Introduction

Rapid transformations characterized the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century Pueblo world. The depopulation of the Four Corners region triggered widespread population movement; one result was a large influx of migrants to the northern Rio Grande (Ottman 2010). Concurrent with large-scale demographic change were shifts in social and cosmological focus among the ancestral Northern Tewa (Fowles 2009, Kershnar 2009). Evidence of this suggests that during the late thirteenth century, the world-quarter shrine was used by Tewa ceremonial specialists. The world-quarter shrine was a prominent architectural and religious feature in the Tewa world, and its appearance in the late thirteenth century is evidence of the transformation of the Pueblo world. The world-quarter shrine was unique to the Pueblo world and was associated with the Tewa world, suggesting that the Tewa world was a significant component of the Tewa cosmology. This project addresses the question of how and when this transformation occurred.

World Quarter Shrines

Although rock rings are an important and ancient shrine type common across the Pueblo world, the world-quarter shrine is unique to the Tewa world. The Tewa phenomenon was documented by the early twentieth century (A.D. 1350). Comprising of a ring of axially spread stones, gravel, or tuff, 10-12 meters in diameter with an opening oriented due east, Tewa world-quarter shrine design is tightly constrained. Only one world-quarter shrine is present per village and it is located on a hill or ridge approximately 500 meters to the southeast.

Jeancon (1923) explained that historically the world-quarter shrine was primarily used to encourage rainfall. During a long drought the Summer and Winter chiefs, with their top lieutenants, would retreat to the shrine and “would stay there for four days and nights and make magic to bring rain” (Jeancon 1923:53). From this description anthropologists learned two important points: 1) for the Historic period Tewa, the world-quarter shrine was associated with agriculture and; 2) the shrine was the purview of Tewa ceremonial leaders, suggesting that world-quarter shrines are in a separate class from household shrines.

Study Area: The Rio Chama

Populations levels in the Chama were low until the early fourteenth century when hundreds, if not thousands, of people settled the watershed, likely following the Pajarito Plateau to the south (Duwe 2011). These people were either displaced by incoming Four Corners migrants or were an amalgamation of both migrant and indigenous Rio Grande populations. Whatever their identity, the settlers brought with them novel ideas of place-making and social organization, which they began to express during this tumultuous time of climatic and residential instability.

Case Study: Tsiping' uinge

Tsiping' uinge is 450-room village located on the northwestern frontier of Tewa world and is one of the largest Wiyo phase Tewa sites in the region. Although situated on a highly inaccessible mesa, ‘Tsiping’ uinge was a major population and ceremonial center as evidenced by three-story tall room block architecture, a great kiva, 23 cave rooms, and a highly complex ritual landscape. There were two main building events at ‘Tsiping’ uinge based on tree-ring dates collected from exposed beams in both the 1930s (Smiley 1951) and during the current project in collaboration with the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research. The village was initially built between A.D. 1312-1314 as part of the large-scale colonization of the Chama, and remodeling and expanded in A.D. 1325-1326. Whether the expansion and remodeling of ‘Tsiping’ uinge was related to an influx of population into the region or internal growth is currently unknown. What is known is that at the very end of this building episode the only dated world-quarter shrine in the northern Rio Grande region was constructed in the fall of A.D. 1326.

Ritual Landscapes in the Tewa World

The Tewa Pueblos of northern New Mexico have a highly complex cosmology and social organization. Ortiz (1969) describes how the Tewa map the world with mountains, hills, springs, caves, and shrines in the northern Rio Grande region. Shrines, which are archaeologically visible and identifiable, were built across the landscape but concentrated around villages. Tewa shrines generally fall into two classes: (1) those immediately adjacent to the village and used by households; and (2) those used by ceremonial specialists. Anschuetz (1998) argues that while ritual landscapes resembling those of the ethnographic-era are found at ancestral Tewa villages after A.D. 1350, the earliest villages in the region (A.D. 1250-1350) generally associate with smaller and simpler ritual landscapes comprised solely of village household shrines. Shrines associated with ceremonial specialists, such as the world-quarter shrine, appear sometime in the fourteenth century. The appearance of specialist shrine types likely coincides with the development of an ethnographic-era cosmology. This project addresses how and when this transformation occurred.

Discussion

The appearance of a world-quarter shrine at ‘Tsiping’ uinge in A.D. 1326 suggests that a social and cosmological organization similar to that of the ethnographic Tewa may have been present in the Rio Chama watershed in the latter part of the Wiyo phase. The building of the shrine concurs with population expansion at the site, suggesting that increased social and ceremonial complexity was a consequence of migration and population aggregation and growth. ‘Tsiping’ uinge is not unique in its landscape transformation during the Wiyo Phase. Ancestral Puebloan sites across the northern Rio Grande region (Fowles 2009; Kershnar 2008), especially those of large (>400 rooms) size, were likely undergoing similar changes as they adapted to population, subsistence, and metaphysical pressures.

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