



The Chaco Experience: Landscape and Ideology at the Center Place (A School for Advanced Research Resident Scholar Book)

By Ruth M. Van Dyke

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In a remote canyon in northwest New Mexico, thousand-year-old sandstone walls waver in the sunlight, stretching like ancient vertebrae against a turquoise sky. This storied place?Chaco Canyon?carries multiple layers of meaning for Native Americans and archaeologists, writers and tourists, explorers and artists. Here, isolation, the arid climate, and dry-laid construction have preserved ruins that are monuments to prehistoric creativity and perseverance. Chaco Canyon draws its power not only from the ancient architecture sheltering beneath its walls, but from the ever-changing light and the far-flung vistas of the Colorado Plateau. Light and shadow, stone and sky come together in the canyon. At the heart of this sky-filled landscape lie twelve massive great houses. The Chacoan landscape, with its formally constructed, carefully situated architectural features, is charged with symbolism. In this volume, Ruth Van Dyke analyzes the meanings and experience of moving through this landscape to illuminate Chacoan beliefs and social relationships.

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Editorial Review

Review

Before finishing the first page I was hooked on her [author Ruth M. Van Dyke] lyric description of not only Chaco Canyon but the surrounding horizon's pull. She sees Chacoan roots in Basketmaker and Pueblo I settlements growth to agricultural villages. She envisions five major Ancestral Puebloan themes manifesting at Chaco. 1. sacred geography, 2. visibility, 3. movement, 4. memory, 5. cosmography. This is a book that I unequivocally recommend, certainly worth far more than the [purchase price]. --Charles Swenson, DirtBrothers.org

[A]n excellent work--well written, focused, original, and engaging.... This is a unique volume that does what no other Chaco book, no other Southwestern book, and indeed no other North American archaeology book does--develop a phenomenological argument by, literally, walking us into Chaco. --Timothy Pauketat, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

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It has been difficult to suggest a good first book for those interested in diving into Chaco Canyon the place, the ancient phenomenon, and the object of archaeological scrutiny. Much of the literature on Chaco assumes substantial background knowledge, and many works are clearly written for those already initiated into Chaco-arcana. In this context, Ruth Van Dyke's concise, non-technical, and well-written book stands out as an exception. Van Dyke's book is neither an introductory text nor a survey of the literature. The author has a definite perspective on Chaco and seeks to expand the range of evidence used to interpret the place. At the same time, the author presents a good summary of the Chacoan archaeological record, takes few shortcuts in introducing the range of perspectives on the Chaco phenomenon, and cites most of the relevant literature. The result is a book that works just as well as a first book on Chaco as it does as a book with specific points to make about Chaco and about archaeological practice in general. --Scott Ortman, H-Net Reviews, January, 2012

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About the Author

Van Dyke is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Colorado College.

Users Review

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