

Inequality, demography, and variability among early complex societies in Central Pacific Panama



C. Adam Berrey

Department of Anthropology, 3302 WWPB, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 December 2014

Revision received 14 August 2015

Keywords:

Early complex societies

Chiefdoms

Social inequality

Settlement analysis

Regional demography

Environmental risk

Local interaction

Panama

ABSTRACT

The early complex societies of Central Pacific Panama have long been recognized by anthropologists for their strong levels of social hierarchy. Such hierarchy is apparent in the ethnohistoric texts of the 16th century, and in elaborate burial assemblages of the Late Ceramic II period (AD 700–1522). Not surprisingly, those regions in which hierarchy is most apparent have been the main focus of archaeological research, while those in which inequalities were apparently weaker have received less attention. These latter regions, however, are also a vital part of understanding hierarchical development—they can bring into sharper relief the factors that gave way to hierarchical organization in some regions, as well as those factors that may have discouraged it from developing in others. Regional settlement data from the Río Parita and Río Tonosí valleys provide an opportunity to explore this issue. These data suggest that the hierarchical variability observed between these regions may have arisen as a result of differential levels of regional population growth and environmental risk, which gave way to different patterns of land use and structures of local interaction. These different interaction structures facilitated different sorts of activities and inter-household relationships, leading to markedly different forms of social organization.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In recent decades one major objective of early complex society research has been to understand the immense amount of variability that exists in the way early complex societies developed (e.g. [Drennan and Peterson, 2006](#); [Earle, 1997](#); [Kirch, 1984](#); [Peterson and Drennan, 2012](#)). Particularly important to this endeavor has been an attempt to understand the highly variable role played by social inequality, and the forces that shaped early inequality in such a variety of different ways. Why was it, for instance, that some societies came to be organized according to very strong hierarchical principles, while others exhibit little in the way of status differentiation? Moreover, why among those in which inequalities emerged did factors such as economic control, specialization, ritual, and warfare play such highly variable roles? Archaeologists have approached these questions from a number of different vantage points, resulting in a diverse range of models aimed at understanding the various contexts, forms of behavior, and sets of activities through which early inequalities came to develop (e.g. [Beck, 2003](#); [Blanton et al., 1996](#); [Earle, 1997](#); [Renfrew, 1974](#); [Sanders and Webster, 1978](#); [Scarborough and Burnside, 2010](#)).

E-mail address: cab10@pitt.edu

Despite the highly varied forms of social organization that developed among early complex societies, though, one need not scan the globe for such variation to become apparent. Within the limits of what is often referred to as the Intermediate Area a great deal of variation can be clearly observed ([Fig. 1](#)). Toward the end of the first millennium AD ritual and ideology were the primary basis for social power in the Alto Magdalena of Colombia ([Drennan, 2000](#); [Drennan and Peterson, 2006](#)), whereas in the western llanos of Venezuela such power was more firmly connected to warfare and agricultural production ([Redmond et al. 1999](#); [Spencer and Redmond 1992, 1998](#)). Social inequalities were highly developed in both of these areas (and conspicuous in the form of monumental architecture), but were much weaker (or at least much less apparent) in many other parts of the Intermediate Area.

As small as the Intermediate Area is, the geographic scope across which variation can be observed could be narrowed even further. As one homes in on increasingly smaller scales one begins to approach areas within which societies would not only have had regular contact with one another, but would have shared important sociocultural roots and traditions. These areas, or what hereafter are referred to as macroregions (so as to distinguish them from the distinct trajectories of regional development that exist within them; cf. [Kowalewski, 2004](#)), represent particularly interesting contexts in which to explore the variable pathways of early



Fig. 1. Culture areas, or macroregions, of the Intermediate Area discussed in the text.

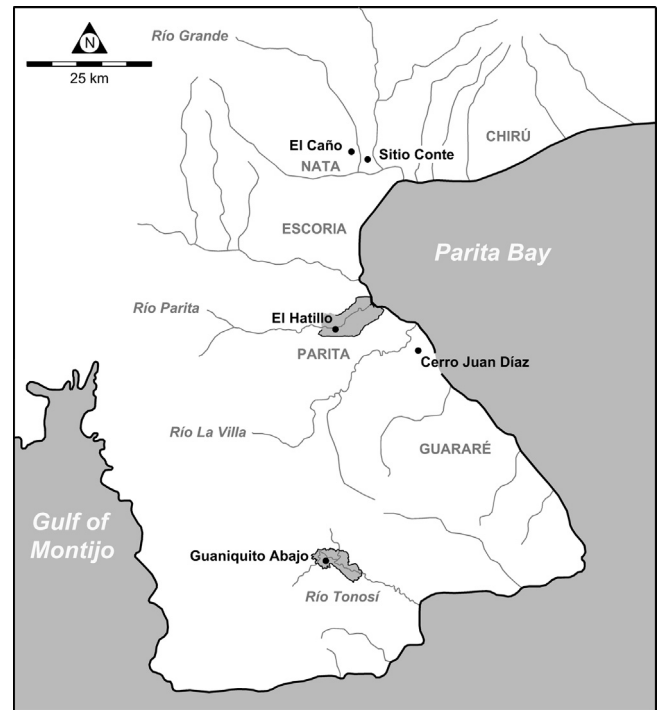


Fig. 2. Ethnohistoric chiefdoms (gray capital letters) and archaeological sites in Central Pacific Panama. The regional survey zones of the Río Parita and Río Tonosí valleys are shown in gray.

complex society development. Within these contexts such variation is not simply the consequence of different historical trajectories, but of divergent evolution sparked by specific forces of social change (e.g. Flannery and Marcus, eds. 1983; Kirch, 1984; Linares and Ranere, eds., 1980).

Central Pacific Panama (Fig. 1) represents one part of the Intermediate Area that encompasses considerable variation of this sort. Such variation is most apparent during the Late Ceramic II period (AD 700–1522), which marks the height of sociopolitical development in the macroregion.

2. Inequality and variability in Central Pacific Panama

For many years much of what was known about the early complex societies of Central Panama was based largely on the rich and vivid descriptions that were left by the Spanish in ethnohistoric accounts (e.g. Andagoya, 1865; Jopling, ed., 1994; de Las Casas, 1986). These accounts document the existence of relatively large and powerful chiefdoms (Fig. 2), notably those of Natá, Escoria, and Parita (Helms, 1979:56), organized on the basis of strongly hierarchical principles and engaged in a seemingly wide range of specialized activities. Though high-ranking social positions were often ascribed at birth (Helms, 1979:23–28), warfare was an important avenue of social mobility and source of chiefly authority (Helms, 1979:13, 31–37; de Oviedo, 1959:28–29). Interregional exchange was also important to chiefly power, which, combined with warfare, helped fuel the political economy and ideology on which that power relied (Helms, 1979). While craft specialization and resource control are also documented in ethnohistoric texts (Helms, 1979:14–15, 57, 1994), Helms (1979) argues that warfare, exchange, and, above all else, ideology were the mainstays of social power among Panama's 16th-century chiefdoms.

Social inequality seems to have manifest in various arenas of social life, but nowhere was it expressed more extravagantly than during elaborate funerary rituals. One oft-cited expression of this inequality was documented at the funeral of Chief Parita (Cooke

et al., 2003:120; Flannery and Marcus, 2012:221–222; Haller, 2008a:3; Lothrop, 1937:46). Ethnohistoric sources indicate that Parita was decked head-to-toe in gold ornamentation, and buried with attendants and competing chiefs that were offered as sacrificed victims (see Lothrop, 1937). A funerary investment such as this was obviously not afforded to everyone, and is a clear indication of strong inequality during the 16th century. Such inequality was nothing new to the indigenous societies of Central Panama, however, as comparable levels appear to have emerged some 700 years beforehand, at the onset of the Late Ceramic II period (AD 700–900).

2.1. Social inequality during the Late Ceramic II period

The very lavish graves recovered from Sitio Conte (Fig. 2) have long been recognized as a prehispanic manifestation of the social power that existed in Central Panama during the 16th century (Drennan, 1995:323; Flannery and Marcus, 2012:219–222; Linares, 1977:72). Not only were these graves stocked with the most elaborate funerary assemblages throughout the macroregion, but they stand out as being some of the most elaborate burials seen among early complex societies around the world (Drennan et al., 2010). The most elaborate of these graves (Burial 11) contained a total of 23 adult individuals, mostly males, one of whom is believed to have been the principal figure for which the others were likely sacrificed. This individual was centrally located among the other bodies (see Hearne and Sharer, eds., 1992:9; Lothrop, 1937:50, Fig. 31), and was associated with many of the graves more notable gold offerings (Drennan et al., 2010:47–48). In total these offerings included 3496 beads; 233 ear rods; 87 bells; 31 medallions or pendants; 17 chisels; 13 plaques; 10 cuffs, wristlets, or anklets; and 6 nose ornaments. Additional offerings (those not made of gold) included at least 152 polychrome and 159 monochrome ceramic vessels, 1548 stone projectile points, 168 stone celts, 4 agate

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7440540>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7440540>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)