PUEBLO POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN 1500: TINKERING WITH DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: By the beginning of the 16th century, the Pueblo people of New Mexico and Arizona were all living in aggregated villages of several hundred to several thousand residents. Although outwardly similar in appearance and culture, there was (and still is) a remarkably diversity in the social and political organization of the individual pueblos and clusters of pueblos. This paper looks at the diversity of Pueblo political organization as an example of individual social units "tinkering" with different strategies for economic survival and for competing more effectively with their neighbors. Examples drawn from the archaeological and ethnohistoric record will be used to illustrate the communities experimenting with diverse patterns of village structure and organization.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Evolution, Archaeology, New Mexico, Political Organization

In the Fall of 1540, the Spaniard Francisco Vasquez de Coronado with a following of soldiers, priests, and Indians entered what we know today as northern New Mexico. He was searching for gold and treasure - chasing the myth of the golden cities of Cibola. What he found instead was the vibrant culture of the Pueblo Indians. The Pueblos both impressed Coronado with the strength of their communities and to some extent confounded him because they did not fit the pattern of anything he was used to. Unlike the highly centralized and opulent civilizations of central Mexico the Pueblos did not have a king or even a dominant chief who could command the immediate obedience of his people. Coronado and subsequent Spaniards who explored northern New Mexico found to their considerable consternation that without a central Pueblo command structure, they really had little choice but to deal with each village independently - a cumbersome and costly way to both conquer and govern a new territory.

In some ways, the organization of the Pueblos has continued to confound European explorers and visitors to northern New Mexico for the more than 450 years since Coronado's initial expedition - and this has been particularly true for anthropologists. One of the biggest questions for anthropology centers around the relationship among the individual Pueblo communities. Today, each of the Pueblos is politically, economically, and socially autonomous. Although there is certainly communication and interaction between the Pueblos, they are all largely independent of each other - at times fiercely independent, as can be seen in negotiations land or water rights and over casinos. The presence of a relatively dense cluster of large, independent and autonomous villages living side-by-side with each other is a unique phenomenon in the known ethnographic world.

A number of different models have been offered to describe the precontact, aboriginal organization of the Pueblos prior to European influence. Some of the proposals that have been made for protohistoric Pueblo society include confederacies, complex tribes, chiefdoms, ranked society, autonomous egalitarian communities, corporate units, and regional alliances (Wilcox 1981; Reed 1990; Spielman 1994; Dozier 1961, 1970). Although attempts are often made to apply such models universally to cover all the Pueblos, our research in the area indicates that some models may be useful to describe some Pueblos but not work at all for others. Indeed, the archaeological and ethnohistoric records combine to show that the protohistoric Pueblo world of the 15th and 16th centuries was characterized by broad infrastructural similarities in the economy, but profound differences in social and political organization.

What we propose in this paper is that the diversity manifested in Protohistoric Pueblo political organization was a reflection of a period of developmental transition in the context of intense inter-village competition and conflict. In this environment of competition and conflict, the different communities of the northern Rio Grande were, in effect, "tinkering" with alternative

strategies of social, economic and political organization. We are using the term "tinkering" here to refer to the generation and adoption of diverse organizational principles as different communities struggle to compete effectively and survive in the cultural and environmental landscape of the 16th century.

The basic premise of cultural tinkering view is that in every society, across time, people are tinkering with their world (Haas 1998; Braun 1995; see Jacob 1977 and Levi-Strauss 1962 for a discussion of tinkering and the role of tinkerers and tinkering in evolution). Just as farmers tinker with their fields and cooks tinker with their recipes, there is also more collective tinkering at the community level as members and factions pursue alternative organizational strategies to meet their social, ideological, and economic needs. While this kind of community tinkering to some extent goes on constantly, we can also expect that the level and direction of tinkering will be a factor of the social and environmental conditions influencing a given community at a given time. We can expect the intensity of tinkering to increase as a community is subjected to stress from either internal or external sources. Internally, sources of stress may come from population growth or factionalism, for example, while external stress may come from deteriorating environmental conditions or competition with other communities.

The evidence for external stress in the Northern Rio Grande region during the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. is manifested both in nutritional problems (Stoddard 1990; Palkovich 1980) and endemic intervillage conflict (Haas and Creamer 1997). One of the consequences of the level of external stress during this period, we believe was a high level of tinkering with the social and political organization of the northern Rio Grande village communities. Community tinkering is manifested in a number of ways, including village layout, plaza position and use, and inter-village relations.

One direct manifestation of village-level tinkering is to be found in the physical design or layout of the villages themselves. If we look at the northern Rio Grande prior to the mid-1300s, we find most people were living in small communities of 15 to 30 rooms, though there were occasional villages of 100-200 rooms such as Pot Creek (Wetherington 1968; Crown 1991) and Pindi (Stubbs and Stallings 1953; Cordell 1979: , Stuart and Gauthier 1984). Change occurred during the 14th century with growth in the size and numbers of pueblo villages in the northern Rio Grande. Sustained by adequate rainfall and arable land, and encouraged by a pattern of raiding and warfare, we see people throughout the area converging on aggregated villages as the overwhelmingly dominant settlement strategy. Throughout the 15th century, villages got larger and larger until by 1500, virtually everyone was living in pueblos of more than 300 rooms (Haas and Creamer 1992) (Figure 1 and Table 1). The emergence of the aggregated village is itself a very good example of the transformation of a regional settlement pattern through a process of community level tinkering (see Creamer and Haas 1997).

In general then, the aggregated pueblo pattern encountered by the

first Europeans in the area was archaeologically a relatively recent pattern. The aggregation by itself would have introduced a broad range of problems and issues for the residents of each village as they sought new means for dispute-resolution, mediation with other villages, village-wide decision making. While the internal social relations in the villages is not immediately manifest in the archaeological record, variation in the layout of the villages gives some indication of the experimentation that was going on with organization and structure.

The various subregions of the northern Rio Grande themselves show interesting patterns of variation. In the Jemez region a high density cluster of sites exhibit considerable intersite differences. Some of the sites (Figure 2) are quite similar, with roomblocks, 3-4 rooms wide, rectangular open plazas, usually enclosed on all four sides with constricted entries. Other, fully contemporaneous sites in the Jemez area are dramatically different (Figure 3). Some, such as Wabakwa, are long linear arrangements of rooms with virtually no plaza areas; some, such as Seshukwa, are linear arrangements of rooms with tiny plazas filled with kivas; and yet others, such as Unshagi, are solid blocks of rooms with kivas distributed in both a single enclosed and two wide open plazas.

On the Pajarito Plateau, we can again see interesting experimentation with site layout (Figure 4). Puye, for example, is a single rectangular block, 6-9 rooms thick, surrounding a single large, open plaza. Tyuonyi, in contrast, is also a single block of rooms, 5-8 rooms across, surrounding an open plaza, but in this case the rooms are in a circular arrangement. Yet a third pattern is expressed at Otowi, where large blocks of rooms are completely separate from one another and there is no discrete plaza area at all.

The Chama area to the north, in contrast, is a good example of the convergence of a number of communities on a highly consistent pattern. Although there was considerable variation in village layout in the Chama area in the 14th and 15th centuries (Beal 1987), by the 16th century the villages are all made of adobe, with the rooms arranged in long, linear blocks, surrounding large, open plazas (Figure 5).

While the layout of roomblocks, plazas and kivas is itself a manifestation of community tinkering, it is also an indication of tinkering going on with village organization, ceremonial activities, and social relationships. It has been argued, for example, that plazas and kivas were used as public spaces by political leaders in efforts to exercise social and political control (Adams 1991, Lekson 1988). Clearly in the northern Rio Grande, plazas and kivas played quite different roles at different sites. At Seshukwa (Figure 3) in the Jemez region, for example, we see medium sized kivas crammed into tiny internal plazas; at Te'ewi (Figure 5) large kivas stand out in the middle of open spacious plazas; and then at Puye (Figure 4) the kivas are outside the plaza completely.

Further indications of social and organizational tinkering are to be found in variations in settlement patterns across the northern Rio Grande region. There are 65 known protohistoric villages recorded in northern New Mexico, ranging in size from 300 to 3000 rooms. Although it is possible that there are protohistoric sites that have yet to be recorded, this pool of 65 sites represents the large majority of the Pueblo population during the period from about 1450 to 1680 (Creamer and Haas 1991).

In looking at the distribution of sites, several different patterns are apparent. First, there are a number of discrete site clusters (see Reed 1990). In the Jemez area, for example, there are 17 protohistoric pueblos clustered in an area of less than 500 sq km. All are in a similar forested montane environment, and have similar material culture and masonry architecture. Although not as densely packed, there are comparable clusters in the Chama subregion, in the Galisteo Basin and on the Pajarito Plateau. There is significant variation in the size of sites within each of these clusters, but no clear indications that any particular sites were politically or economically dominant.

Sites in clusters account for about 75 percent of the total in the region. The remaining 25 percent, including such well known sites as Pecos (LA 625), Taos (LA 3932), and Paa-ko (LA 162) are isolated sites, disconnected geographically from other sites in the region. Although physically separate from other sites and clusters, these isolated sites are nevertheless connected complex interaction spheres of language, material culture and economics. Pecos, for example, the dominant ceramics were all the glazewares found in the Galisteo Basin cluster and sites to the south. However, the people of Pecos were recorded historically as speakers of the Towa language, which they shared with the people of Jemez Pueblo, makers of Jemez Black-on-white ceramics and situated squarely in the Jemez cluster. When Pecos was finally abandoned in the early 19th century the remaining residents in fact moved across the region to move in with kin and linguistic compatriots at Jemez. At the same time, Pecos was architecturally unique to the region and at least in the early historic accounts prided itself on dominating its neighbors: As related by Pedro de Castaneda, Chronicler of the Coronado Expedition, Pecos "is surrounded by a low stone wall. Inside there is a water spring, which can be diverted from them. The people of this town pride themselves because no one has been able to subjugate them, while they dominate the pueblos as they wish." Other isolated sites such as Picuris or Tzeguma, are much smaller than Pecos, and it is hard to envision them dominating any of their immediate neighbors.

Overall, the distribution of protohistoric Pueblos across the landscape, as with village layout, shows that relationships within and between communities were diverse and highly complex. Ultimately we are left to conclude that there was no one uniform "Pueblo pattern" of social, political and economic organization. In the face of both competition and conflict between communities, the pueblos throughout the northern Rio Grande region were trying out different alternative strategies for organizing themselves

within communities and for interacting with their neighbors. Heterarchical alliances and confederacies, as well as hierarchies are all possible configurations open to the Pueblo communities. The archaeological and historical records of the protohistoric Pueblos does show, for example, the formation of confederacies, as during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, and the site cluster in the Galisteo Basin may have formed some kind of alliance or tribal organization akin to what we see among the Hopi villages today. The pride of Pecos in dominating surrounding villages may have been the start of a classic "Carneiro chiefdom" had they been successful in subjugating neighboring communities.

The trajectory of Pueblo development was ultimately not played out because of the arrival of the Spanish and we will never know what might have been. Although the record from other world areas would indicate that centralized, hierarchical chiefdoms may have been one likely outcome in an environment relatively dense populations of people competing for resources and waging war against each other. However, it is also apparent that the Pueblo people were tinkering with new and unique strategies for coping with demands of the beautiful but uncompromising landscape of northern New Mexico.

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Figure Captions

1. Map of 65 Protohistoric sites in the Northern Rio Grande region (sites are listed by their Laboratory of Anthropology [LA] number.

2. Plan maps of Kiatsukwa and Pejunkwa in the Jemez subregion. (Dotted circles represent kiva locations.)

3. Plan maps of Seshukwa, Wabakwa, and Unshagi in the Jemez subregion.(Dotted circles represent kiva locations.

4. Plan maps of Puye, Tyuonyi and Otowi all located on the Pajarito Plateau. (Dotted circles represent kiva locations.)

5. Plan maps of Poshu and Te'ewi located in the Chama subregion. (Dotted circles represent kiva locations.)