Variation in Architecture and Occupation of Field Houses on the Tonque Agrarian Landscape

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Introduction

This poster presents the results of fieldwork undertaken by the 2024 University of New Mexico Field School on a parcel of land in the eastern foothills of central New Mexico's Sandia Mountains. The study area follows an intermittent tributary of the Rio Grande River, along which is found an unusually high density of precontact field houses. The area is lush compared with much of the surrounding desert scrub and must have been a desired location for farmers from nearby aggregated pueblos who dispersed across the landscape during the maize growing season to establish cropland. Nearby contemporaneous communities include Tonque (1325-1600 CE), Paa'ko (1200-1600 CE), and Tijeras (1313-1425 CE). We refer to the study area as the "Tonque Agrarian Landscape" due to its proximity to this significant, large pueblo.

Rio Grande Glaze Ware (RGGW) is the dominant decorated ceramic ware recovered on the Tonque Agrarian Landscape. It was produced from approximately 1315 to 1700 CE, with types Glaze A to Glaze F produced sequentially, though with some overlap, through the Classic Period (1325-1600 CE) (Eckert 2006). Individual types are identified primarily by variation in rim profiles but also by slip color and design. Tonque Pueblo, just five kilometers to the north, was a major producer of RGGW, as was San Marcos Pueblo (1200-1680 CE), 29 kilometers to the northeast (Schleher 2017; Warren 1969). In what follows, we present the results of our analyses of ceramic assemblages and architectural elements, exploring issues of occupational intensity through time and the role of the landscape's inhabitants in regional agricultural land management strategies.

Figure 1: Replica field house at Walatowa Visitor Center, Jemez Pueblo

Methods

We identified five different field house architectural styles while recording the sites. When we plotted these on a map of the study area, we observed patterning in the locations of the five field house types relative to topographic setting. Because the various RGGW types were produced during relatively narrow temporal spans, we can quantify the number of field house sites occupied per 50-year interval, providing a reasonable proxy for occupational intensity on the landscape from the Developmental (600-1200 CE) through the Classic Periods.

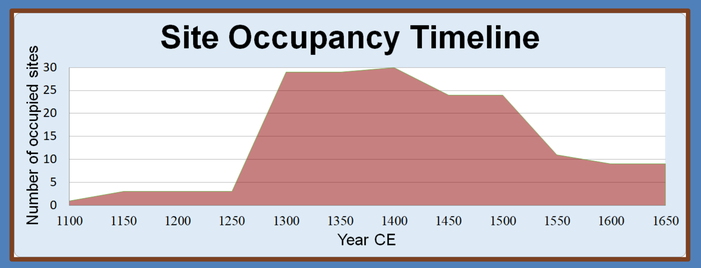

Figure 2: Number of sites occupied per temporal interval based on diagnostic glazewares present

Figure 3: Metate found at UNM-24

Field House Typology

We observed patterned variation in field house architecture and identified five recurring types of structures:

1. Expedient Foundation

We designated the simplest type expedient foundation. These structures consist of a single rectangular course of masonry blocks, likely having served as a footprint for a perishable superstructure.

2. Upright Slab

The foundations of upright slab field houses are defined by rough, tabular pieces of sandstone set vertically in the earth. These also probably supported jacal walls (fig. 12).

3. Formal Foundation

Formal foundation field houses are divided into two subtypes:

Regular coursed are constructed of finely shaped and laid masonry blocks reaching a height of two to four courses.

Double slab coursed denotes double rows of partially buried slabs with a gap between them. This space may have served to secure jacal poles.

4. Full Masonry

Identified by the quantity of rubble present, full masonry field houses were one- to six-room buildings constructed with floor-to-ceiling masonry walls.

Figure 4: UNM-17 Expedient Foundation

Figure 5: UNM-33 Upright Slab

Figure 6: UNM-18 Formal Foundation (Regular Coursed)

Figure 7: UNM-44 Formal Foundation (Double Slab Coursed)

Figure 8: UNM-14 Full Masonry

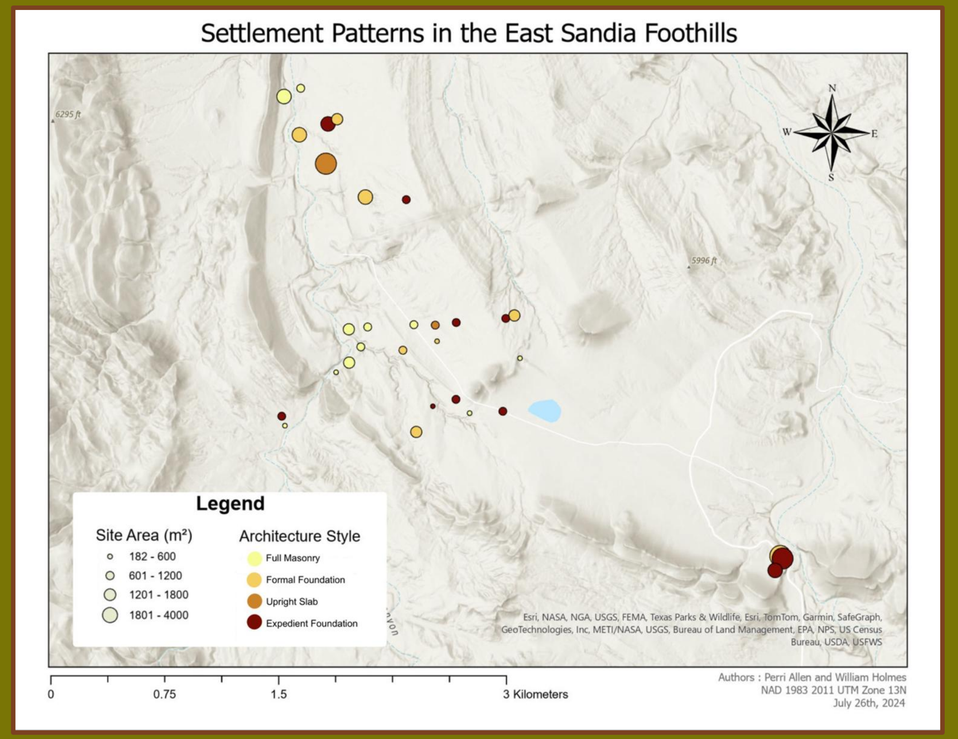

Figure 9: Map showing locations of sites documented with site area and architectural style indicated

Occupational History

We determined the occupation intervals of newly located sites using ceramic frequencies, particularly the temporally diagnostic RGGW rims recorded during survey and excavation.

The presence of Rio Grande White Wares and Rio Abajo White Wares dates the earliest occupation of the Tonque Agrarian Landscape to around 1100 CE. It was not until the 1300s, however, that field house utilization reached its apogee.

Due to the frequency of Agua Fria Glaze-on-red (Glaze A), we determine that this population influx began in the early Classic Period, when populations were burgeoning across the Middle Rio Grande region at large.

Glazewares from later in the sequence (i.e., D & E) occur at far fewer sites, suggesting a sharp decrease in local population after 1500 CE. The total absence of Glaze F implies that the area was completely depopulated by 1640 CE.

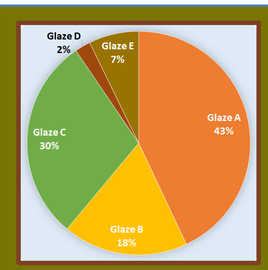

Figure 10: Relative proportions of Rio Grande Glaze Wares recorded

Figure 11: An early Rio Grande Glaze Ware bowl (Agua Fria Glaze-on-red) from Tijeras Pueblo (LA581). Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, Catalog No. 78.67.518.

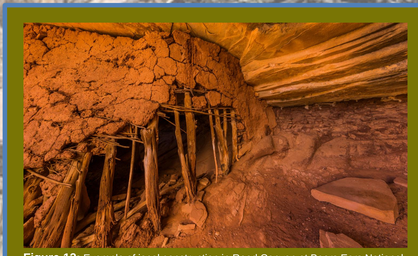

Figure 12: Example of jacal construction in Road Canyon at Bears Ears National Monument. Courtesy Lee Rentz / Alamy Stock Photo.

Conclusion

Field house occupancy spiked at the beginning of the Classic Period in tandem with expanding populations throughout the Middle Rio Grande region. Between 1400 and 1450 CE, however, occupational density on the landscape began a gradual decline for reasons that remain unclear. Full masonry field houses were more likely than other types to be built near the area's primary intermittent watercourse, but they are not necessarily older than other types of sites nor do the density of their artifact scatters evince more intensive occupation. We consider the possibility that full masonry structures built along the riparian corridor may reflect some aspect of the status of their owners.

Going forward, we propose to conduct ceramic compositional analyses to evaluate whether any of the identified architectural types are more closely associated with pottery produced at Tonque, Paa'ko, Tijeras, San Marcos, or another community. If we can recognize any such correspondences, we would gain valuable insight into the ways in which community boundaries were constituted, and arable land allocated, during the Classic Period.

Further, the architectural types would be recognized as a high visibility marker of community affiliation which could be employed to great effect in future nonintrusive, nondestructive field studies.

Acknowledgements

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