

Great Kivas and Community Integration at the Harris Site, Southwestern New Mexico

Barbara J. Roth  and Danielle Romero

Great kivas served as important ritual spaces and played significant roles in community integration throughout the Pithouse period (AD 550–1000) occupation of the Mimbres Mogollon region of southwestern New Mexico. This article uses data from excavations at the Harris site, a large pithouse village located in the Mimbres Valley, to explore the role of great kivas and an associated plaza in community integration as the village grew, extended family households formed, and social distinctions developed. Data from excavations of sequentially used great kivas surrounding the plaza along with household data from domestic structures are used to examine the role of ritual space during the Pithouse period.

Keywords: US Southwest, Mimbres, great kivas, community

Las estructuras conocidas como Gran Kivas funcionaron como importantes espacios rituales para la integración de la comunidad a lo largo del periodo Pithouse (550-1000 dC) en la región de Mimbres Mogollón dentro del suroeste de Nuevo México. Este trabajo utiliza información proveniente de excavaciones en el sitio Harris, una aldea grande de casas en pozo ubicada en el Valle de Mimbres con el fin de explorar el papel de las gran kivas y de una plaza asociada para la integración comunitaria a medida que la aldea creció, que se formaron grupos familiares multigeneracionales y se desarrollaron distinciones sociales. Los datos de las excavaciones de las Gran Kivas utilizadas secuencialmente que rodean la plaza, junto con los datos de los grupos familiares en las estructuras domésticas se utilizan para examinar el papel del espacio ritual durante el periodo Pithouse.

Palabras clave: Suroeste de EE.UU, Mimbres, gran kivas, comunidad

Studies of ritual space in the past document the important role that it played in community development, integration, and social change in villages worldwide (Makarewicz and Finlayson 2018; Pluckhahn 2010; Rick 2017; Verhoeven 2002). This space was often used to connect members of a community into an interacting, cooperating social group. Ritual space provided a venue for ceremonies and other activities that reinforced social norms, regulated actions, and served to legitimize both social power and cultural change (Adler and Wilshusen

1990; Byrd 1994; Rappaport 1999; Schachner 2001).

Ritual space is often highly visible on the landscape, especially in regions where above ground monumental architecture marked and defined this space. As Scarre (2011:9) notes, “The construction of a monument is a consummately cultural and ideological undertaking.” This kind of ritual space provided visible credence to the rituals performed within it and the practices sanctioned by it. But ritual space was also marked in other ways, either as spatially

Barbara J. Roth (corresponding author, Barbara.Roth@unlv.edu) and **Danielle Romero** ■ Department of Anthropology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, USA

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distinct within a village or as part of prominent landscape features. The critical role of ritual space was structured in part by its location, which reinforced its significance within the community by giving the perception that this was an important place. These places were then made meaningful by social action and the ritual acts performed within them (Bell 1997; Swenson 2015).

This is true of great kivas in the US Southwest, which represent visibly significant features within sites and on the landscape (Creel and Anyon 2003; Dungan and Peeples 2018; Gilman and Stone 2013; Herr 2001; Kintigh 1994; Lipe and Hegmon 1989; Stokes et al. 2022; Van Dyke 2007). These structures are much larger and deeper than domestic pithouses associated with them, are usually located within specific areas of a site, and are often associated with other special-use areas such as plazas (Adler and Wilshusen 1990; Creel and Shafer 2015). The exact role of great kivas within prehistoric communities is not always clear, however, given the variability in location, formal characteristics, and artifacts found within them across the Southwest and, in particular, the Mogollon region of southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona (Anyon and LeBlanc 1980; Arakawa et al. 2022; Creel and Anyon 2003; Dungan 2015; Dungan and Peeples 2018; Gilman and Stone 2013; Nisengard 2006; Stokes et al. 2022). Great kivas in the northern Ancestral Pueblo region were used for longer periods than those in the south, and they appear to have had different life histories, in part due to their association with demographic upheavals, migrations, and population resettlement (Van Keuren 2012; Ware and Blinman 2000). Despite the variability present within them across the Southwest, however, great kivas are generally viewed as important ritual spaces.

Our understanding of the function and significance of great kivas has often been shaped by ethnographic analogy of Puebloan groups that used kivas in very specific ways (Bunzel 1932; Frigout 1979; Parsons 1939; Stevenson 1904). The kivas documented by many ethnographers were specialized features linked to historic pueblo groups such as the Zuni, Hopi, and Rio Grande pueblos. These kivas are not directly comparable to the larger communal structures

that we refer to as great kivas, however. Consequently, the role of great kivas, especially those found outside the traditional homelands for southwestern Puebloan groups and dating prior to the construction of pueblos, cannot necessarily be understood in light of these same practices.

Previous studies of prehistoric great kivas in the Southwest have emphasized their role in community integration (Adler 1989; Adler and Wilshusen 1990; Anyon and LeBlanc 1980; Herr 2001; Lipe and Hegmon 1989; but see Dungan and Peeples 2018). In lieu of centralized leadership, these structures and their related rituals promoted solidarity and regulated social and economic activities and interaction (Hegmon 1989). Early great kivas most likely served both secular and ritual functions (Adler 1989; Anyon and LeBlanc 1980). The steady increase in the size of great kivas through time mirrored growing populations and the need for community cooperation and integration (Adler and Wilshusen 1990). The presence of plazas associated with great kivas would have allowed for full community participation even if activities within the great kivas themselves were restricted to specific segments of the population, although the largest great kivas could have housed every adult within the community (Adler and Wilshusen 1990; Anyon and LeBlanc 1980; Dungan and Peeples 2018; Hegmon 1989).

In this article, we explore the role of great kivas in community integration using data from the Harris site, a Late Pithouse period (AD 550–1000) village located in the Mimbres River Valley of southwestern New Mexico. Work done at the site by archaeologists from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), from 2008 to 2013, documented changes in household and community organization as the village grew from the Georgetown (AD 550–650) through the late Three Circle (AD 750–1000) phases (Roth 2019; Roth and Baustian 2015). These changes were associated with population growth and agricultural intensification, and they involved social changes including the development of extended-family corporate landholding groups. Through time, it became increasingly necessary to find ways to integrate households and corporate groups within the community as a whole and address developing

differences in social power to mitigate factions within the community. We argue here that this was accomplished by the use of both great kivas and a large central plaza.

We examine the role of great kivas within the Harris community using data from two excavated great kivas dating to the Three Circle phase, supplemented with data from excavations of two earlier great kivas collected during Emil Haury's work at the site in the 1930s (Haury 1936). These data indicate that kiva rituals and ritual sponsorship by particular households were integral to the successful growth of the village and were critical factors in sustaining village cohesion, particularly during the Three Circle phase. We also explore the nature of inferred differences in social power that developed as a result of the association of these households with great kivas (Roth and Baustian 2015).

Great Kivas as Ritual and Communal Space

Hegmon (1989:6) has argued that one of the main roles of communal architecture at southwestern sites was to reinforce social norms and sanctify social decisions. As Rautman (2013) and Stone (2002, 2013) have argued, shared space implies shared experience and meaning, which in turn facilitates communal action and counters the development of factions. Ritual spaces like great kivas were therefore imbued with meaning that facilitated communication and connectivity, literally demarcating the social processes of integration.

In the Mimbres Mogollon region of southwestern New Mexico, the largest pithouse villages in the Mimbres and Gila River Valleys contain well-defined ritual spaces consisting of sequentially used great kivas associated with plazas. This pattern is most apparent at NAN Ranch (Shafer 2003), Old Town (Creel 2006), and Harris (Roth 2015). Subsequent construction of pueblos atop these pithouse villages has sometimes obscured this ritual space, but it appears to have been the common layout at other large pithouse villages such as Galaz (Anyon and LeBlanc 1984) and Swarts (Cosgrove and Cosgrove 1932) and therefore indicates a region-wide pattern of demarcating and using ritual space.

We argue that the centralized location of the great kivas and associated plazas and the long-term use of these spaces support the inference that they served as ritually integrative spaces. Rituals conducted within great kivas would have established and solidified social relationships and reinforced attitudes that emphasized cooperation. This does not mean that these spaces could not serve as venues for contesting and reworking the existing structure, but data from the Mimbres region suggest that the primary use of these structures was for integrative purposes rather than as political arenas, as has been documented for later great kivas in the Mogollon region (Dunghan and Peeples 2018) and in the northern Southwest (Chamberlain 2011; Plog and Solometo 1997). The use of great kivas mitigated social stress by creating spaces where social tension could be diffused through ritual performance and interaction. In general, rituals tend to be conservative through time, and great kivas were sometimes repeatedly revisited even after a site was abandoned to reinforce connections to the past (Creel and Anyon 2003). These structures therefore served as "an enduring mark of kin and cooperative group identities" (Goodale et al. 2021:183).

Great Kivas and Community Integration at the Harris Site

In the remainder of this article, we explore the role of great kivas in community integration at the Harris site. We view the great kivas and associated plaza at the Harris site as physical manifestations of ritual and social arenas that created and strengthened shared beliefs and social relationships in light of changes in agricultural intensification, population increase, and household organization that developed throughout the site's occupation.

The Harris site is located in the middle portion of the Mimbres River Valley (Figure 1). Its occupation predates the Classic Mimbres pueblo period, with excavated pithouses and great kivas dating to the Georgetown (AD 500–650), San Francisco (AD 650–750), and Three Circle (AD 750–1000) phases of the Late Pithouse period. Work by UNLV has identified the sequence of village growth and agricultural intensification



Figure 1. Harris site location in the Mimbres Valley. (Map by Danielle Romero.)

extending through the end of the Three Circle phase (Roth 2015, 2019; Roth and Baustian 2015). These excavations have documented the development of extended family corporate groups by the San Francisco phase, the maximum growth of the village during the Three Circle phase, and the subsequent dispersal of residents sometime in the late AD 900s.

Changes in the use of great kivas mirrored changes in village organization and illustrate the growing importance of great kivas and the plaza in village life. Haury's (1936) work at the Harris site involved the excavation of three sequentially used great kivas surrounding a central plaza (Houses 8, 10, and 14 on Figure 2).¹ Subsequent work by archaeologists from UNLV resulted in the excavation of portions of an early Three Circle phase great kiva (Kiva Pit-house 55; Figure 2) and the center posthole of Haury's House 10. These data have been crucial in assessing the role of great kivas in community

integration through time. The centrality of the location of this ritual space, combined with the long-term use starting in the Georgetown phase and extending to the end of the Three Circle phase (ca. late AD 900s), indicates that it retained significance within the community across substantial social changes involving population increase, agricultural intensification, and the development of extended family corporate groups.

Great Kiva Use through Time

The Georgetown phase occupation at the Harris site is inferred to represent a seasonally sedentary occupation (Roth 2015). Data from this phase are limited at Harris, but it appears to mark the beginning of an increasing focus on agriculture, and it is the period when an initial communal structure was built at the site (House 14; Haury 1936). The village was still quite small, and House 14 apparently served to integrate the growing community. This structure is larger (44 m²) than the Georgetown phase domestic houses, which usually average 12–15 m². Artifacts recovered by Haury in House 14 consisted primarily of domestic trash, but they also included a stone bowl made of volcanic tuff and a clay pipe (Figure 3). Elsewhere, Roth and colleagues (2022) have suggested that volcanic tuff stone bowls were part of a suite of artifacts associated with great kiva rituals. Anyon (2022) and Roth et alia (2022) argue that Georgetown phase communal structures in the Mimbres River Valley were multipurpose and were perhaps used by initial landholding households for both habitation and ritual activities. The fact that House 14 opens directly onto the plaza suggests its association with communally integrative activities and establishes the long-term use of the great kivas and plaza as communal and ritual space.

House 14 was later repurposed as a burial location (cemetery), with 10 inhumations and one cremation dating to the subsequent San Francisco and Three Circle phases. We see the repurposing of House 14 as tied to commemorative activities used to physically represent “social connections and memory” (Makarewicz and Finlayson 2018:19). Both males and females

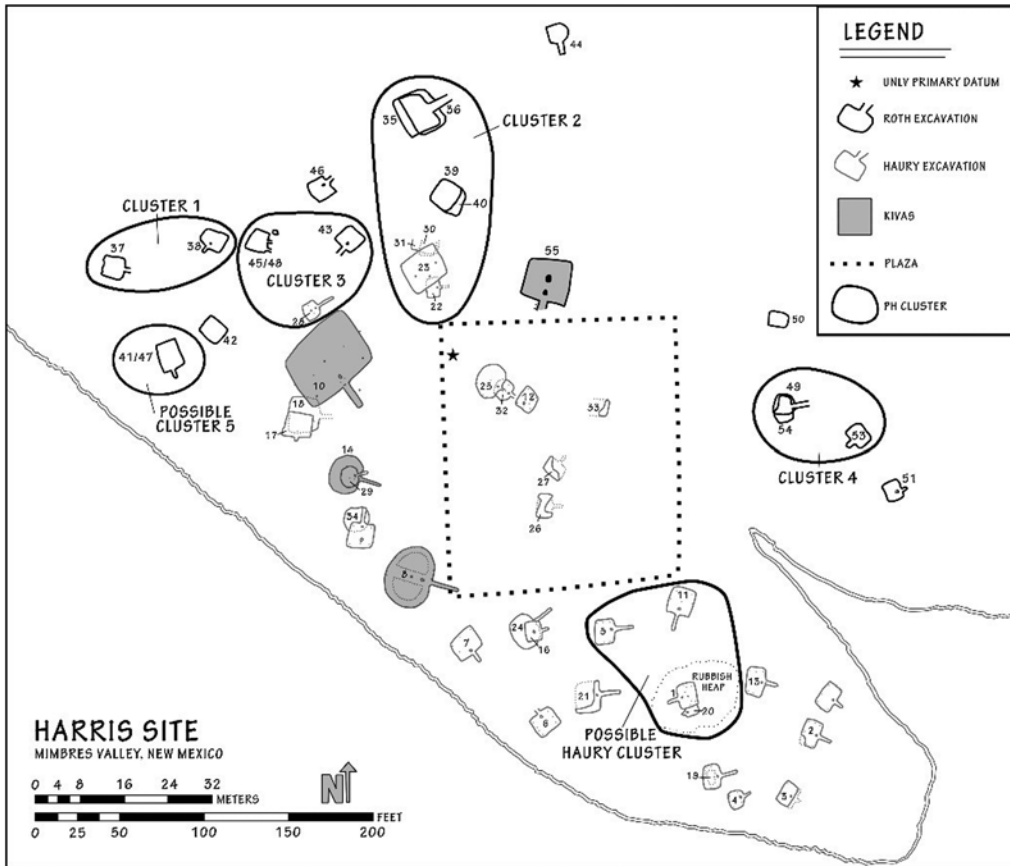


Figure 2. Harris site map, showing plaza, great kivas, pithouse clusters, and Haury's excavations. (Map by Russell Watters.)

were buried in the structure fill, but only females had preserved grave goods.² One of the inhumations, a young adult woman (Burial 22), was buried in such a way that she was seated on the floor of the communal structure. Based on other data on social memory at the site (Roth and Baustian 2015), this appears to have been a purposeful action that we interpret as linking this particular woman and perhaps her lineage to previous ritual activities conducted within this structure. A similar burial (Burial 11) was found in one of the extended family households on the west end of the plaza that is inferred to have been sponsoring kiva rituals (discussed below).

By the San Francisco phase, the pace of social change increased at the Harris site. Roth and colleagues (Roth 2015, 2019; Roth and Baustian 2015) document the development of extended

family groups by this period, which they see as tied to both agricultural intensification and the coincident land-tenure issues associated with this change in household organization. These extended family groups were identified as clusters of pithouses surrounding common work areas and sharing distinct material traits, including evidence of craft production and possible ritual sponsorship (Roth 2015, 2019). They are spatially distinct from individual pithouses that have been inferred to represent autonomous contemporary households and none of the autonomous households have material assemblages indicative of craft production or ritual activities.

One pithouse cluster and three associated burials dating to the San Francisco phase were found in the northern portion of the site (Cluster 3; Figure 2). A second cluster of pithouses



Figure 3. Stone bowl and clay pipe from Pithouse 14, the Georgetown phase great kiva excavated by Haurly. (Photo by Barbara Roth.) (Color online)

associated with two extramural burials was excavated by Haurly in the southern portion of the site, and this may be a second extended family household, although the data recovered from them are not robust enough to determine this unequivocally. The burials in these extended family clusters indicate that some social distinctions were beginning by this time. Extramural burials associated with Cluster 3 included an adult male buried with multiple ceramic vessels, a white chert projectile point, a *Glycymeris* shell bracelet fragment, and a piece of turquoise tessera; an adult male buried with 14 *Agaronia* shell beads across his chest (which are thought to represent a sash), three *Glycymeris* shell bracelets, and a white chert projectile point; and an older (50+) adult female buried with four ceramic vessels. These represent some of the wealthiest burials in terms of associated artifacts found on the site (Roth and Baustian 2015). A child (12–15 months) buried in the lower floor of a superimposed pithouse associated with this cluster,

Pithouse 45, was buried with two *Glycymeris* shell bracelets, two turquoise pendants, and four ceramic vessels. Taken together, these data suggest that the extended family household associated with Cluster 3 was attaining some level of social power within the Harris community.

During the San Francisco phase, a new great kiva, designated by Haurly as House 8, was constructed south of the Georgetown phase communal structure (Figure 2), and the Georgetown structure was first used as a cemetery. House 8 was only partially excavated by Haurly, who excavated along the edges of the house to outline it and then dug a trench through the center, exposing the hearth and entryway. At 71 m², it was significantly larger than the contemporary domestic pithouses, which continued to average 12–15 m², and it opened onto the plaza with the entryway facing due east. It is not clear if this structure was used for both domestic and ritual activities or if its use was transitioning into a primarily ritual and integrative role, as seen in the

more formal great kivas built during the later Three Circle phase. An incised volcanic tuff spindle base was found in the fill of this house along with a large, intentionally broken stone pipe. Elsewhere Roth and colleagues (2022) have documented the association of stone pipes with great kiva retirement rituals at the Harris site and other Mimbres Valley sites, so this pipe was most likely used in the closure and retirement of House 8.

As noted above, the San Francisco phase is when the first extended family households occur at the Harris site. The presence of extended family groups alongside autonomous households would have created some level of tension between the two groups, especially if access to productive agricultural land was being negotiated. The great kiva and rituals performed within it and the associated plaza consequently became essential to facilitate the integration of and cooperation among these increasingly disparate households.

Great Kivas, the Plaza, and Community Integration during the Three Circle Phase

The Three Circle phase at the Harris site witnessed continued village growth, both in general site population and in the development of additional extended family corporate groups (Roth 2015, 2019). UNLV's excavations identified five extended family households that lived contemporaneously with autonomous households. Roth and Baustian (2015) discuss the beginning of architectural and burial practices during the Three Circle phase that they see as tied to the use of social memory in demarcating land tenure. These include the rebuilding of houses within the same architectural footprint, the superpositioning of hearths within these superimposed houses, and the placement of child burials with multiple burial goods in the floors of the lower pithouses. These practices are confined to the extended family households, and Roth (2019) and Roth and Baustian (2015) argue that these households began to maintain their social power in part through ritual sponsorship (discussed more below)—a process that likely began during the San Francisco phase given the evidence discussed above.

The increasingly significant role of the great kivas and plaza in community integration is evident at the Harris site and across the Mimbres Valley in the large size and formal characteristics of the Three Circle phase great kivas, including well-plastered walls and floors, distinct ritual paraphernalia, and in some cases, specialized features such as sipapus and benches (Anyon and LeBlanc 1980). Large great kivas are present at the major Three Circle phase villages in the Mimbres River Valley, including Old Town, NAN Ranch, Swarts, Galaz, and Harris. Creel and Anyon (2003; Creel et al. 2015) see the construction and use of these great kivas as tied to an increased focus on irrigation agriculture and the associated labor and land tenure requirements. At some point in the AD 900s, the majority of these structures were ritually retired in prescribed ways that involved intense burning, toppling of walls, and the deposition of retirement artifacts such as pottery vessels, grinding slabs, pipes, stone bowls, and projectile points (Creel and Anyon 2003:77).

Creel and Shafer (2015) have discussed the significance of plazas in Mimbres communities during the Late Pithouse and Classic periods. Extensive plaza excavations at NAN Ranch documented a series of cremations that Creel and Shafer argue represent important individuals in village society and may represent social ties with Hohokam groups to the west. Haury conducted some excavations, primarily trenching, in the plaza at the Harris site. He excavated three burials of socially prominent males, given the quantity of grave goods recovered from them, including ceramic vessels and abundant shell (Haury 1936; Roth and Baustian 2015). Haury also excavated one cremation in the plaza, although little information is available on it. A large pit with multiple smashed ceramic vessels was found in the plaza in front of one of the Three Circle phase kivas (Kiva Pithouse 55) during UNLV's work at the site. This feature, discussed below, has been interpreted as the remains of a feasting event associated with the ritual retirement of the great kiva. It therefore appears that the plaza at the Harris site was a locale for ritual and communal performance and also served as the burial location for important individuals in the community.

New Data on Three Circle Great Kivas at the Harris Site

Data from the two excavated great kivas at the Harris site provide additional information on the role of great kivas in community integration during the Three Circle phase: Kiva Pithouse 55, excavated by UNLV and dating to the early to mid Three Circle phase, and House 10, excavated by Haury and dating to the late Three Circle phase. Kiva Pithouse 55 was built and ritually retired before House 10 was built. House 10 was one of the structures in the Mimbres Valley that was intentionally and intensively burned in the early AD 900s in a valley-wide phenomenon of great kiva retirements (Creel and Anyon 2003). This represents the final great kiva built at the Harris site; other sites in the valley, including Galaz and Old Town, had later Three Circle phase great kivas, but none was found at the Harris site.

Kiva Pithouse 55: Early Three Circle Phase Great Kiva

Kiva Pithouse 55 dates to the early to mid AD 800s. It is large (76 m²), and the entryway faced south (195°) opening onto the plaza (Figure 2). A berm rising approximately 60–90 cm surrounded the kiva and likely represents material from the original excavation of the floor that was then piled around the kiva walls. A similar berm is present around House 10, and these berms likely served to further demarcate the great kivas as important ritual spaces.

Portions of the kiva were excavated during UNLV's work at the site, including the entryway, hearth, and the center posthole (Figure 4). Several trenches were also excavated to define the kiva walls. The walls and floor of this structure were heavily plastered, and Roth (2015) has described this feature as “overbuilt,” given the investment in architecture, the presence of a large step in front of the entryway, and the presence of a large plastered basin hearth (Figure 4).

The structure was ritually retired, most likely at the time that House 10 was built in the late AD 870s. It was not completely burned, however, unlike what has been documented for

later Three Circle phase structures and House 10 (Creel and Anyon 2003), because only the front portion of the house over the center post, hearth, and entryway exhibited evidence of burning. The roof in this portion of the house came down onto the floor, and then the walls were toppled over this section of the burned kiva.

Combustible material was burned in the hearth, leaving a thick layer of ash. A *Glycymeris* shell bracelet fragment was found on top of the ash, and a white chert dart point was found within it. These objects were apparently placed in the ash after the material burned, because they do not exhibit any signs of burning. The ash was covered with a layer of adobe, and cobbles of ochre were placed atop this adobe cap.

The center post was removed prior to burning the structure, suggesting that the two burned lateral posts adjacent to it were the major weight-bearing posts for the central portion of the roof. The center posthole was also covered with a thick layer of adobe. A complete stone cloud blower pipe with red ochre on it was found on top of this adobe cap. The use of the cloud blower pipe was one of the final acts before the kiva was retired. Abundant ethnographic data point to the use of stone cloud blowers in rituals, given that the smoke was used for both cleansing and blessing ceremonies (Aberle 1966; Parsons 1939; Underhill 1946). It therefore appears that the pipe and smoke were important components of the closure of the great kiva. Shell beads were found around the pipe, and they were apparently sprinkled on top of the center posthole.

Stratigraphic evidence indicates that the structure was then left open for some period of time before the side and back walls were toppled into the center of the kiva. The upper levels consisted of a mixture of trash fill and material washing in from the berm. Unlike some of the other great kivas found in the Mimbres area and House 8 at the Harris site, no burials were found in the excavated fill of Kiva Pithouse 55.

A large pit (Feature 36) was found in the plaza directly in front of the entryway to Kiva Pithouse 55. Only a small portion of the pit was excavated, but the recovered artifact assemblage points to feasting activities tied to the closure of the great kiva. The pit was filled with a number of



Figure 4. Kiva Pithouse 55, Three Circle phase great kiva, after excavation. Note center post, hearth, step leading to entryway, and entryway. (Photo by Barbara Roth.)

smashed ceramic vessels (Romero and Lauzon 2015). At least 10 separate vessels have been identified, including several large partially reconstructed decorated and corrugated jars, as well as some decorated bowl fragments. The sherds in this pit were stacked, indicating that the vessels were smashed first and then placed in the pit. One broken and one complete stone palette were found in a layer of ash on top of the smashed vessels. Stone palettes are common in the Hohokam region to the west and are one of the artifact types that Roth and colleagues (2022)

link to ritual activities associated with great kivas and plazas at the Harris site. This feature is consequently inferred to be tied to village-wide feasting rituals conducted on the plaza when Kiva Pithouse 55 was ritually retired.

House 10: Three Circle Phase Great Kiva

House 10, excavated by Hauray, is the latest great kiva on the site, with several cutting dates in the late AD 870s (Hauray 1936), indicating that it was built and used after Kiva Pithouse 55 was retired. This structure is larger than Kiva Pithouse 55

(156 m²), suggesting that the village continued to grow throughout the Three Circle phase. The presence of heavily burned posts on the side walls and Haury's field notes stating that a large quantity of burned beams were removed from the center of the feature indicate that it was burned in a manner similar to the other large Three Circle phase great kivas in the valley (Creel and Anyon 2003; Creel et al. 2015). An archaeomagnetic date from wall plaster indicates that it burned in the mid to late AD 900s.

Haury did not excavate the center posthole during his work in House 10. Data from great kiva excavations across the Mimbres Valley have documented the significance of the center posthole in the ritual closure of great kivas (Creel and Anyon 2003), so UNLV's project opened the area surrounding House 10's center post and excavated the posthole fill. The center post was removed before House 10 was ritually retired given the lack of any burned materials in the posthole fill. Retirement artifacts were then placed within the posthole, including mica, quartz crystals, broken shell jewelry, and a slate pendant identical to one found in the center posthole of Kiva Pithouse 55. Haury found a large, intentionally broken stone pipe in House 10, and two additional stone pipes were recovered from the center posthole during UNLV's excavations. One of these was a large cloud blower pipe made of the same volcanic tuff that other great kiva pipes were made from, and the second was an unfinished pipe, also made of volcanic tuff. The recovery contexts of these pipes support the interpretation that stone pipes and the smoke emanating from them were associated with the ritual closure of these great kivas (Roth et al. 2022). The posthole was then filled with three large boulders, and the great kiva was intensely burned, marking its final closure.

Unlike the other large pithouse villages in the Mimbres Valley with burned great kivas, no later great kiva was built at the Harris site. Elsewhere, Roth (2019) has suggested that extended family households dispersed from the site after House 10 was retired, and only a small remnant population of autonomous households remained. The Harris site is the only large pithouse village in the Mimbres Valley that does not have a pueblo built on it; this may be due to the social fracturing

of the major landholding households and suggests that once House 10 was burned and retired, the existing mechanisms for maintaining village cohesion proved to be inadequate.

The Role of Extended Families in Ritual Sponsorship

Data from Haury's and UNLV's excavations at the Harris site provide evidence suggesting that certain extended family households were associated with great kiva and plaza activities and that they were potentially sponsoring rituals to facilitate community integration. Three clusters of pithouses surrounding the plaza have large, superimposed houses that contain evidence of specialized activities. These superimposed structures, built within the same architectural footprint, are inferred to be what Roth and Baustian (2015) refer to as "anchor" households for extended family households, most likely representing the residence of heads of the household. Each of the extended family households identified at the Harris site by Roth and Baustian (2015) has at least one superimposed house, but the ones surrounding the plaza (Clusters 2, 4, 5) are the only ones that contain artifact evidence indicative of their association with kiva and plaza rituals. These data suggest that these socially prominent households were developing strategies to address emerging social differences by sponsoring rituals that would promote cooperation and social cohesion (Van Keuren 2012).

The physical location of the pithouse clusters surrounding the plaza (Clusters 2, 4, and 5 on Figure 2) is the first line of evidence supporting their role within the village and their link to the great kivas and plazas. Artifacts found within them also point to this association. Superimposed Pithouse 49/54, located on the eastern end of the plaza, is part of an extended family household cluster along with Pithouse 53 (Cluster 4; Figure 2). The lower house (Pithouse 54) burned, and a roof beam from the structure had a cutting date of AD 844. This is the same as one of the dates from the lateral post in Kiva Pithouse 55, suggesting the possibility that the beams were procured at the same time (Ron Towner, personal communication 2013) and that these structures were built at the same

time. Pithouse 49/54 had all but one of the tabular knives recovered from the site, with the only other tabular knife recovered from Pithouse 41/47, discussed below. Roth (2015) has suggested that this household was processing and possibly fermenting agave based on the presence of the tabular knives and the recovery of a jar with significant pitting and wear indicative of fermentation (Miller and Montgomery 2018; Shafer 2013). The location of this house next to the plaza, the cutting date associated with the construction of Kiva Pithouse 55, and evidence of fermentation that was likely tied to feasting and ritual activities all suggest that this extended family household was participating in and possibly sponsoring rituals.

Superimposed Pithouse 41/47 is located on the west end of the plaza and is inferred to be the anchor household for an extended family cluster, along with two unexcavated pithouses (Cluster 5; Figure 2). The primary evidence of ritual sponsorship for this household comes from Burial 11, an adult female found in the trash fill of Pithouse 41. The burial pit extended through the floor of the upper house (Pithouse 41), and the woman was seated on the floor of the bottom house (Pithouse 47). She was buried with four black-on-white vessels, one of which is stylistically identical to a vessel found in the feasting pit associated with the retirement of Kiva Pithouse 55. The close similarity of these vessels indicates that they were made by the same potter—possibly this woman. Two intentionally broken stone palette fragments were found in a layer of ash above this burial, a pattern that virtually replicates the two stone palettes found in the layer of ash on top of the feasting pit. We therefore interpret this household as associated with ritual activities in the plaza.

The third household thought to be sponsoring rituals, House 23/22, is a large, superimposed structure excavated by Haury (1936) on the north end of the plaza. Haury originally interpreted this as a ceremonial structure, but UNLV's research resulted in a reconsideration of the role of House 23 in the Harris community. Given its architectural traits and artifact content, it is now thought to be part of an extended family pithouse cluster (Cluster 2). This cluster contained two other superimposed structures

(Pithouses 35/36 and 39/40) that had superimposed hearths that were touching despite some time between house occupations. This is thought to represent the marking of ancestry and social memory tied to land tenure (Roth and Baustian 2015).

One large stone cloud blower pipe “blank” (per Haury's field notes) was found in House 23, and a complete, red-slipped stone pipe was found in House 22 beneath it. The context of these pipes suggests that this extended family was possibly involved in pipe production for kiva rituals. Roth and colleagues (2022) discuss the significance of stone pipes in kiva retirement rituals at the Harris site, and Creel and Anyon (2003) found that they were associated with kiva retirement rituals throughout the Mimbres Valley. All but one of the stone pipes recovered during UNLV's excavations at Harris came from ritual contexts, and the one that was not associated with the great kivas was found in the upper trash fill of a pithouse next to House 10; Roth and colleagues (2022) suggest that this may have come from the fill of House 10 during Haury's excavations at the site. Haury found stone pipes in three domestic pithouses that he excavated, with Houses 22 and 23 representing two of these houses. These data consequently highlight the restricted context of stone pipes and indicate that House 23/22 was unique in the presence of stone pipe production.

Households with the largest land holdings would have become more socially prominent in the village, but this would have resulted in some tensions between households for access to land and other resources. This could have been mitigated in two ways: (1) through community rituals designed to bring households together and facilitate cooperation and social cohesion, and (2) through ritual sponsorship by the socially prominent households. These appear to have been the strategies used by extended family households at the Harris site. The centrality of great kivas and the plaza between groups of structure (see Figure 2) indicates that communal rituals served the entire village. Communal rituals conducted in the plazas may also have involved visiting kin and visitors from surrounding communities. The role of socially prominent households in ritual sponsorship would have

been one way for these households to promote village-wide cooperation, solidify local and regional social relationships, and mitigate any stress or dissension caused by variation in resource access.

Discussion

Data from the Harris site further document the integral role that great kivas played in prehistoric southwestern communities and highlight their significance as important ritual spaces. The use of great kivas and associated plazas at Pithouse period sites in the Mimbres region was directly tied to village growth, sedentism, and agricultural production—something long recognized in the region (Anyon and LeBlanc 1980; Creel and Anyon 2003; Creel and Shafer 2015; Gilman and Stone 2013). Social and economic changes occurred during the Late Pithouse period that impacted community relationships, resulting in the need for communal spaces and rituals associated with integration. These changes began in the San Francisco phase and were amplified during the Three Circle phase.

Social distinctions, while not falling in the domain of hierarchies (see Gilman 1990), were present through time as extended family corporate groups developed and lived alongside autonomous households. These extended family households, represented at the Harris site by discrete clusters of pithouses with shared architecture and artifact traits, are inferred to represent the major landholding households at the site (Roth 2019; Roth and Baustian 2015). The important role that these households played in the village was likely tied to land tenure related to agricultural intensification, perhaps irrigation agriculture, as has been proposed for other large sites in the Mimbres Valley such as Old Town, NAN Ranch, and Galaz (Anyon and LeBlanc 1984; Anyon and Roth 2018; Creel 2006; Shafer 2003).

We argue that great kivas at the Harris site and other large villages in the Mimbres region served as important social arenas for integrating households within these dynamic communities. As noted earlier, at Harris, the centrality of the location of this ritual space combined with long-term use starting in the Georgetown phase and

extending to the end of the Three Circle phase (ca. late AD 900s) indicates that these spaces retained significance within the Harris community across substantial social changes. The great kivas, plaza, and rituals performed within them appear to have been oriented toward supporting the existing social structure and bringing the community—both local and valley-wide—together. This also involved counteracting factions and dissension (Dungan and Peoples 2018). Internal social dynamics may have created some tensions among these households, especially as social power differences emerged among particular households, but these appear to have been mitigated by the use of great kivas. The lack of evidence for violence in the Mimbres region (Baustian 2018), the open nature of the site layout at the Harris site, and the overall similarity of material culture across the site (suggesting similar access to resources) all indicate that the great kivas worked: community integration resulting from ritual performance resulted in a reduction in or at least a mitigation of conflict and dissent.

All of this changed at the end of the Three Circle phase at the Harris site and at other large village sites in the valley. This is best illustrated by the burning of the great kivas at most of the large pithouse villages in the valley in the AD 900s (Creel and Anyon 2003). Creel and Anyon (2003) have discussed the significance of these acts, arguing that great kivas were constructed with predesigned mechanisms for ritual retirement, including toppling the walls. They see the construction, use, and retirement of great kivas as reflecting cultural and ritual transformations that began in the Three Circle phase and culminated in the pithouse-to-pueblo transition (Creel and Anyon 2003:69).

At the other village sites where great kivas were burned (NAN Ranch, Swarts, Old Town, and Galaz), later great kivas were constructed after the burning. This was not the case at the Harris site, however, and it appears that the burning of the large great kiva, House 10, resulted in some level of community disruption. Although the site remained occupied by a small set of autonomous households, the larger extended family households dispersed from the site in the late AD 900s after House 10 burned. This

suggests that the rituals performed in the great kiva and associated plaza no longer served to integrate the community. Sedig (2020) argues that during the Transitional phase from the Late Pithouse to the Classic Mimbres pueblo period (late AD 900s to early 1000s), ritual transformations that manifested in changes in architecture, site layouts, ceramics, and kiva use represent responses to an extended drought, which led to the reconfiguration of older ritual practices. The beginnings of these changes are manifest at Harris and the other large pithouse villages. The Harris site represents a case where ritual space was successfully used to integrate the community for a long period of time, but ultimately, new ritual practices were not adopted, and the site was eventually abandoned. This supports Van Keuren's (2012:176) proposal that religion and ritual in the Southwest is "situational and contingent" and speaks to the precariousness of the communal ties that existed in these villages.

Conclusions

Pithouse period groups in the Mimbres River Valley faced many of the same challenges that groups throughout the world faced as their populations grew and they became more sedentary and agriculturally focused. One of the key challenges they dealt with was ensuring that people in the villages interacted and cooperated, especially once social distinctions began to appear. It is therefore not surprising that great kivas developed in sync with these changes, as the kivas, plazas, and rituals conducted within them served to ensure social cohesion and facilitate the cooperation that was necessary for these villages to grow and thrive.

Data from the Harris site illustrate the important and enduring role that ritual space played in large villages in the Mimbres region. These data have implications for broader understandings of community integration and the role of ritual spaces and ritual performances in responding to social and economic change. They illustrate the critical role that centrally located ritual space and the rituals conducted within it were to integrating the Harris community, especially as changes in social organization led to differences in social power. These differences represent

social stressors that would require responses to support the existing social structure and to maintain village cohesion. The enduring aspect of the ritual space and village occupation in general indicates that for much of the site's occupation, these strategies—the use of the great kiva and plaza, and ritual sponsorship by some of the land holding families—were successful in ensuring community integration and cooperation. The implications of these data go beyond the Southwest, given that many other Neolithic societies exhibit evidence of similar responses in the use of ritual space and ritual action.

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Data Availability Statement. Data from UNLV's excavations at the Harris site are available from the authors and in Roth (2015).

Competing Interests. The authors declare none.

Notes

1. Haury (1936) referred to all excavated structures as "Houses," so Houses 1–34 represent Haury's excavations. UNLV's excavations used the designation "Pithouse" to distinguish their excavations from Haury's, so Pithouses 35–55 are from UNLV's excavations.

2. Here, we use burial data from Haury's 1934 excavations at the Harris site, which predated NAGPRA regulations. Burials examined as part of UNLV's work at the site were done under a burial permit from the State of New Mexico, with engagement of relevant tribal groups.

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