

Book Review

Religious Transformation in the Late Pre-Hispanic Pueblo World. Edited by Donna M. Glowacki and Scott Van Keuren. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2012. 310 pp.

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Over the past two decades archaeologists have reconsidered how they approach ritual and religion in the archaeological record. Agent-centered theoretical frameworks have been put forward as specifically useful to archaeologists for analyzing and interpreting evidence of ritual practice and religious belief. The authors in this edited volume apply these frameworks, adapted from historic and contemporary social theory, to the rich archaeological data from the American Southwest—an area where archaeologists have often emphasized material and external factors to explain regional, social and cultural development. Importantly, as Pauketat in his summary chapter (Chapter Eleven) observes, what the authors do differently here is instead of rigidly defining what Pueblo religion is, in contrast to previous models, they investigate what it does. In this case, the authors in this volume argue that religion plays an important role in surviving, understanding, and accommodating great societal and environmental change.

The focus of the volume is on the Pueblo IV period (1275/1300 to 1540 CE), a time when the American Southwest experienced incredible shifts in the environment as well as in population and settlement organization due to migration. As a result, the sociopolitical landscape was radically transformed. The authors in this volume explore the transformations in both society and religion within the theoretical frameworks of agency, power, performance, gender, meaning, historical process, and materiality (Van Keuren

and Glowacki 2012: 3-4). They use a variety of archaeological, historical, and linguistic data, from architecture to rock art, and from oral histories to ceramic motifs. They also cover a wide-range of geographical regions and prehispanic Southwest cultures. Overall, it is an effective approach to investigating ritual and religion in the Pueblo region, especially since this topic has been exhaustively studied before, though never through these theoretical frameworks.

Though not organized specifically so, the chapters can be grouped thematically. Some of the chapters look at what role religion played in the origins and outcomes of the transformations that occurred throughout the Pueblo IV period. McGuire (Chapter Two) reexamines the evidence for the relationship between Mesoamerica and the Great Northwest/Southwest region to argue that we cannot understand similarity in religious expression and ritual practice between regions without including the differences. This refreshing look at complex geopolitical interactions—not simply cultural diffusion—is useful to scholars studying religious materiality at multiple scales. Plog (Chapter Three) explores the evidence on ritual practice before, during and after the Chaco period to see what social conventions had changed and by how much, and what similarities may still exist. Reflecting the overarching thesis of the volume, Glowacki (Chapter Four) argues that religion may have played a role in the emigrations out of the Mesa Verde region. Competing religious narratives between those who held to older traditions and those who reject them as failing and adopt new practices, could have accelerated the disintegration of the Mesa Verde community.

Contributors Ortman and Bernardini each take a look at the connections between late pre-hispanic, historic and present-day Pueblo religions, incorporating an emic indigenous perspective via their particular datasets. Ortman (Chapter Five) suggests that we can study the history of religious discourse by focusing on verbal “building blocks” and how

they are variable expressed linguistically and materially. He uses the metaphors for the concept of “community” in Tewa and Tewa-related languages to demonstrate that these conceptual metaphors, which change over time, reflect new experiences in a transformed landscape. Taking a slightly different approach, Bernardini (Chapter Ten) examines the historic and present-day oral traditions about Hopi prehispanic migration movements, arguing that such traditions afford insight into the behavioral processes occurring at the local scale within the larger pattern of migrations during this time period. Both chapters make extensive use of the archaeological data to contextualize the linguistic and ethnographic evidence.

Several of the chapters focus on the theme of ritual practices and the social contexts in which they occurred, exploring how transformations in ritual space and material culture both influenced and reflected the changes in sociopolitical organization during Pueblo IV. Two of the chapters look at how visual material culture changed both in content and location. Munson (Chapter Six) observes a shift in rock art imagery, and links these changes to shifts in the political structure in the northern Rio Grande. A shift in imagery is also documented by Newsome and Hayes-Gilpin (Chapter Eight) in mural art, which the authors argue reflects different ways of seeing or “thinking”. Continuing with visual images, Van Keuren (Chapter Nine) examines the motifs on pottery in eastern Arizona, concluding that though certain motifs are shared, the way they are painted reveals the “diverse social practices through which understandings (or misunderstandings) of religious knowledge were expressed” (Van Keuren 2012:176).

Of course, we cannot consider the social context of ritual practice without taking into account the space in which they were performed. Chamberlin (Chapter Seven) investigates the sudden predominance of plazas as the architectural foci of new settlements in the Salinas area of New Mexico. He

views plazas as social fields where control over the production of culture could be contested in novel ways, contributing to a tension between communal and individual power.

Overall, the volume is an excellent examination of religion and ritual practice in the Pueblo IV American Southwest. Though many of the theoretical frameworks applied by the authors are not new to archaeologists, their use here is particularly critical given the materialist-oriented perspective that has predominated archaeological interpretation in the Southwest. Although the emphasis is on what religion does, its role is not reduced here to mere function, in contrast to previous models that argued for region-wide cults. This is an important point to be considered if archaeologists are going to engage with the evidence for religion and ritual practices beyond the description and cataloging of artifacts and sites. Finally, the emphasis on contextualizing the archaeological evidence at the local scale, and the way religious behavior is differentially expressed materially among different communities, marks a critical step forward for scholarship on religion and ritual in the Southwest.

The present work is of interest to a large audience, and should be read not just by archaeologists who work in the Southwest but by any archaeologist or student interested in the topic of religion and ritual. While some chapters are certainly stronger than others in connecting their theoretical frameworks to their datasets, I find the volume to be very successful and a good example of how much the field has advanced since Hook's ladder of inference, which famously placed religion at top of a scale of difficulty for archaeologists. One particularly important lesson that we can draw from this volume, for any archaeologist, is that we cannot simply assume that meaning—religious, economic, or political—translated effortlessly across space, time and cultures. Rather, we should always consider local processes, and how they can change on a regional scale.