

Survey Area and Objectives

In the summer of 2006, under permit from the Mexican government's *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (INAH), anthropologists from University of Missouri, the University of North Florida, and INAH conducted an extensive, reconnaissance survey in the Casas Grandes cultural zone. The Janos Archaeological Project located and surface surveyed over two dozen sites in northwestern Chihuahua, Mexico. This poster provides a brief overview of the project results, while the other posters in this session provide more detailed discussions of ongoing research conducted by project personnel.

The first goal of the project was to identify and gather basic descriptions of archaeological sites in the region north of the core Casas Grandes culture area. A second goal was the collection of pottery sherd samples for sourcing and dating analyses. The final goal of the project was to identify prehistoric period sites that hold promise of elucidating the origins of the Casas Grandes culture and that would be appropriate for future excavation.



Artifacts Observed by the Janos Archaeological Project



The Poster Session Recent Research in the Casas Grandes Region of Chihuahua, Mexico.

In 2006 the University of Missouri and University of North Florida conducted a collaborative field reconnaissance of the region surrounding Janos, Chihuahua approximately 50 km north of Casas Grandes and 50 km south of the U.S. - Mexico boundary. This area is within the generally acknowledged boundaries for the Casas Grandes culture and just south of the Mimbres region of New Mexico. The posters presented in this session provide a summary of the results of the survey including in-field artifact analyses, discussion of the relationship between these settlements and neighboring culture areas, as well as other research conducted on Casas Grandes materials.

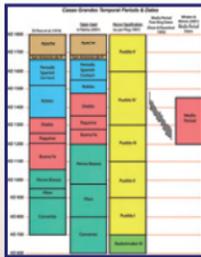


The 2006 Janos Archaeological Project

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Petroglyphs in the Casas Grandes Region



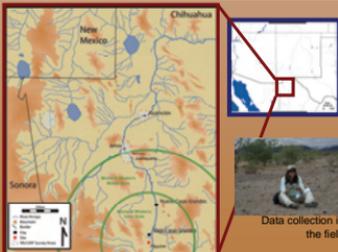
The Casas Grandes Region

The archaeological record of the northwestern portion of Chihuahua, is incredibly rich and over the past fifteen years has garnered considerable attention from archaeologists. For example, recent work by Hard and Roney (1998) with Late Archaic period (ca. 1000 B.C.) remains, especially those at the site of Cerro Juanaqueña, have demonstrated the aggregation and large-scale labor investment of peoples in the region very early in the history of its human occupation. The early ceramic period of the Sierra Madres is represented by the famous Cueva de la Olla site. The region also contains extensive historical remains including the Hacienda San Diego formerly owned by Luis Terrazas.

The ceramic period remains from the region are dominated by the thirteenth and fourteenth century Casas Grandes culture (the Medio Period, A.D. 1200-1450). This impressively complex cultural phenomena is centered around the site of Paquimé (or Casas Grandes). The culture is known for its impressive ruins, beautifully decorated polychrome ceramics, evidence of craft specialization in both ceramics and ground stone artifacts, turkey and macaw husbandry, and elaborated ritual systems (Di Peso 1974, Rakita 2006, Van Pool 2003, Van Pool & Leonard 2002, Van Pool & Van Pool 2003; Whalen & Minnis 2001). While the origin and nature of the complexity exhibited by the site of Paquimé and its associated sphere of cultural influence is currently under debate, there is little question that the culture is one of the most complex known to have existed in the desert Southwest (Plog 1997: 173-178).

The Nature of Casas Grandes

Currently, much debate surrounds the origin and nature of the Casas Grandes cultural system. Three general models have been proposed. DiPeso (1974) suggested that Paquimé originated as a trade entrepôt as a way for Mesoamerican polities to exploit the resources of their far northern periphery. As such, he saw the Casas Grandes region as a tightly knit economic system administered by the primate center of Paquimé. Michael Whalen and Paul Minnis (1996, 2001), on the basis of their considerable survey and excavation data from the region have argued that the Casas Grandes system is a direct outgrowth of the preceding Viejo period culture of the area (with some influence from outside regions). Whalen and Minnis see a less centralized Casas Grandes polity, arguing instead for three geographic levels of integration; with Paquimé dominating settlements in an inner zone (within 30km of the site), having limited control over settlements within a middle zone (30-60km from the site), and an outer zone (greater than 60km) being outside of Paquimé's periphery. A more recent model has been proposed by Van Pool and Van Pool (2002) who draw inspiration from Sayles (1936). They suggest that the Medio period system is an outgrowth of the Classic Mimbres culture (A.D. 1000-1150) of southern New Mexico with limited continuity with the Viejo period. They further suggest, in concert with others (VanPool et al 2005, Schaafsma and Riley 1999), that the Casas Grandes system should be viewed as a ritual and symbolic sphere of influence with Paquimé as its religious center.



Petroglyphs at Cerro del Diablo



Cerro del Diablo



(A) Roasting pit at Paquimé
(B) Possible Roasting pit from site near Janos



Possible brujería shrine on Cerro near Janos

Examining a rock alignment

Project Results

Project crew conducted reconnaissance expeditions to three general areas; (1) the zone immediately around the town of Janos, (2) an area near the town of Ascención, and (3) west of the Sierra de Enmedio. Crews included team members from all three participating organizations and were often facilitated by local informants. In all, over 25 sites were identified and visited by project crews. On-site procedures included, field note-taking, completing site forms, photography, sketch mapping, in-field lithic analyses, and collection of sherd samples (where appropriate). A variety of different types of sites were identified by the project and included; lithic scatters, petroglyphs, agricultural features, Medio period habitation sites, mixed Viejo (A.D. 600 - 1200) and Medio period sites, possible Mimbres sites, historic settlements, and modern shrines. Surface features and artifacts included; possible roasting pits, ball courts, exposed walls, ground and chipped stone artifacts, prehistoric pottery, historic glass, human and animal bone, shell, obsidian, turquoise, and copper objects.

Future Research Questions

The 2006 Janos Archaeological Project identified a number of sites that have the potential to shed considerable light on the actual nature of the Casas Grandes system and its origins. One site (Janos 14) is about 800 meters east of the Rio Casas Grandes in the Janos survey area contained both Viejo and Medio period remains including at least four probable pit houses, a low mound representing a likely single story Medio period habitation, as well as local red-on-brown, Mimbres Classic black-on-white, and Medio polychrome pottery. Another site (Janos 13) appear to be a fairly typical Medio period habitation site that seems to also include a possible large roasting pit like those found at Paquimé. A third site (Janos 28) is composed of as many as eight separate mounds and appears to be a Medio period habitation site. The large size (in terms of square meters, number of mounds, and size of exposed walls) as well as the existence of copper, shell, and turquoise on the surface suggest that this site may be a fairly important location in the Casas Grandes system falling well outside of Minis & Whalen's middle zone. Finally, a fourth site (Janos 11) contains a large (100x75m) mound representing a Medio period habitation with associated linear rock alignments that may be agricultural features covering an area at least 300 by 200 meters. Future activities of the Janos Archaeological Project will (in part) seek to examine in greater detail the nature of these sites.



Features Observed by the Janos Archaeological Project



Project Participants

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