In Brief: Social inequality among Pueblo Indians

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A study in this week's *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* finds that social hierarchies may have emerged within Southwestern Native American society as early as the 9th century.

Stephen Plog and Carrie Heitman used unpublished archival information and modern radiocarbon dating, and performed an updated archeological analysis to examine Pueblo mortuary sites within the Chaco Canyon of northwestern New Mexico.

The Chaco Canyon is famous for its unusual architecture and the dense packing of at least 15 multistory masonry pueblos, known as "great houses."

Chaco has long been considered a remarkable example of multifaceted culture in the prehistoric New World, but researchers remain divided over whether Chaco gave rise to chiefly societies, or if the society and buildings were cooperatively constructed.

Together with other data, patterns of human remains and artifacts within several great house mortuaries suggested to the authors that the long-observed disparity in burial numbers between small houses and great houses in the canyon may be due to the presence of social hierarchies.

The authors suggest that only Chaco elites were buried in great houses, where their status was legitimized through ritual links to ancestors and cosmological forces.

More information: "Hierarchy and social inequality in the American Southwest, A.D. 800-1200," by Stephen Plog and Carrie Heitman. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.* www.pnas.org/

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