Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs (RIHA)
Exploring the Role of Religion in the Origins of Novelty and the Diffusion of Innovation in the Progress of Civilizations

Religion and Innovation in Pre-Columbian Societies

Religion & Political Innovation in Formative Mesoamerica ($230,000). University of Colorado, Boulder. PIs: Arthur Joyce (University of Colorado, Boulder) and Sarah Barber (University of Central Florida)

This project was a collaborative archaeological endeavor designed to examine the role of religion in later Formative political innovations in the lower Río Verde Valley and the Valley of Oaxaca. Rather than viewing religion as secondary to what are typically seen as causally prominent economic and political factors, we argue that in both regions religious belief, practice, and the material items and settings in which religion was enacted were central to the political changes of the time. In both regions, religion was at the core of the entanglements through which community, polity, and political authority were negotiated and at times contested. These entanglements were focused on public buildings and spaces and assembled people from different communities and varying statuses as well as entities such as ancestors, deities, offerings, sacrificial victims, burials, and feasting foods. Yet our case studies demonstrate dramatically divergent outcomes that point to different roles for religion in political innovation depending on culturally and historically contingent circumstances. In the lower Río Verde Valley we argue that religion was a conservative force constraining innovations that could have led to political centralization. In the Valley of Oaxaca we also found that religion and especially public facilities were central to entanglements that constituted community and political authority. In contrast to the lower Verde, however, we find religion was less constraining in the Oaxaca Valley and instead fostered political innovations. More broadly, our analysis suggests new avenues of inquiry into the relationships between religion and political innovation in ancient societies.

Major Outputs:
Books:
- Joyce, Arthur A. & Sarah B. Barber. Religion and Political Innovation in Formative Mesoamerica (manuscript in progress)
- Joyce, Arthur A. & Sarah B. Barber, eds. The Archaeology of Religion and Politics in the Americas (manuscript in progress)

Articles:
- Joyce, Arthur A. & Sarah B. Barber, “Religion and Political Innovation in Formative-Period Oaxaca, Mexico.” (manuscript completed; submitting summer 2014).

Conference Session:

Presentations:

Dissertations:
• We expect that the project will directly contribute to at least two doctoral dissertations and two MA theses over the next few years.

Website:
• Rio Verde Archaeology: [www.rioverdearchaeology.org](http://www.rioverdearchaeology.org)