

6-21-2011

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### Recommended Citation

Blainey, M. Gordan (2004) "Revising the "Conjunctive Approach" in the American Southwest," *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology*: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol12/iss1/4>

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## Keywords

conjunctive approach, American Southwest, Anasazi, comparative analysis

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## Revising the *Conjunctive Approach* in the American Southwest

M. Gordon Blainey

### Introduction

Walter W. Taylor furiously attacked the methods and approaches of his archaeological peers in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, citing their misaimed focus on *comparative* rather than *intensive* studies of particular sites. He suggested a replacement theory called the *conjunctive approach* (Thomas 1999: 21). Today, the conjunctive approach has a much different connotation in the avant-garde branches of archaeology and "calls for all approaches, and all data sources, to be combined to address common research questions" (Sharer 2003). More specifically, it involves "conjoining multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives, especially those of archaeology, iconography, and epigraphy" (Ashmore 2004: 100). Nowhere has this argument been more fervent than in ancient Maya studies where after years of being ignored, accomplished iconographers and epigraphers have finally been given recognition in the last decade. Yet so far, the use of the more modern conjunctive approach in archaeology has been restricted only to the cultures like the ancient Maya who left a hieroglyphic record that supports the argument for a broader archaeological focus (Coe 1992).

Unfortunately for archaeologists, no other ancient New World culture boasts an extensive literate text with which to argue the importance of non-materialist evidence; however, there are many cases of prehistoric cultural developments that exhibit formidable iconographic records. One of the best examples of a society with a rich display of ideological art is the Anasazi culture of the prehistoric southwest United States. Although the entire Southwestern region demonstrates a multitude of iconographic examples, the Anasazi civilization is perhaps the most appropriate for the expansion of the modern conjunctive approach. Anasazi rock art, decorated pottery, murals and astronomical markers all express the culture's worldview in a way that no unadorned material object ever could. Such iconographic pieces open up a window of understanding for those trained in the study of the Anasazi. This evidence combined with the temporal longevity of the culture, allow for a comparative analysis

of the Anasazi worldview and how it changed over time.

It is fitting that the Southwest region, which inspired Taylor in his crusade for the original conjunctive approach will be the focus for an application of the modern version. After all, the whole purpose of a *conjunctive approach* seems to be to broaden the scope of the archaeological discipline and to include important information that has been previously overlooked. This is exactly the purpose of this paper, which will argue that the conjunctive approach that has recently become widely accepted in Maya studies is required in the archaeological pursuits of the Southwest. The Anasazi are a particularly suitable cultural development for this new approach and I contend that it would be beneficial to this region's archaeologists to accept and begin practicing the modern conjunctive approach, which first requires the acceptance of iconography.

#### **Anasazi Iconography**

The Anasazi conveyed their ideology in many different forms, all of which reflect the fundamentals of their distinct worldview through elaborate images. Adequate studies have been conducted focusing on pottery decoration, but for the most part the artistic remnants of the Anasazi peoples have not been incorporated into the archaeological record. Strong emphasis on pottery decoration has been described as the "ceramic-centric view," where other forms of iconography are overlooked because of an assumption that they can do little more than suggest the ancestral artistic style for historically known groups (Hays & Adams 1992: 149). This is mostly due to the dominance of the "subsistence-settlement" approach in archaeology whereby ritual, ideology, and cosmology are considered "epiphenomena" and secondary in importance to material artifacts (Flannery & Marcus 1996: 351). Yet with the arrival of the postprocessual movement in the late 1970's, *cognitive archaeology*, with a focus on combining the physical evidence with ideologies represented in art and structures, began to grow in credibility (Flannery & Marcus 1996). As cognitive archaeology began to take hold, a more multidisciplinary range of studies appeared possible where forms of art that are not found on pottery would be embraced for their informative value. However, when one looks at the research being conducted today on the prehistoric Anasazi, it is still biased towards materialism. The author of this article was hard-

pressed to find published articles concerning iconography and those that do exist are mostly in marginal journals, dedicated specifically to art or archaeoastronomy instead of appearing alongside or within the analyses of more traditional studies.

Rock art is perhaps the most recognizable of the Southwestern art forms and has drawn sizeable interest from some researchers but not much recognition from archaeologists of the region. Schaafsma points out that there is a prejudice towards rock art study. She says they prefer information to be excavated before it is analyzed and claims there is a "bias on the part of many archaeologists that rock art, unlike other cultural remains, lacks order, a definite structure of patterning that can be used as a guideline for analysis" (Schaafsma 1980: 5). Schaafsma and others raised these issues in the early 1980s and continue to argue for the significance of rock art as an important medium of interpretation. This interpretive aspect is perhaps Southwestern rock art's biggest stumbling block because it is seen as mere intuition instead of concrete data (Flannery & Marcus 1996: 358). Yet as time went on, more testable techniques that coincided with archaeological evidence were developed that disputed the prejudice and argued for iconographic significance. For example, material artifacts from the Prayer Rock District in northeastern Arizona were collected in the 1930s, but it was not until 1989 that the rock art associated with these sites was systematically recorded. The 1989 analysis showed decorative similarities between the rock art and pottery and "they probably come as close as one can get to showing the entire repertoire of decorative expression of a prehistoric Anasazi community at one point in time" (Hays & Adams 1992: 143). In the Anasazi area, association with archaeological sites is important for the interpretation of rock art as either *representational*, meaning it depicts actual life events of the people, or *abstract* where the art is an expression of ideological inspiration (Schaafsma 1980: 3). This method was used, for example, in the interpretation of the "procession" figures in the rock art at the Broken Flute Cave site. Human figures in a line with a larger "leader" figure occur on a cave wall that is associated with a *kiva*, known to be a ritual structure of the ancient Anasazi (Hays & Adams 1992: 144-146). These occurrences of rock art associated with known ritual sites mean that what we are seeing is probably the illustration of real life ceremonies carried out for religious

purposes. Confirmations of representative rock art can be useful in reconstructing the ideological beliefs of the Anasazi and helps us understand their worldview in a way that utilitarian artifacts cannot. Again, this evidence is only as good as the approach that is taken by the archaeologist. If his or her approach is narrow and focused only on lifeways that can be extracted from the ground, valuable information can be disregarded and lost.

Ceramics are also a good source of iconographic information and often the styles and figures represented in rock art also appear on Anasazi pottery, which allows for the reliable dating of the rock art (Schaafsma 1980: 15-16). Unlike rock art, which is "dominated by human, animal, and bird forms," Anasazi ceramics are mostly decorated with distinctive geometric patterns (Hays & Adams 1992: 144). These patterns usually coincide with the geometric patterns found on preserved basketry and various textile items indicating a common manufacturer. Hays and Adams believe that the stark difference in content between rock art and more domestic utensils reflects either a gender difference in the two realms or a difference in ritual and domestic activity (Hays & Adams 1992: 144). If not for the analysis and comparison of pottery and textile decoration, this important relationship could have been overlooked. Pottery decoration undergoes the largest shift in style of all the Southwest iconographic forms during the 14<sup>th</sup> century *katsina* cult phase. This prehistoric *katsina* cult style is significant for the Anasazi because of the great emphasis on masked faced figures in rock art, ceramics and mural art. Spread of this trend throughout the area is attributed to its use in pottery because it was the only form of the style that was mobile and could be traded (Hays & Adams 1992: 146).

The Anasazi were also adept at painting detailed wall murals, especially on the walls of their sacred kiva structures. The Pottery Mound site in New Mexico has 17 kivas with over 800 paintings in total (Hibben 1975). It has been one of the best suppliers for Anasazi mural art and consequently has been the focus of much experimental research aimed at the development of new methods of salvation iconography. The work becomes as exhaustive as traditional archaeological excavations requiring experts to carefully strip off the walls revealing the multiple layers of murals painted on top of older versions which can vary anywhere between three and 38 renewals (Hibben 1975: 14). Anasazi murals are an important source of ritual

portrayals and are much more meticulous than rock art icons. It is sometimes difficult to interpret these scenes because of their religious context, but nonetheless they offer a glimpse into the mind of the artist. Many of the scenes resemble those in rock art, including depictions of warfare. In fact, warfare has been extensively studied in the traditional archaeology of the area, but "the potential for iconography to elucidate more elusive aspects of prehistoric warfare in this region has only recently begun to be realized" (Lambert 2002: 222). This is another example of how iconography is used as a convenient supplement to archaeological theories only when it agrees with subsistence-settlement objectives. Anasazi kiva murals and rock art depict battles and fighting which is now being accepted as concrete representational art reflecting true war because it corresponds with archaeological data that confirmed a violent upsurge in the region at the same time as the painting of the murals (Lambert 2002: 223). Comparative analyses of the depictions of shield-bearer icons in these war scenes shows that they were inspired by the Utah Fremont culture's styles and are indicative of increased relations between the two groups (Crotty 2001; Lambert 2002). The shared iconographic style has led many to believe that the Anasazi adopted the ideology of the Fremont peoples as well (Crotty 2001: 80). This latter suggestion is not as substantiated as the former but there is no question that the Fremont culture had a significant influence on the Anasazi worldview revealed in the change in mural imagery.

The above examples describe the abundance of Anasazi iconographic forms, all of which improve our understanding of their ideology and worldview. There is no practical reason why such information should be ignored in archaeological studies; in fact, it is reasonable to claim that modern theories are incomplete if they omit details that are derived from iconographic study. With a determined utilization of the advanced techniques of iconography, the modern conjunctive approach can be applied to Anasazi archaeology with great promise.

#### **Case Study: Fajada Butte and the Three Slab Site**

Another important marker of a culture's ideology is their comprehension of the cosmos. Iconographic forms of Anasazi astronomy are an ideal example of how more intensive focus on

non-material evidence can strengthen our understanding of prehistoric peoples. Ancient people's perception of the universe beyond our terrestrial world is one of the key elements of cognitive archaeology. The study of archaeoastronomy has long been a marginal field of archaeology because:

subsistence-settlement archaeologists think that cosmology can be conveniently left to the humanists. Who cares how some ancient culture conceived of the universe? Isn't the important thing the way they used the soil, water, plants, and animals to their advantage? (Flannery & Marcus 1996: 352).

In the Southwest and elsewhere, this type of attitude is harmful, as the discarding of an entire body of essential evidence is counterproductive for archaeology as a whole. After all, one's conception of the nature of the universe can have substantial influence on other life ways, such as the power of cosmological deities to dictate agriculture and subsistence practices (Flannery & Marcus 1996: 353).

Anasazi cosmology has been studied in many noniconographic media including historic and present ethnography (Zeilik 1985, Young 1986) and architecture (Sofaer & Sinclair 1987). However, the principle focus of archaeoastronomy in the Southwest is rock art associated with cosmological markers. The academic debate concerning the significance and meaning of Anasazi cosmological markers is a good case study for the modern conjunctive approach because it shows how successful iconographic pursuits can be when they are given enough attention. The case of Fajada Butte and other cosmological markers sparked considerable interest in the 1980s and through constant critiques and arguments a large corpus of new hypotheses and discussions were amassed concerning the Anasazi (Newman *et al.* 1982; Sofaer & Sinclair 1986; Sofaer & Sinclair 1987; Young 1986; Zeilik 1985; Zeilik 1986). Only with the thorough examination of sites such as Fajada Butte can iconography gain any credence in archaeology. This sets an example for other interpretive ventures of iconographic remains in the Southwest and is an explicit example of how an intensive use of the modern conjunctive approach can further archaeology as a discipline. The following is an assessment of the arguments and the progress achieved by the comprehensive

work on the Fajada Butte Solar marker and its impact on Southwestern archaeology.

Fajada Butte is an Anasazi solar marker located in the southern part of Chaco Canyon in New Mexico (Sofaer & Sinclair 1987: 43). Chaco Canyon was the location of one of the peaks of Anasazi civilization called the *Chacoan Phenomenon*, which flourished in the region from A.D. 1050-1125 (Zeilik 1985: 72). The Chacoan Anasazi apparently concentrated a great deal of ceremonial significance on Fajada Butte and its immediate area. The Butte stands 135 metres high and its sandstone walls display various petroglyphs that are almost certainly associated with the movements of the sun (Sofaer & Sinclair 1987). The most famous and disputed of the petroglyph sites is the "three slab" marker, where three monolithic sandstone blocks rest beside each other against the butte, creating a filter for sunlight that only allows a thin ray of light to hit two spiralling petroglyphs on the wall during the day. One of the debates that was settled early on confirmed that the stone slabs were natural and not artificially constructed by the Chacoans (Newman, Mark, & Vivian 1982). Other discussions ensued such as an argument over the function of the petroglyphs within Chacoan society. There are markings on the spirals that are hit by a dagger of light on the equinoxes and solstices, which like the alignments of Anasazi structures and roads, represents the "geometric expression of astronomical concepts and the culture's cosmology" (Sofaer & Sinclair 1987: 65). Efforts were made to demonstrate how the petroglyphs, which include the two spirals at the three-slab site and seven others at two other sites on the butte, were used specifically for astronomical observance for the agricultural calendar (Sofaer and Sinclair 1986: 59). Michael Zeilik was particularly interested in the "practical astronomical uses of the site" and explored ethnographic data as well as the function of the habitation sites on the butte that are associated with the petroglyphs (Zeilik 1986: 66). On the other hand, most attempts to attribute meaning to the Fajada Butte etchings have relied on historical ethnographic sources. Some have concluded that there is a relation between the solar observations at Fajada Butte and the importance of the sun and moon as markers of regular time for historic Pueblo peoples, which they used to plan agricultural and ceremonial events (Sofaer & Sinclair 1987: 63). These holistic studies, which included evidence from many branches of anthropology, were



essentially applying the modern conjunctive approach in that they surveyed the iconographic evidence relative to the framework of Anasazi culture. Archaeological studies on Chacoan roads, irrigation construction, and structures such as kivas and pueblos all provide a cultural context into which petroglyphs can be inserted and properly assessed (Sofaer & Sinclair 1987: 65).

Similar to the popularization of Maya hieroglyphic study in the 1980s (Coe 1992), Fajada Butte was reluctantly thrust into the archaeological spotlight because of public interest sparked by formerly marginal scholars and television documentaries (Zeilik 1985). The first publications on such marginal topics were written by people that were not acclaimed in academia but assembled renowned interest from the nonacademic community. These early publications concerning the meaning and purpose of the Fajada Butte solar marker received a backlash from the contemporary archaeological community, but I believe that is exactly what was needed. The archaeoastronomers had succeeded in getting the subsistence-settlement archaeologists to consider the existence of these iconographic sites and provided valuable scrutiny to the debate, thus allowing rock art into the academic fray.

#### **Discussion: The Conjunctive Approach and the Anasazi**

The modern conjunctive approach draws much from other postprocessual concepts such as *cognitive archaeology* (Flannery & Marcus 1996) and the *anthropocentric perspective* (Hall 1977). Whatever the name is, it is clear that there is a constantly rising number of scholars who are unsatisfied with the exclusionary practices of subsistence-settlement or *geocentric* archaeology and are calling for a reconsideration of the discipline's "tendency to refer all culture to the physical environment" (Hall 1977: 499). Remarkably, it is not the cultural remains that dictate archaeology; it is instead the old paradigms and personal biases that decide what evidence is valid and what can be discarded. Obviously there are limits to opening up the subject to more cognitive methods that are unsubstantiated or not factual, and "no approach has greater potential for dilettantism, flights of fancy, charlatanism, and intellectual laziness" (Flannery & Marcus 1996: 361); however, this does not mean that physical evidence is the only interpretable aspect of the archaeological record. The application of the

modern conjunctive approach must be selective, because only some ancient cultures left enough artistic or iconographic remains. This is precisely the argument of those who support postprocessual and humanist pursuits in archaeology: hieroglyphs and art of the ancient Egyptians and Maya must be approached from a different perspective than Neolithic or Paleo-Indian remains that lack substantial bodies of literary or artistic expertise (Flannery & Marcus 1996: 360-361). They call for an overhaul of the long held paradigm in archaeology that perceives and approaches all cultures as similar entities, no matter what the size or scale of their organization.

Robert L. Hall pointed out the geocentric bias in 1977 but archaeologists like Robert Sharer are still raising the same complaints in 2003! This is a disturbing sign that the concerns raised in the 1970s are not being addressed in modern archaeology and that progress must be made to heed the calls that have for too long gone unanswered. It must be demonstrated that the treatment of ancient cultures is based on the "kind" of society they were, not the biased interests of the archaeologist.

Settlement-subsistence archaeology is a very important practice in the Southwest, but only when it is perceived as a portion of the culture being studied. As seen in the above synopsis of ideological remains, there is much to be explored concerning the prehistoric Anasazi mind and worldview. After all, "trying to understand what it may have been that prehistoric peoples found worthwhile to live for" (Hall 1977: 499) is a necessary anthropological pursuit that greatly influences the study of a people's diet and customs. A multidisciplinary study of the Anasazi may yield aspects about their lives and culture that no amount of faunal or stone-tool analyses could provide alone. Their rock art is an expression of deeply seeded inner beliefs about the universe, their pottery was a means of communicating ideological concepts as tradable art and their painted murals adorned the walls of their sacred kiva structures. If these priceless artifacts are tossed aside as mere epiphenomena then archaeology is making a grave mistake.

I have shown how Fajada Butte offers a chance to see what concerned the Chacoan Anasazi beyond just the essentials for survival. We may never know exactly what the purpose of the solar markers was, but to ignore the importance of this site for the Chacoans who lived in the surrounding area would be

preposterous. It obviously had great cosmological significance because it would have taken painstakingly methodical observance of the sun daggers for many years to accurately mark their placement at the equinoxes and solstices. The conjunctive approach can be applied to sites such as this because as M. Jane Young points out:

Enough research and fieldwork has been completed in the Southwest in the disciplines of regional archaeology and ethnology, cultural symbolism, archaeoastronomy, and in the relative dating and stylistic analysis of rock art, that it is possible to establish significant interdisciplinary relationships, to situate specific rock art sites within the context of these broader areas of knowledge (Young 1986: 43-44).

The information is available and it just needs to be conflated into a single body of knowledge. The Southwest is ripe for the modern conjunctive approach because even though it lacks a written record, it has ample iconographic remains that can add to what we have already learned from settlement-subsistence archaeology.

### Conclusions:

It is difficult to progress in academics when the founding principles of one's discipline are constantly undermined. In the case of archaeology, there is still not unanimous support for the adoption of a broader field of study that includes iconography. Perhaps it would be better to look at ancient cultures from a different perspective. For instance, if in thousands of years archaeologists were to study the affects of the Second World War on 20<sup>th</sup> century European culture, would they learn everything they could from studying only the remains of guns and tanks? Would it be prudent for archaeology to ignore the writings in Ann Frank's diary or to disregard the representation of the European psyche in Picasso's *Guernica*? Picasso's painting voiced the anguish of his fellow Europeans that resulted from their shared experiences in the worst war in human history. This is a clear example of how art is a powerful expression of human emotions and ideology in all cultures. Of course, we are not lucky enough at present to have examples of art from all ancient peoples, but when we are fortunate enough to have the remains of their iconographic expression, every effort should be made to develop methods aimed at extracting its meaning.

With cultures like the Anasazi, the extraction of meaning can be accomplished by the inclusion of their many artistic media into the region's archaeological record and interpretations. The Anasazi are just one of the many cultures around the world whose iconography is ignored simply because they are approached from the same perspective as all other cultures that lack a writing system. It took archaeology until the end of this century to recognize the iconography of a highly developed civilization like the Maya, but that does not mean they have to stop there. The Anasazi and other neglected cultures of the New World have iconographic and cosmological evidence too, and it is just waiting to be analyzed by scholars that are willing to identify its worth. The modern conjunctive approach is a great way to bring these previously discarded spheres of knowledge under the auspices of the archaeological discipline.

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