (1997) *Guns, Germs and Steel*, Felipe Fernández-Armesto's (2001) *Civilizations*, and Peter Watson's (2011) *The Great Divide.* Of course there were important, even profound differences in the two worlds and their histories – differences from which there is much to learn. But I fear the ancient peoples of the New World have been mis-represented by American anthropological archaeology – not the high civilizations of Mesoamerica and the Andes, but the complex societies of North America. We've sold them short.

Old World ancient and pre-modern polities – big and small; good, bad, and ugly – interacted with extraordinarily important consequences. We now assume that the ancient and pre-modern Old World was globalized, a precursor to 20th and 21st century globalization; cross-cultural dynamics were inherent in societies of Europe, Asia and Africa. Advocates for ancient globalization promote those transnational interactions as a sort of "human universal" (Chanda 2008). Apparently, that universal was universal only in the Old World. We make a strong counter-assumption for the New World: Native New World societies, we assume, were ignorant

of each other unless proven otherwise, to a very high degree of proof. Not only are Native societies north of Mexico "people without history", they seem to be people without space – beyond their local proper boundaries. In Chaco's case (and indeed the Southwest's) evidence of cross-cultural and transnational dynamics is abundant and undeniable (e.g., summarized, skeptically, by Nelson 2006; see also Crown and Hurst 2009). Chaco's easy. We should extend to all the New World's ancient peoples the assumptions we make for Old World societies: that is, a more cosmopolitan conception of space. We demand smoking gun material evidence Mesoamerica at Cahokia, and absent that evidence that Cahokia was ignorant of the south. We could much more reasonably assume that the lords of Cahokia knew of those cities and civilizations – even if they never went to see for themselves – and knowledge of those civilizations affected their choices and Cahokia's historical trajectory.

We need new narrative methods for pre-history and more cosmopolitan understandings of space. North American archaeology is global history, or it runs the risk of being nothing. Until we get the history right, all the science we do may well ask the wrong questions and get the wrong answers.

Figure 1. 3-C Site (two unit pueblos) and Pueblo Bonito, at the same scale.

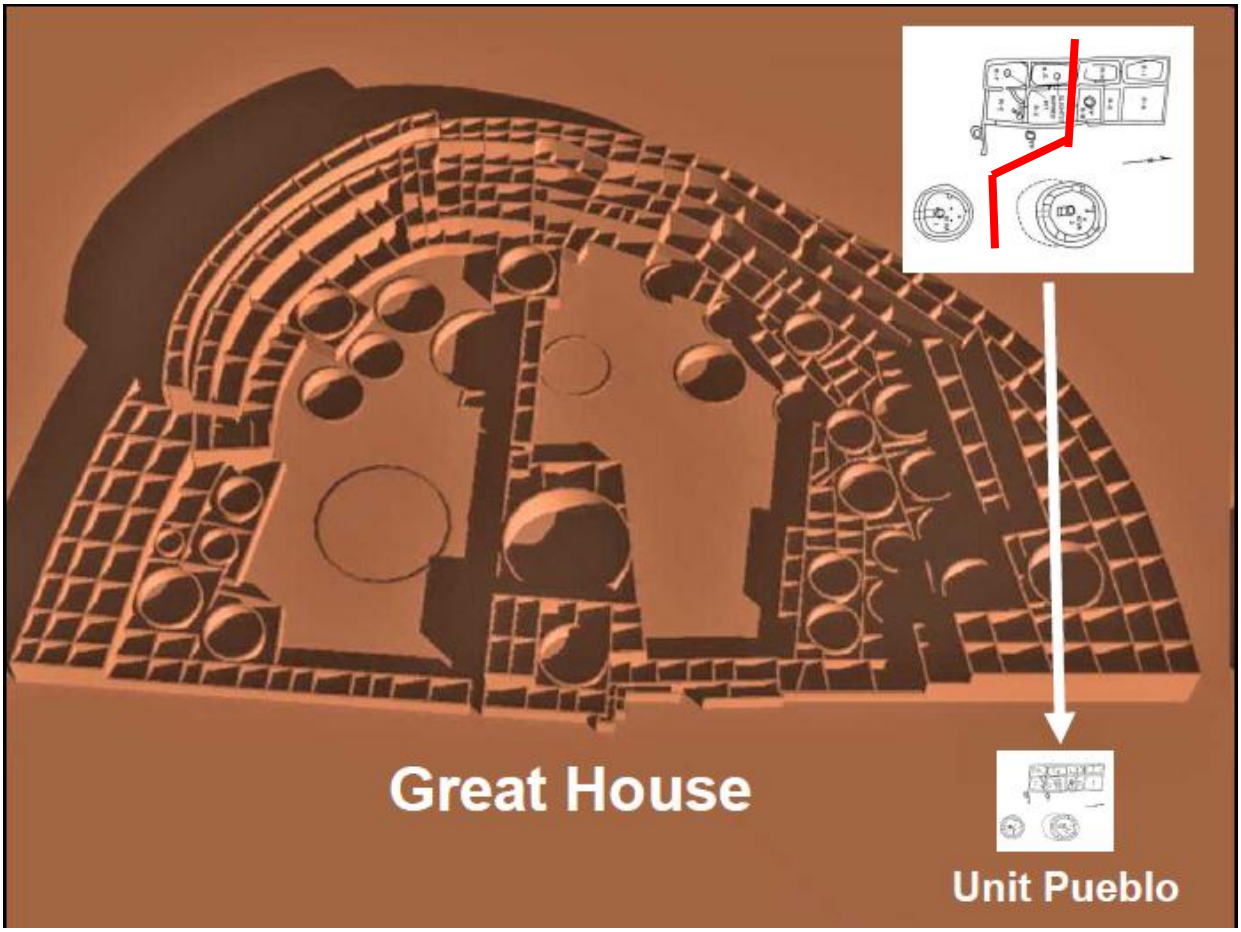


Figure 2. Lockhart's diagram of an altepetl.

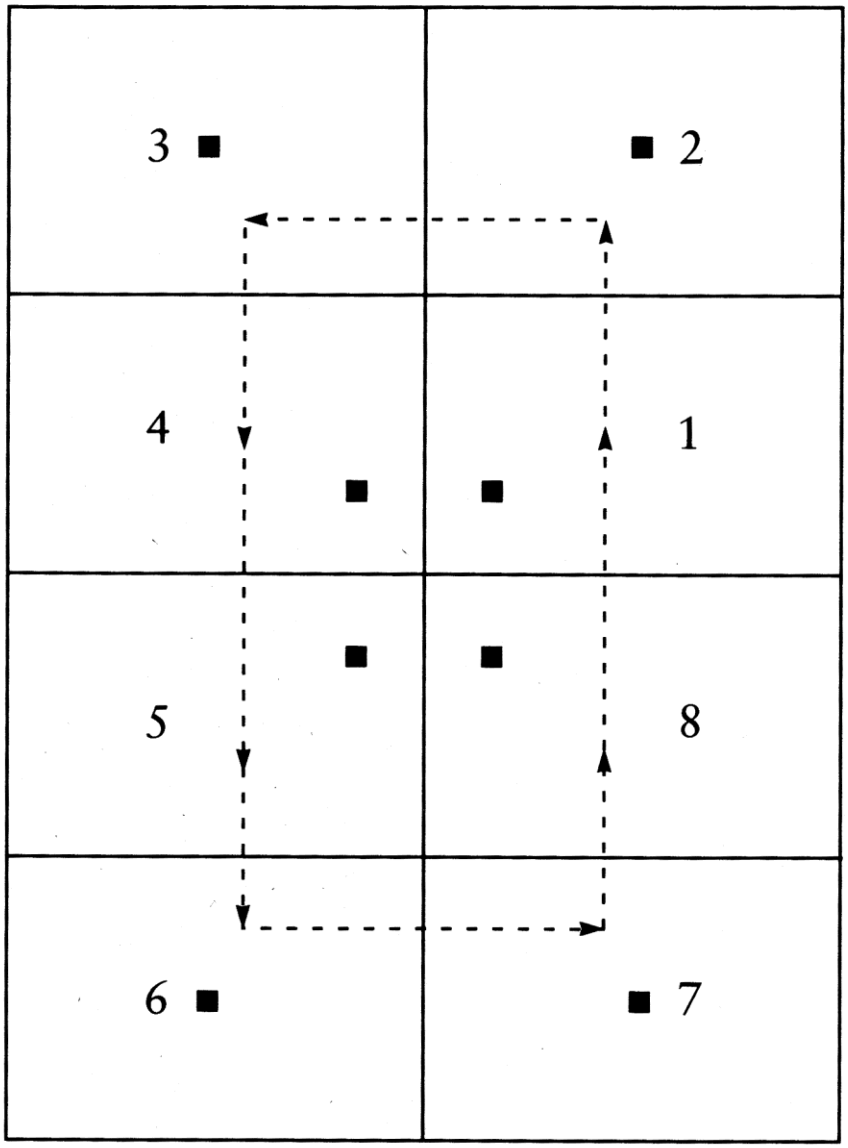


Figure 3. Diagram of an altepetl, Kenneth Hirth (REFS)

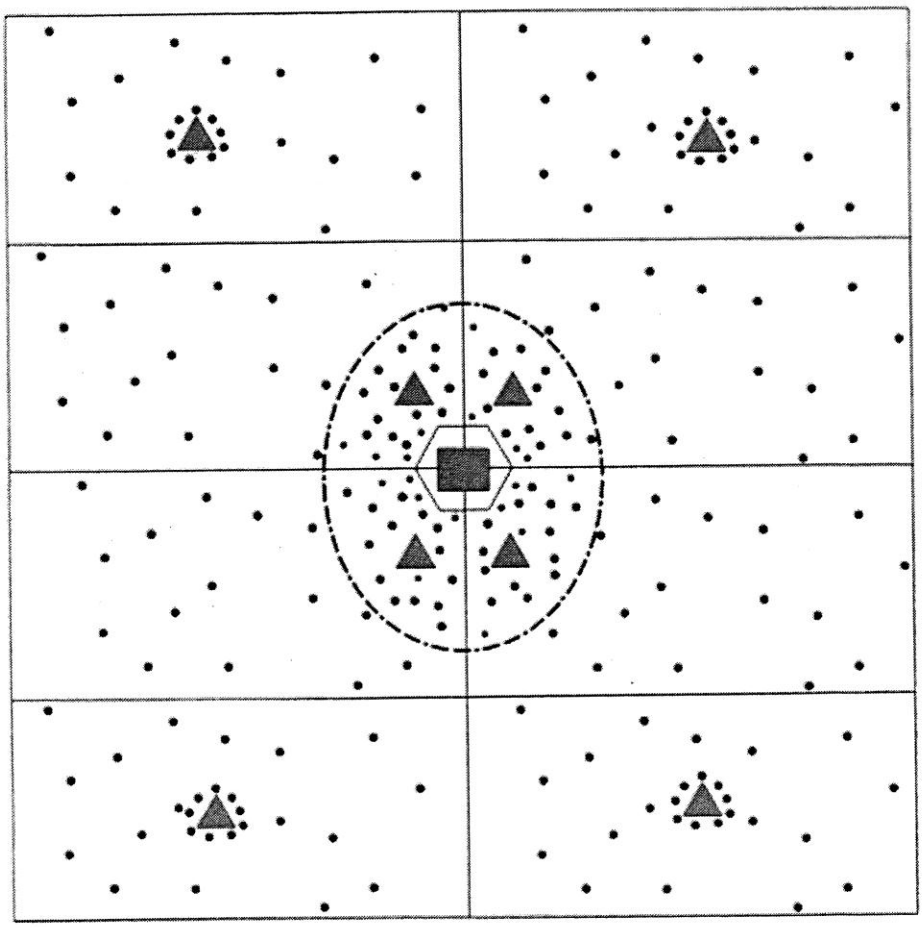
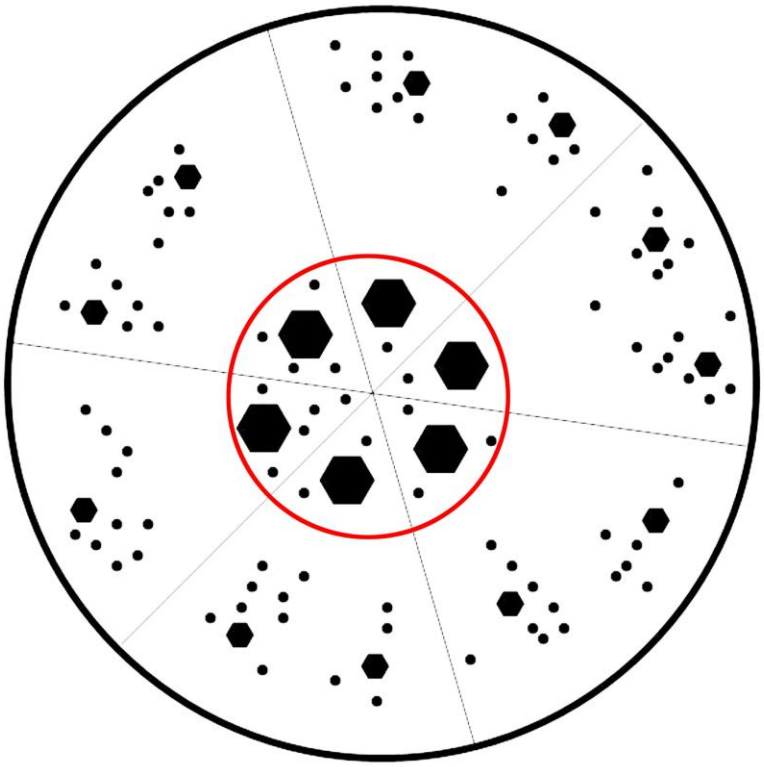


Figure 4. Gerardo Gutierrez's diagram of an altepetl (REFS).

Figure 5. Lekson's diagram/map of altepetl organization. Central red circle = Chaco Canyon; outer black circle = Chaco region.



1. The idea of a vacant ceremonial center is by no means entirely dead. For example, the site of Cahuachi in the Nasca region of Peru has been identified by Helaine Silverman (1994 *World Archaeology* 26:1–18) as "…an Ancient Peruvian Pilgrimage Center" of the Nasca period. Silverman (REFS) and others (Orefici 1993) conclude that Cahuachi was essentially a vacant ceremonial center, much as suggested for Chaco. However, Silverman argued that the nearby urbanized site of Ventilla and Cahuachi served as "dual capitals of early Nasca society", one secular and the other religious (Silverman 1993:326). Thus, the empty ceremonial city was part of paired urban-ritual cityscape; however, the urban and political nature of Ventilla (inevitably) has been called into question (REFS), so Cahuachi yet may emerge as something along the lines of Chaco as Pilgrimage – but at a state level.