This volume focuses on the ways universal processes of political centralization and hierarchy construction played out within the specific culture-historical context of the Roble phase Naco valley. Our general contention is that the valley’s late prehistoric political structure was, at any one time, a dynamic configuration shaped by the actions of diverse people engaged in ongoing, unresolved efforts to claim preeminence or to undermine the pretensions of those staking such claims. In the process, people organized themselves into networks, the members of which contested for material and conceptual assets crucial to their political projects. These schemes were variably successful, resulting in a political structure forever vulnerable to change as the abilities of one faction or another to secure essential resources shifted.

To use this model in illuminating late prehistoric developments in the Naco valley, we must specify the crucial variables of which it is composed. In particular, we will outline the key nexus among resources, networks, and political projects.

Mobilizing Resources in Search of Power

A basic premise underlying the approach followed here is that people are neither slaves to custom nor constantly innovating cultural patterns free of structural
constraints. Rather, following Marcel Mauss (e.g., 2007; see also Goffman 1997: 36; Schortman 2008), we see them as managers who manipulate the economic, political, ideological, and social resources available to them by virtue of the structural positions they occupy in search of goals deemed significant and achievable within specific historical circumstances (Earle 1997; Mann 1986; Runciman 1982). Individuals thus selectively deploy assets in combinations that may be innovative. Such creativity, however, is always exercised within limits imposed by the resources bequeathed to people as occupants of specific social positions at particular moments in time (Beck et al. 2007; Giddens 1984; Goffman 1997: 144; Monaghan 1995: 360; Sewell 1992).

**Resources and Power**

Among the objectives individuals seek is power over the actions of others and power to attain their own ends by their own means (Foucault 1995; Wolf 1990). Achievement of these goals requires the manipulation of resources that may be material or ideological in form, of local or foreign origin, derived from the past or the present. Material resources are those variables that are in some senses crucial to physical survival. Ideological factors, in turn, play central roles in defining and conveying an authoritative understanding of the world and the relations among the people and supernaturals who inhabit it (this parallels Giddens’s distinction between allocative and authoritative resources, 1984: 38, 258–261). Would-be leaders seek privileged rights to determine how and by whom significant material and ideological variables are acquired, fabricated, distributed, and used. Their subordinates, in turn, try to frustrate such monopolies by challenging these prerogatives (Bloch 1977a, 1977b; Brumfiel 1992; de Certeau 1984; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Gailey 1987; chapters in McGuire and Paynter 1991).

Such contests result in power competitions that are perpetually unresolved. No individual or faction ever secures absolute dominion, as no one person or group can completely monopolize all of the assets on which power is based. Consequently, some power to articulate, accomplish, and legitimize goals remains in the hands of subordinates based on their abilities to secure at least a subset of the resources needed for their own survival and to define, to some extent, their relations with other people as well as with sacred beings (Foucault 1995; Wolf 1990). Such control over their own actions, no matter how limited, is an important basis from which elite privileges can be challenged and overthrown (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 1980; Adams 1992; Bloch 1977b; Bourdieu 1979: 82, 1989: 20–23; de Certeau 1984; Gailey 1987; Giddens 1984: 16; Ortner 1995; Paynter and McGuire 1991; Roscoe 1993: 115).
One result of these competitions is that the processes by which goods and ideas are acquired, produced, consumed, and distributed are linked into coherent, if unstable, political economies. Each move and countermove by groups and individuals involved in power contests leads to changes in extant political relations, these shifts resulting from purposeful actions that may have unintended consequences (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; Ortner 1995; Roscoe 1993).

The unstable, negotiated outcomes of these competitions are often described with reference to political centralization, dealing with the extent to which power is concentrated in a few hands, in part as a result of the aforementioned monopolies over goods and ideas, and hierarchy, a measure of how clearly defined and institutionalized were social rankings based on differential access to material and ideological assets (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; McGuire 1983; Paynter 1990; Paynter and McGuire 1991; Roscoe 1993).

**Power and Networks**

Individuals rarely gain or lose advantage on their own (chapters in Brumfiel and Fox 1994; Preucel 2000: 59). Instead, crucial assets are secured and put to work through participation in networks composed of people engaged in similar political and economic projects (Campbell 2009; Earle 1997; Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1994: xiii; Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006; Mann 1986; Marcus 2000: 239; Ortner 1995: 187, 191; Preucel 2000: 59–61; Trigger 1984: 286). Cooperation within such webs is founded on their members sharing a social identity, or a sense of themselves as possessors of a distinct persona hedged round with identifying symbols (Barth 1969; Cohen 1969; Curtin 1984; Ferguson and Mansbach 1996; Jones 1997; Rapoport 1982; Royce 1982; Schortman 1989; Spence 2005: 175–176; Vincent 1974, 1978; Wobst 1977, 1999). Networks are therefore means for coordinating the actions of a group of people who deploy resources in support of common political endeavors and who reflexively set themselves apart from others similarly organized in the pursuit of complementary or conflicting goals (Giddens 1984; Knoke 1994: 290; Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006; Preucel 2000: 59–61; Spence 2005). It is through such webs that political struggles are waged.

People can belong to multiple networks simultaneously or change memberships through time, employing the associated identities in different contexts, to access different resources, and for different purposes (Alcock 2005; Goffman 1997: 23; Horning 2000: 225; Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006: 129–130; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 479–480; Preucel 2000: 61, 73; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Stein 1999). Any particular society, therefore, is composed of a dense concentration of social networks that variably unite and divide its members along shifting lines of cooperation and competition. These
webs also extend, to differing degrees, beyond a society’s spatial boundaries, tying at least some members to their compatriots in other realms who seek similar resources to support comparable political projects (Barth 1969: 10; Cohen 1978: 387; Jones 1997; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 472, 474; Royce 1982; Vincent 1974: 376). Together, these networks of networks comprise a political structure in which people living at different places participate to varying degrees (Campbell 2009: 824).

Political webs are created and reproduced within structural constraints that, like the nets themselves, play out over multiple, overlapping spatial scales (Bourdieu 1977; Campbell 2009: 825; Giddens 1984; Knoke 1994; Wolf 1990). These structural features, which combine physical aspects of the environment with extant sociopolitical and economic relations and variably shared worldviews, define the ways material and conceptual resources are distributed among all participants and, hence, what political projects are possible. They do not, however, determine how those potentialities are translated into action. Rather, the manner in which individuals take advantage of the opportunities offered by extant arrangements of structural features to secure assets by allying with some in opposition to others is what shapes power relations on local to interregional scales (Giddens 1984).

Political structures in this formulation are therefore inseparable from the events in which power relations are enacted (Goffman 1997: 101; Mauss 2007; Monaghan 1995: 13–14). Structural principles are implicated in every choice people make. For this reason, structure is always vulnerable to change through the deeds of people seeking their own goals in concert with some and opposition to others (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; Goffman 1997: 106; Monaghan 1995: 15; Ortner 1995). Networks are simultaneously parts of and the means for transforming political structures as these structures operate over multiple territorial extents. Distinctions between structure and agency, local and foreign, are thereby collapsed in that decisions made and actions taken by agents working within webs at any one place both shape and are constrained by extant distributions of material and conceptual resources found both at that locale and over broader spatial expanses (Giddens 1984; Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006: 125; Wolf 1982, 1990).

The sorts of networks described here clearly do not describe the full range of interpersonal interactions in which people engage. Nor is it the case that all social identities are linked in equal degrees, if at all, to particular webs in the manner outlined here. Interpersonal interactions may always be structured around the mutually understood social personas people adopt in different contexts. This does not mean, however, that such affiliations are invariably related to enduring and distinctive webs, the personnel of which clearly set themselves off from all others.
We argue, however, that the subset of regularly recurring interpersonal contacts concerned with acquiring and challenging claims to power is often conducted in terms of these reflexively constituted webs because such efforts require forging enduring alliances that link collaborators in explicit opposition to those who organize along similar lines in pursuit of comparable political goals (Hodder 1979; Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006: 125; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 483–484). Repeated mobilization of material and ideological resources during oft-repeated confrontations in which all parties have significant stakes reinforces a pronounced sense of self among web members who see each other as essential allies in important, life-defining transactions. Shoring up and conveying such feelings of distinctiveness often involve the mobilization of physically prominent symbols of network affiliation (Goffman 1997: 57–58; Hodder 1979; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 485; Lightfoot, Martinez, and Schiff 1998: 202; Schortman 1989; Spence 2005: 175–176; Wiessner 1983; Wobst 1977, 1999). It is through identities so defined and expressed that claims to various forms of preeminence are established and legitimized.

Patterned relations among the physical signifiers of network identities, therefore, provide a basis for inferring the duration, spatial extent, and political significance of ancient networks. It may not be possible to reconstruct from archaeological remains all the social webs in which a person could have participated. Those that were particularly salient in power competitions, however, are the most likely to be recognized from the physical distribution of their material markers (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 485; Schortman 1989; Schortman and Nakamura 1991).

**Network Forms**

Salient political nets can take many forms. They may grow out of those routinized dealings in which prosaic items and material styles are regularly, repetitively, and perhaps implicitly used in daily interactions to secure essential resources and convey identity. At the other end of the continuum are linkages explicitly proclaimed and demarcated by prominent material symbols that may be actualized only infrequently.

This distinction points to two general strategies by which people who occupy different structural positions organize their lives and, in the process, create and reproduce political structures. For example, those seeking power frequently make these claims based on their participation in networks that link them to potent allies located at significant physical or conceptual distances (Curtin 1984; Donley 1982; Stein 1999; Wells 1984). Elite control over the dissemination of valuables secured from such allies can form the basis of unequal intra-societal exchange relations in which subordinates render labor
and loyalty to paramount lords in return for receipt of locally rare but generally esteemed items (e.g., Cohen 1981: 2–4; Ekholm 1972; Friedman 1982; Friedman and Rowlands 1977; Peregrine 1991; Spencer 1982; Wells 1980, 1984). Participation in these interaction webs commonly involves manipulating symbols that clearly and overwhelmingly express their members’ identities and distinguish them from near neighbors (Helms 1988, 1992; Wheatley 1975: 239). Drawing such explicit symbolic boundaries ensures that the advantaged few enjoy local monopolies over the use of ideological and material resources whose exhibition and deployment are instrumental in securing power and building hierarchies at home (Arnold 1995; Ekholm 1972; Hayden 1995; Paynter 1990: 370, 381; Peregrine 1991; Wells 1984).

Routinized, quotidian interactions, on the other hand, are often the ones by which people of all backgrounds seek to gain—through their own efforts—the means to survive physically, reproduce extant social relations, and define themselves in reference to other humans as well as to supernatural figures. These contacts, which occupy much of everyone’s day, tend to operate on local scales, if only because it is difficult to maintain close, regular ties with people or sacred forces at great distances (Bowser 2000; Smith 2007). Such logistical problems, however, do not rule out the possibility that at least some individuals of non-elite status may enjoy significant, ongoing relations with those they only interact with periodically (e.g., at trade fairs or on pilgrimages; Freidel and Sabloff 1984; Hammond and Bobo 1994: 19; Wells and Nelson 2007). Regardless of a network’s spatial extent, however, webs that regularly and predictably unite a group in search of essential ideological, social, or economic resources at least implicitly challenge efforts by would-be rulers to claim preeminence based on monopolies secured through participation in their symbolically prominent, physically far-flung nets (Bowser 2000; Gailey 1987; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 488; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Yaeger 2000). Such often-repeated interactions also encourage development of a group’s sense of self as distinguished from others who pursue life’s course in different ways, according to different principles (analogous to Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus” [1977] and Yaeger’s “practices of affiliation” [2000: 125, 129–131]).

This discussion simplifies a complex reality. It conveys a neat distinction between two major types of interaction networks, one linking its members in assertions of dominance and the other rallying participants to resist such claims. Nothing could be further from the truth. The dense networks that converge within any one society join varied sets of people in ways that defy easy categorization (e.g., Alcock 2005: 326). For example, elites who engage in occasional, if politically significant, distant transactions are also tied to their immediate neighbors through contacts repeated on a daily basis (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 26). These leaders must therefore both distinguish themselves
from their followers and assert connections to them, being of and above “their people.” Otherwise, these magnates risk being perceived as irrelevant to, or no different from, everyone else, with no special claims on power in either case. Achieving these seemingly disparate goals depends on the magnates’ ability to manage several different identities tied to distinct networks that vary in their inclusiveness (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 26; Goffman 1997; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Yaeger 2000).

Non-elites, in turn, likely comprise a heterogeneous group whose members are variably willing and able to resist elite pretensions or to ally themselves with ascendant lords (Yaeger 2000). Some may see advantages in novel hierarchical relations; others likely detest and reject them; while still more remain uncertain about, or indifferent to, the changes. In all of these cases, networks are restructured over varying spatial scales to take advantage of perceived opportunities offered by shifting power relations to advance within the new system, undermine its operation, or reestablish some version of the status quo (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 36; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Yaeger 2000; Yoffee 1991: 287). These efforts may well form the bases for variably successful strategies—involving a diverse array of cross-cutting networks through which an equally wide range of assets is mobilized—to resist or accommodate elite demands, or both. These strategies have at least implicit political significance.

Individuals of all persuasions thus are constantly engaged in creating political structures as they enact their principles through patterned interactions conducted in a host of different settings (Brumfiel 1994, 1996; Paynter and McGuire 1991). The result is a diverse set of relations through which people are increasingly distinguished by, among other factors, their power, social affiliations, and positions within single or multiple hierarchies operating at varied temporal and spatial scales (Crumley 1979). These ties and their material symbols are variably stable. All are susceptible to change through time as a result of shifts in a complex array of local and foreign variables and the ways those factors are perceived by actors and those perceptions acted upon.

The approach outlined here offers a very instrumental perspective on social interactions. In this view, people establish and maintain contacts to achieve specific objectives, the goals of primary interest here being those related to securing power. There are other rewards for maintaining interpersonal ties, but they are largely put to one side here. This decision is determined by our focus on ancient power relations, an interest that, in turn, is dictated in part by the nature of the data available from our investigations. In the present volume, therefore, we concentrate on describing and understanding the strategies Roble phase Naqueños employed to contest for power. Such an admittedly limited view of interaction yields insights into the structured distribution of resources
with which ancient people contended, although it hardly captures the full richness of their experiences.

**NETWORKS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD**

To apply a network perspective to the study of prehistoric political structures, we must infer the dynamics of past interactions from static archaeological remains. We propose to address this challenge by identifying what nets were in operation in the Roble phase Naco valley; who belonged to them; what resources were accessed through such connections; how, if at all, these assets and alliances were employed in political struggles; and what the outcomes of those contests were.

**Identifying Networks**

Reconstructing which networks were available to a population at any moment in time relies on using two sets of criteria: spatial proximity and material styles. These features are variably useful in recognizing ancient webs, depending on where the nets fall on the scale of spatially rooted to rootless. For those webs near the former pole, physical proximity can be an important indicator of shared network membership. Propinquity is equated with web participation based on the argument that those living close to each other likely interacted on a regular basis. They at least had the chance to forge a common identity around engagement in a range of projects, some of which were political in nature. Opportunity is not destiny, however. Proximity cannot by itself be accepted as a measure of network ties. At the very least, the manner in which daily tasks are conducted within localized social groups must be addressed. Such studies may provide insights into how much and in what ways those living near each other cooperated in common projects. More indirectly, an analysis of how daily activities were structured within neighboring social units can reveal the extent to which different people incorporated similar understandings of themselves and their relations to others within routine performances (Goffman 1974, 1997; Isbell 2000; Jackson 2001: 12). This last point speaks directly to the existence of those shared values and premises that underlie all social identities and cooperative endeavors.

Regardless of a web’s relation to space, membership in a net is signaled by symbols intelligible to participants and outsiders alike (Goffman 1997: 57–59, 97–98; Jackson 2001). Recognition of the former existence of such networks, therefore, relies on identifying patterned spatial and temporal relations among surviving markers of network affiliation. Because of their relative freedom from technological and functional constraints, material styles are the
most likely signifiers of web membership (Carr 1995; Wiessner 1983; Wobst 1977, 1999). These culturally conditioned choices of fabrication, decoration, embellishment, and arrangement have significant potential for conveying social information (Carr 1995; Wiessner 1983; Wobst 1977, 1999). Some of that information has to do with the networks, and their associated identities, to which a person subscribed.

As discussed earlier, the means by and contexts in which network participation is conveyed vary. In some instances, the relevant material symbols are evident in the choices people make in a wide array of daily activities and the implements used to complete those chores. The organization of space within a house, patterns of trash disposal, and selections made among widely available materials in fashioning commonly used tools may therefore signal network participation as loudly as the ways those implements and domiciles are decorated (e.g., Blanton 1994; Bourdieu 1977). Alternatively, the symbols used to convey network affiliations may overtly and self-consciously specify membership in a web. The form, organization, and dimensions of monumental edifices employed in elite ritual and administration may fall within this category, as would elaborately decorated jewelry, serving vessels, and other accoutrements all deployed to signal the segregation of some activities and people from the world of the mundane (LeCount 2001).

It may be that physical aggregation reduces the need for communicating membership through explicit material symbols (Yaeger 2000). Those who live in each other’s midst probably do not require frequent manipulation of prominent markers in various media to identify their compatriots and distinguish them from non-members. Participants in these nets may rely on their own intimate knowledge of each other’s histories in coordinating their actions and cooperating on projects. This information, in turn, can be reinforced by the display of subtle material cues to network affiliations, cues embedded in the daily round of quotidian tasks.

Similarly, people who interact relatively infrequently might depend on just those sorts of prominent symbols that are irrelevant at the local scale to separate allies from others (Wobst 1977, 1999). Here, web affiliations may be conveyed by the use of particularly ostentatious diagnostics to ensure that they are easily legible to all participants (Wobst 1977, 1999). While such a correlation between distance and symbolic marking may hold generally, there are a variety of reasons why those who see each other daily would want to employ explicit symbolic makers to distinguish themselves from their neighbors. The often-repeated case of elites seeking to define themselves as a group apart from those they rule is just one example of this phenomenon.

These two broad forms of web signification define extreme points on a continuum in which the prosaic and the exceptional often interpenetrate. Thus
members of non-elite domestic units may express overtly their participation in some networks through the sparing use of richly decorated items, such as ceramic serving vessels, that convey crucial social information appropriate to certain infrequently enacted contexts. Their high-born counterparts, in turn, likely also employ locally fashioned items in activities structured according to principles that link them and their subordinates within webs rooted in parochial affiliations. Symbols of different origins can also be combined to varying extents within the same object or related set of items as parts of efforts to forge new identities and networks that link previously disparate social groups (see chapter 8). In all cases, attention is devoted to the ways the distribution of material styles in diverse media might have been affected by the decisions of people seeking to express participation in one or more political networks. The more important certain webs are to the accomplishment of a person’s crucial objectives, the more prominent and diverse the markers that distinguish membership in those affiliations (Hodder 1979). As noted, it is through the patterned distribution of such symbols that the existence, duration, and extent of salient nets can be reconstructed.

**Networks in the Roble Phase Naco Valley**

The four localized networks we consistently identified in the Naco valley investigations are houses, households, sites, and the settlement cluster that includes Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco (see also Canuto and Yaeger 2000: 10; Smith 1994: 146–148). The nature and relevance of each of these entities to understanding political developments in the Naco valley varied over time. During the Roble phase, the basin’s residents employed all four webs in structuring their lives and their participation in political formations.

Houses consist of individuals who occupy the same residence and use its associated outbuildings over a protracted span (Blanton 1994; Gillespie 2000; Joyce 2000; Sheets 1992, 2002). These entities are therefore composed of people who regularly and repeatedly cooperate in basic economic and social chores as parts of networks firmly rooted in specific places and reinforced by intense daily interactions born, in part, of their proximity (Freidel and Sabloff 1984: 111–112; Gillespie 2000; Joyce 2000). Houses may vary considerably in size and are recognized in the Roble phase Naco valley by anything from a single residence raised atop a platform to distinct, shallow trash deposits likely generated by people who lived in perishable constructions in the immediate vicinity.

Households are composed of multiple residences and their outbuildings clustered together, usually around a plaza (e.g., Flannery 1976). They incorporate members of distinct houses who cooperate regularly in basic economic, social, political, and ritual tasks (Ashmore and Wilk 1988; Blanton 1994; Sheets
Households are widely recognized as basic units of production and reproduction across ancient Mesoamerica (Ashmore and Wilk 1988; Blanton 1994; Wilk and Rathje 1982; see chapters in Santley and Hirth 1993; Tourtellot 1988; Wilk and Ashmore 1988). Close interpersonal collaborations are inferred, therefore, from both the near spacing of domestic constructions and their mutually adjusted organization surrounding a patio. Such concentration and coherence in building arrangements physically manifested, and provided venues for the repeated re-creation of, those values, premises, and understandings that underwrote intra-network cooperation (Hendon 1996).

Roble phase Naco valley sites are defined as locales composed of numerous houses, households in which a wide range of activities was pursued, or both (Urban 1986). These entities are usually separated from comparable units by 100 m or more of seemingly open, unoccupied space. They are tentatively treated, therefore, as physically discrete settlements, the occupants of which likely interacted more intensely with each other than with the denizens of other such units. As we will see in chapters 6 and 10, however, there is reason to think that Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco were subsumed within a more inclusive interaction network represented by the settlement cluster. The latter extends for 5 km southwest-northeast and is anchored on the former end by Naco and by Site PVN 306 on the northeast. Site PVN 144 is situated between these two centers, in the midst of what was likely continuous Roble phase occupation—the signs of which are difficult to identify from surface remains. Like houses, households, and sites, spatial proximity within and between these three settlements bespeaks regular, coordinated contacts founded on the understandings and identities of shared networks. Membership in these webs, from house to settlement cluster, was expressed and reinforced through a variety of symbols, material dependencies, and behavioral similarities that figured in diverse aspects of Roble phase life operating within sites (described in chapters 3–5) and across them (reviewed in chapters 6–9).

During the last Precolumbian centuries, therefore, the Naco valley was home to a dense concentration of networks created by their members as they cooperated in the pursuit of common goals, not all of which were directly concerned with power and wealth. At least some of these webs were linked to particular locales organized on a graduated scale, from the house to site to settlement cluster. Chapters 6 and 10 consider where the concept of “society” fits within this network of networks.

The territorially rooted nets outlined here are not the only ones in which ancient Naqueños participated. Cross-cutting these entities were webs that linked their members, directly and indirectly and to differing degrees, to each other and with those residing at variably great distances beyond the Naco valley.
Spatial contiguity provides little guidance in reconstructing these ties. Instead, we must rely on tracing patterns of similarities in material styles across Naco valley houses, households, sites, and settlement cluster with those found among their counterparts in other areas. As we move from territorially specific to more spatially diffuse connections, we, like the actors themselves, rely on the patterned distribution of styles in a number of media to identify ancient, spatially extensive interaction networks and their participants.

**Power and Webs**

The possible relevance of different webs to political contests is approached here by evaluating the degree to which variations in measures of power correlate with distinct nets. This set of variables speaks to how successful different population segments were in controlling their compatriots’ actions.

Power is measured here by the differential ability of some to command the labor of others. Such productive efforts can be harnessed to many tasks, most of which are not enshrined in the Naco valley archaeological record. One set of projects that did leave tangible remains was the construction of buildings associated with specific population segments (Abrams 1994; DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle 1996; Masson 2003b: 280; Smith 1994: 151–153). The Roble phase architectural corpus in the Naco valley spans a continuum stretching from perishable edifices raised directly on ground surface to sizable platforms. Differences in the dimensions of, and the engineering skills needed to raise, such constructions imply comparable distinctions in the sizes of the networks mobilized by those who commissioned these edifices (Abrams 1994; Trigger 1990).

A second rough measure of power is people’s differing ability to attract and hold the loyalty of others, assessed here based on variations in the nucleation of settlement between sites. This correlation is based on the assumption that controlling the actions of subordinates relies in part on keeping those associates close so they are readily available for conscription into tasks that require their efforts (de Montmollin 1989; Roscoe 1993). Such concentration also helps ensure that labor pledged to a central individual or group is not siphoned off by competitors (de Montmollin 1989; Roscoe 1993).

Variations in building sizes and settlement aggregation, therefore, materially express the sizes of political networks focused on certain nodal people or groups and indicate how effectively the latter could channel web members’ actions to their benefit. The more densely concentrated residences are within a site, the larger the constructions raised in the house, household, or site. In addition, the more numerous these sizable edifices are, the more power we infer was vested in those who occupied the centers of these nets (Trigger 1990).
These measures are, to be sure, crude approximations of power. There are many ways in which people’s labor can be directed in production, war, ritual, and the like. This approach tacitly assumes that building sizes and settlement nucleation are valid proxies for all forms of control, that those who could commission large edifices and attract considerable followings also had privileged claims on their subordinates’ food surpluses, as well as on their prowess in combat and participation in religious observances. Such connections may well have pertained, and we will point out some instances where we believe they did operate in the Roble phase Naco valley. Still, it is wise to bear in mind that different forms of cooperative action occurring at distinct scales may have been coordinated by diverse people who exercised control through varied networks (Crumley 1979). Labor mobilized to raise large constructions, therefore, could have been marshaled by different means, drawing on different participants than those involved in organizing for rite, combat, and production.

Networks and Resources

People operating within networks might have employed numerous potential resources as they sought to advance and challenge claims to power. For the purposes of this study we distinguish between those material assets deemed essential to a people’s physical survival and those that defined the basic premises of existence (see Giddens 1984: 33, 258–262). The former include raw materials, the technologies by which those materials are transformed for human use, and the products of those transformations (Giddens 1984: 258). The latter are the conceptual structures, as well as the symbols by which they are expressed, through which people understand, organize, and relate to each other and to the world around them (Giddens 1984: 258). These two sets of resources are closely interconnected; political preeminence may be founded on effective exploitation of physical assets, those processes imagined, understood, rationalized, and conveyed through ideological frameworks and their symbols. In political contests, therefore, success goes to those who can stake privileged claims to essential resources, their acquisition, production, distribution, and consumption, and also ensconce those demands within conceptual structures in such a way as to make them seem reasonable and beyond question (Earle 1997; Giddens 1984: 258–262). People who wish to challenge such assertions must work through their networks to subvert both elite control over aspects of the material realm and the frameworks by which such command is presented and rationalized (Gailey 1987).

This distinction between material and conceptual assets is therefore an arbitrary one adopted here to facilitate discussion of political processes in the Roble phase Naco valley. Convenient as this division may be, it must
be acknowledged that the importance of any resource in political struggles was informed simultaneously by its physical properties as well as its cultural meanings. We are variably able to address these two broad aspects of ancient resources with the data in hand. There are times, therefore, when we will stress the material or the conceptual pole of an asset’s significance. Such bows to the nature of our information should not obscure the complex reality of a world where, in the past no less than in the present, ideological and physical features intersected to determine the significance of resources within political competitions.

As noted at the start of this chapter, we are pursuing the notion that power flows to those who can redirect resource streams to their benefit by reconfiguring social networks and the ideological underpinnings of those connections. How, then, are such material and ideological transformations to be recognized archaeologically? One of the prime indicators of these changes available in the Naco valley data involves the extent to which the production of materially and symbolically significant objects was centrally controlled or diffused throughout the population of houses, households, and sites. In part, therefore, attention focuses on the scale, intensity, and contexts of the production of prosaic implements as well as items that symbolized conceptual structures (Costin 1991, 2001; Schortman and Urban 2004a). Elite control over these manufacturing locales could effectively convert the mass of the population into clients dependent on the monopolists’ largesse for goods needed to survive and to fashion satisfying relations with other people and supernatural entities. Alternatively, dispersal of production loci might signify efforts to retain some level of household autonomy as people fabricated their own goods to meet their own needs, as well as for exchange with others engaged in complementary economic pursuits (Costin 1991, 2001; Schortman and Urban 2004a). We address these issues in chapter 7.

Another set of resources that might have been significant in political contests are those finished goods and ideas acquired from afar. The parochial importance of these foreign concepts and objects is in part a factor of their local rarity, as well as of attributions of sacred potency derived from their associations with distant, high-prestige realms and figures (Helms 1979, 1988, 1992, 1993). Those who effectively insinuated themselves within the networks by which such imports were acquired would have enjoyed a decided advantage in intra-valley political contests. They would have been in an excellent position to use prized items as markers of elevated status and as gifts recipients would have been hard-pressed to reciprocate (Ekholm 1972; Friedman 1982; Friedman and Rowlands 1977). In either case, privileged access to foreign goods and concepts could have been a foundation for creating invidious distinctions based on power.
However symbols were acquired and whatever their inspirations may have been, central control over their use and definition can be crucial to establishing political hierarchies because symbols both express an understanding of the world and motivate action within a world thus construed (DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle 1996; Geertz 1973; Turner 1964). The power of symbols to control behavior is based on varied sources (e.g., Geertz 1973; Turner 1964). From the network perspective, such conceptual assets are particularly significant in that they are crucial to defining web membership. As we will see in chapter 8, Roble phase Naco valley notables devoted considerable effort to restructuring social relations to their liking through the strategic use of symbols expressed on ceramics and also through architecture.

It is difficult to infer the presence and extent of resource monopolies from archaeological data alone. Essentially, we adopt the position that concentration of specific goods, symbols, and the means of fabricating them within specific houses or households reflects centralized control over local access to, and use of, these assets. Still, the degree to which members of some nets could effectively deny resources to others may not be readily apparent from archaeology’s mute remains. Further, the mechanisms by which goods and symbols were deployed in political struggles are not always or easily apparent from the distribution of materials recorded in excavations. These issues are revisited throughout the volume but especially in chapters 7 and 10.

Power might also be secured through monopolies over the provision of certain key administrative, social, economic, or ritual services to the population-at-large. Attention once again focuses on how, if at all, would-be scions forged networks of clients willing to surrender labor, loyalty, and some measure of autonomy in return for inclusion in activities of import to all but enacted by only an advantaged few. Archaeological signatures of this process might include close associations between venues for the performance of behaviors that had polity-wide significance and the domiciles of the elites who officiated at such performances (e.g., Conlee 2003).

The material patterns used to discern variations in power, resources, and network membership overlap to a considerable extent. For example, the same large-scale constructions might have expressed centralized control over labor, symbolized membership in a particular network, and served as venues for the performance of rites through which elites exercised control over their subordinates. This interdigitation reflects a reality in which materials have multiple connotations and serve several purposes. From a practical standpoint, such complex associations mean that any one item may at the same time be a means to and an expression of power. Arguments concerning network membership, power, and resource control that are based on one line of evidence therefore tend to be circular, with monumental edifices in the earlier example signifying
all three processes simultaneously. It is far better to infer aspects of political structures using independent lines of evidence, and we will do this where we can (Wylie 2002). Nevertheless, limitations in our dataset often leave us little choice but to reconstruct multiple features of political structures and processes from a restricted array of material remains. In these cases our descriptions are particularly susceptible to revision and remain hypotheses that need further examination to evaluate fully.

SUMMARY

The acquisition and defense of power require mobilizing support from people of varying backgrounds living at different locales to secure material and conceptual resources that, in turn, come from diverse sources. Distant peers may provide goods and ideas useful in projects such as expressing status differences, establishing unequal intra-societal exchange relations, and rationalizing both. Resident artisans might be co-opted within domination strategies as the fabricators of political valuables used to ensnare clients in dependency relations. Aspiring magnates then employ these and other assets to convert people with diffuse and conflicting loyalties into a network of supporters who owe allegiance and tribute solely or at least primarily to their leaders (Cohen 1979; Curet 1996; Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 36; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Yoffee 1991: 287). By mobilizing resource flows and reconfiguring social relations at varying scales, enterprising elites create hierarchically structured, spatially demarcated realms. That, at least, is the goal.

While leaders may push to secure the absolute, unquestioned allegiance of supporters within clearly demarcated polities, those they would rule push back. Just as magnates forge webs to serve their purposes, those resisting such pretensions also marshal assets of varying sorts to meet their own agendas, including preserving some degree of autonomy. This may take various forms, from engaging in craft production, to establishing independent means of acquiring distant goods, to meeting their own needs for administrative, social, and ritual services by their own efforts. In short, any way of undermining elite monopolies over crucial assets is at least an implicit challenge to paramount power. Non-elites, like their high-born compatriots, do not act alone in politico-economic contests. Instead, they participate in networks of varying spatial, temporal, and demographic scales. Given that different people will have access to diverse nets and that this access will change over time, the resulting political configurations will be heterogeneous, as measured in part by the power various participants achieve at any one moment.

It is very difficult to reconstruct this dynamic interplay of shifting forces based solely on archaeological data. Not only are the networks themselves
difficult to make out from material remains, but the full array of resources their participants manipulated in their struggles is impossible to grasp. We will therefore offer an incomplete account of who was involved in Roble phase competitions for power in the Naco valley, what resources they employed in their struggles, and the implications of these unresolved contests for the area’s late prehistoric political structure. Many aspects of these interchanges are forever lost to us. We hope that what can still be discerned of political structures and processes conveys an accurate sense of the general nature of these developments, even though many of the details are missing.

Throughout this volume, therefore, we will seek to identify the networks through which the Naco valley’s Roble phase residents organized to secure and manipulate resources in their search for power, the assets deployed in this process, how successful these efforts were, and the factors that might help account for the political configurations that emerged from such struggles. As noted earlier, the webs and resources integral to power contests were not restricted to the Naco valley but encompassed people, alliances, and goods distributed across potentially great distances. These features are also not restricted to the two final Precolumbian centuries. Instead, assets and networks have histories that contribute to appreciations of their shifting relevance in political competitions (chapter 9). Temporal spans and territorial distances may therefore be collapsed in the political strategies of people maneuvering, with variable success, for advantage within variably stable political networks.