



A Globalized Past? Long-Distance Exchange and Interaction in the US Southwest and Mexican Northwest

Presentation by Archaeologists Christopher W. Schwartz, PhD and Ben A. Nelson, PhD

Exchange is a fundamental human behavior. While today people rapidly exchange goods and information over great distances, in the past long-distance exchange required the mobilization of vast networks of interaction. The challenges associated with long-distance exchange indicate that the objects that were moved about had special significance to those acquiring and circulating them.

This talk explores the material evidence of long-distance connections of ancestral peoples in the U.S. Southwest and Mexican Northwest (SW/NW) with populations living to the south in Mesoamerica and West Mexico, and the implications of the presence (or absence) of these objects and materials.

For years, archaeologists have documented non-local and Mesoamerican-like objects such as conch shell trumpets, copper bells, cylindrical vessels, and scarlet macaws at SW/NW archaeological sites. These items are not present in all times and places, indicating that the relationships – either long-distance or local – required to acquire these objects and/or their social contexts also changed over time and space.

This talk will review the theoretical perspectives used to examine long-distance exchange and explore the material evidence for this exchange, or lack thereof, in the SW/NW. It will also consider the significance of those objects and the larger intellectual debates surrounding long-distance exchange and interaction in this region.



Macaws photo
courtesy of
Christopher Schwartz



Copper bells
photo courtesy
of Arthur W. Vokes

Thursday March 19, 2026

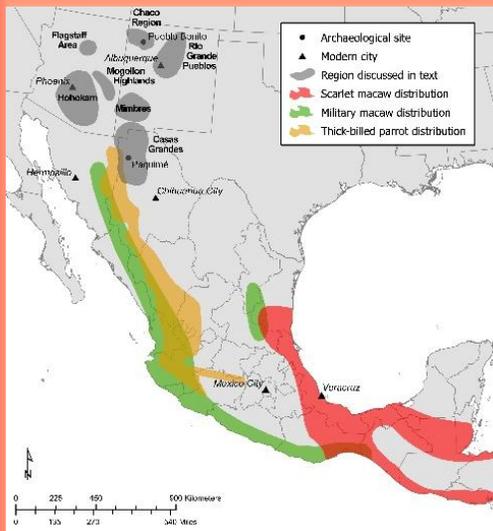
7 pm ARIZONA/Mountain Standard Time
(Same as Pacific Daylight Time)

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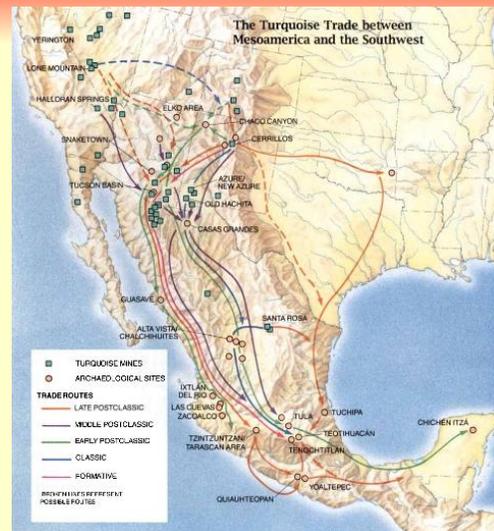
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A Globalized Past? . . .



Ancient U.S. Southwest and Mexican Northwest exchange: Left, distributions of scarlet macaws, military macaws, and thick-billed parrots, and SW/NW archaeological regions where these birds have been found, from *Birds of the Sun: Macaws and People in the U.S. Southwest and Mexican Northwest* edited by Christopher W. Schwartz, Stephen Plog, and Patricia A. Gilman (2022). Right, hypothesized Mesoamerica-U.S. Southwest turquoise mines and exchange routes, from “Turquoise in Pre-Columbian America” by Garman Harbottle and Phil C. Weigand (*Scientific American* February 1992).



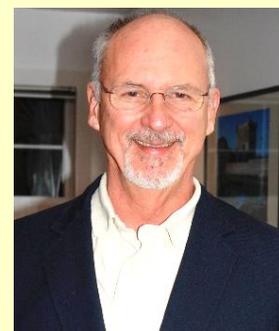
Our Third Thursday presenters: Archaeologists Christopher Schwartz and Ben A. Nelson



Christopher Schwartz, PhD, the City of Phoenix Archaeologist, works at the S'edav Va'aki Museum and holds a Visiting Faculty appointment at Arizona State University. Dr. Schwartz received his PhD from Arizona State University in 2020, where his dissertation examined the transformative local impacts of the acquisition of nonlocal scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) to past people living in the U.S. Southwest and Mexican Northwest as well as their continued significance to contemporary Native American communities. He is the lead editor of *Birds of the Sun: Macaws and People in the U.S. Southwest and Mexican Northwest* (University of Arizona Press, 2022)

Dr. Schwartz has worked since 2013 on the Connections and Impacts of North and West Mexican Cultures projects, which Dr. Ben Nelson established to document instances of nonlocal objects and materials in the U.S. Southwest and Mexican Northwest and to explore their local significance and social impacts.

Ben A. Nelson, PhD is Professor Emeritus, School of Human Evolution and Social Change, Arizona State University. He has worked in the US Southwest, especially the Mimbres region, and in northern Mexico where he directs the La Quemada-Malpaso Valley Archaeological Project in Zacatecas. His research examines the conditions that fostered local social complexity and distant connectivity during the expansion of the northern Mesoamerican frontier ca. 600-1350 CE.



The Third Thursday Series

Old Pueblo Archaeology Center's Third Thursday Food for Thought Zoom webinars on the Third Thursday evening of each month feature presentations about archaeology, history, and cultures.

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