Becoming Tewa: Ritual Landscape Change in the Rio Ojo Caliente Valley, New Mexico

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Introduction
Between A.D. 1300-1500 the ancestral Tewa of northern New Mexico comprised a number of small, dispersed settlements, ranging from 40 large villages in the highland and lowland areas. Just prior to the present-day Pueblo by the late 14th century they had formed a larger cultural entity that has been called the Early Tewa. This was a period of rapid development, characterized by a resurgence of population, the construction of large, continuous settlement complexes, and the establishment of a more integrated system of communal and regional institutions. The area is one of the most intensively studied parts of the American Southwest, and there is a wealth of information about the prehistoric past of the Tewa people. This project is a preliminary investigation of how Tewa cosmology changed during post-contact times, using one class of data: the ritual landscapes that were constructed in this area.

The Tewa Ritual Landscape
The richest source of data pertaining to Tewa cosmography comes from the ethnographic record recorded in the twentieth century. Orin (1998) described the Tewa cosmological axis as divided into four tiers which are each associated with shrines and can be visualized as concentric circles. The first tier includes the mountains (Yojo), which delimit the world (associated with men and material things); the second tier encompasses the low lying hills (Hupobi) where both men and women hunt small game and forage for plants; the third tier also includes the lower slopes of the mountains where women, who reproduce life, are the caretakers of corn and seeds. The fourth is the plains of the center of the world. The landscape surrounding the site is known as the World Quarter shrine (Ortiz 1998). The model outlined by Ortiz appears to have material correlates in the archaeological record, with linear cupule boulders either with cupules or linear ground slicks.

Coalition in the Valley
The Rio Ojo Caliente Valley is a tributary of the Rio Grande and one of the major arteries of cultural activities in the Tewa Basin of northern New Mexico. The Rio Ojo Caliente Valley is home to an ancient Tewa village that is the La Joya Coalition and Classic Villages (A.D. 1275-1550). A list of sites along the major valley axis, including the major village of Sandoval Pueblo, was surveyed and analyzed in previous work (Duwe 2008, 2019). The late Classic Period site of Sandoval Pueblo (LA 9819) has been the subject of intensive research and analysis (Ortiz 1998). The model outlined by Ortiz appears to have material correlates in the archaeological record, with linear cupule boulders either with cupules or linear ground slicks.

Late Coalition/Early Classic Period Ritual Landscape
The model outlined by Ortiz appears to have material correlates in the archaeological record, with linear cupule boulders either with cupules or linear ground slicks. Although these are preliminary data, I argue that this is a larger pattern in the Tewa world. However, while this research may be limited to the Rio Ojo Caliente valley, it is clear that the cultural pattern described here is part of a larger trend in the American Southwest, and that these patterns have implications for understanding the broader trends in Tewa cosmology over the last 500 years.

Conclusions
Although these data are preliminary, the evidence suggests that during demographic population changes between A.D. 1275-1550 Tewa ritual landscapes evolved and materialized into what has been termed the ethnohistoric period by the Classic Period (after A.D. 1400). These results are similar to ritual landscape data from the Rio Ojo Caliente valley. It is clear that the cultural pattern described here is part of a larger trend in the American Southwest, and that these patterns have implications for understanding the broader trends in Tewa cosmology over the last 500 years.

References

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