

## The Feathered Serpent Spreads its Wings: Bundling Knowledge and Religion in the New World

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Abstract: The 13th and 14th Centuries were a period of rapid cultural change in the North American Southwest, yet this cultural transformation included the high fidelity transmission of Mesoamerican religion across the region. The apparent incongruity between rampant cultural innovation within the region mixed with the accurate replication of cultural traits from outside of the region creates an interesting historical and iconographic puzzle. Archaeological and art historical analyses indicate that high fidelity cultural transmission is typically difficult to achieve without supporting social structures. Put another way, it is far easier to do something different than other people than it is to do things the same way. There must be some cultural system that both allows people to know how to do things the same way as other people, and that encourages them to do so. One means of high fidelity cultural transmission particularly common among New World cultures are bundles, in which physical objects act as mnemonic devices for religious/political ideas. The bundled objects outline the relationships between the various ideas/principles in a fluid structure that allows the flexibility for them to be adapted to novel local contexts, while also encouraging cultural continuity. We discuss here how Mesoamerican bundles influenced the Casas Grandes people of northern Chihuahua and southern New Mexico, and explore the implications this spread of religious ideas had on other Southwestern cultures.

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Dr. Christine S. VanPool is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Growing up in Ruidoso, she fell in love with anthropology at an early age. She decided to pursue it as a career while attending Eastern New Mexico University, where she earned her BA in 1993. She then completed her Ph.D. at the University of New Mexico in 2003. Christine's research interests focus on religion, symbolism and prehistoric art, ceramic analysis, and shamanism. She has participated in field work across the Southwest, but has focused most recently on the excavation of 76 Draw. Her research includes *Signs of the Casas Grandes Shamans* (published by the University of Utah press) and *Religion in the Prehispanic Southwest* (published by AltaMira press).