

## ARCHAEOLOGY UNDER THE BELL: THE MISSION AS SITUATED HISTORY

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Abstract: The frontier mission, or *doctrina*, has long been cast as the seminal institution of the Spanish colonial state. Beyond their role as trans-local institutions for the propagation and control of sacred knowledge and socio-political identity, however, missions were the single most important location of colonial and indigenous contact and the context in which colonialism as an historical process was situated. Drawing on material from 17<sup>th</sup> century New Mexico mission settings, this paper examines the mission not as a complete, prior, meta-historical structure imposed on passive subject populations, but as a variable and developmental array of policies, strategies, settings, and processes made and transformed in historical practice .

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*"The central interest around which the mission was built was the Indian. In respect to the native, the Spanish Sovereigns, from the outset, had three fundamental purposes. They desired to convert him [sic], to civilize him [sic], and to exploit him [sic]."* (Bolton 1917).

*"The traditions of the Field leave us hard put to understand how much "conversion" actually took place in these institutions, what aspects of "civilization" were assimilated by native residents, by what means and with what results "exploitation" was actually practiced and with what impact on the lives of the exploited."* (Sweet 1995).

Ever since Bolton (1917), the frontier mission, or *doctrina*, has been enshrined in Borderlands historiography as the seminal institution of the colonial state (Adelman and Aron 1999; Graham 1998; Sweet 1995; Thomas 1989; Weber 1986). Throughout northern New Spain, missions were the single most important setting of colonial and indigenous contact. They were, in effect, the place where colonialism happened. More than sites of conversion, missions were the locus of colonial indoctrination, subjugation, and society-making. Within such settings, colonial interactions may have been asymmetrical but they were also reciprocal and mutually constitutive. Accordingly, the mission and other instruments of colonial governance are best understood not as global or ideal institutions, but as diverse and historically situated strategies, practices, and relations articulated by many agents in divergent contexts over long periods of time (Lycett 2002a, in press). Like other instruments and manifestations of the colonial state, the mission appears not as a complete, prior, meta-historical structure imposed on passive subject populations, but as a variable and developmental array of policies, strategies, settings, and processes made and transformed in historical practice (Comaroff 1998; Dirks 1992; Mitchell 1991; Stoler 1992). If, as I suggest, even global and external forces are themselves re-constituted locally in the very process of colonial incorporation, then missions must be approached as both historical and situated.

The word "mission," of course, glosses a number of institutional and physical settings (Broughton 1993, Graham 1998; Polzer 1989; Ricard 1966). Leaving aside these terminological

issues and taking an analytical perspective, missions may be conceived of simultaneously as place, as community, and as an institutional logic or colonial project (Lycett 2002a). Although these dimensions are intertwined, I want to focus the remainder of my discussion on the production of place in colonial contexts.

Places may be defined as locations that are culturally signified, named, recognized, and bounded. Places have associations that are identified, remembered, and made distinct in contrast to other places and larger spatial framings. Places, like landscapes, are produced through a social process that is historical, accretional, developmental, and integral (Appadurai 1995; Basso 1996, Crumley 1994; Hirsch 1995; Ingold 1993). They constitute a repertoire for further action and construction, or a sedimented form of ongoing history that helps define and constrain the possibilities for subsequent spatial practice and interpretation. Places may be understood in terms of their momentary form or construction states, their potential to act as a symbol or index social memory, or through the experience of their occupation and inhabitation. In this latter form of situated history, places are made meaningful through the routine practices and rhythms of daily life. Thus, the process of constituting place may be located in the relationship between occupational and embodied histories.

For the indigenous inhabitants of seventeenth century New Mexico, the context of and possibilities for constituting place became increasingly defined and constrained by the spread of the Franciscan mission system. The demographic and social disruption attendant on Spanish colonization led to the de-coupling of settlement and place both locally and regionally. Instability in the number, location, and composition of settlements appears to have been common during this period, as Pueblo villages broke up, reformed, and coalesced into new combinations of community and place. Many demographically and geographically marginal communities

collapsed by the second half of the seventeenth century, their populations becoming incorporated into larger and more central settlements that survived long enough to become objects of historic and ethnographic inquiry. Even before the colonial population spread from its base at Santa Fé, fewer and less populous Pueblo settlements occupied a smaller region. While these shifts might have played out in a number of ways, this spatial restructuring was organized around a particular colonial institution, the mission. Missions established in existing Pueblo villages, but Spanish and Colonial places nonetheless. In this period, missions became a focus of settlement incorporating a declining population into novel systems of production and emerging political, social, and religious networks (Lycett 1995, 2002a).

Whether considered as communities or settings, however, these emergent social spaces do not arise *de novo*, but are constructed within already extant, embodied landscapes with existing histories, associations and understandings. Nor should they be characterized as either wholly indigenous or wholly colonial places, but as transformed, simultaneously integral and novel. The mission, thus, constitutes a unique framework for place-making and one that operates from the moment of incorporation through the end of the seventeenth century, when colonialism became everyday life for those who had been born into and had always lived within the mission system. It is both the medium and outcome of historical process.

Returning to the New Mexico case, our recent work at LA 162, alternately known as Paako or Mission San Pedro, provides an example of one such situation and process. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Rio Grande Valley included fully incorporated missions subject to resident Franciscans, less populous and less central *visitas*, formerly missionized places, and displaced refugee communities (Kubler 1940; Scholes and Bloom 1944-45). To the extent that these differences structure the possibilities for accommodating, adopting, challenging,

negotiating, or appropriating colonial power relations, they are crucial to understanding variation in historical experience (Lycett 2002a, nd).

One of the most important axes of variation is the physical presence of the Franciscans and what might be termed the “mission industrial complex;” the church, convento, kitchens, workrooms, and corrals. These are places where labor and resources were mobilized in the production of monumental structures, where indoctrination in social, political, and religious practices was routinized, and where new forms of production and produce were amassed and distributed (Hodge, Hammond, and Rey 1945; Sweet 1995). Residence in such places has implications for access to resources and for potential for subjugation, but also for the daily routines and rhythms of life. From prime to vespers, new patterns of work, of ritual performance, of instruction, and of time discipline became the fabric of everyday life.

The *visita* of San Pedro, with its relatively small population, discontinuous occupational history, and geographically marginal position within colonial networks, provides important contrasts to larger, more central mission settings and allows us to consider the diversity of these settings, the conditions that differentiate them, and the implications of their variation for understanding processes of incorporation.

Over the past 90 years, several large scale excavation projects have been conducted at this site (Lambert 1954; Nelson 1914a, 1914b). Since 1996, our research has focused on the interrelationship between occupational history and spatial organization, colonial incorporation and transformation, the constitution of marginality in new social geographies, and the import of differential incorporative practices on each of these processes (Lycett 2002b, 2004).

Both surface documentation and excavation demonstrate that the occupational history and construction sequence of LA 162 is quite complex, with several episodes of construction,

superpositioning and reoccupation. Nelson (1914a, 1914b) and Lambert (1954) each recognize two major spatial divisions of architecture within the site. The *South Division*, or *San Pedro Viejo I*, excavated primarily by Nelson, includes at least ten adobe or masonry and adobe roomblocks arranged in four agglutinated plaza groups. These roomblock are separated from the *North Division (San Pedro Viejo II)* by a low-lying drainage. Both divisions show evidence of a widespread and intensive occupation between the late thirteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The colonial period occupation of the settlement was confined to a single plaza group in the southwest quarter of the North Division. Throughout the seventeenth century the residential population dwindled and habitation contracted to the southeastern-most roomblocks of this plaza group (Lycett 2002a). The settlement was abandoned sometime prior to 1680, and perhaps as early as 1660. Features associated with the colonial period occupation include, soil and water control facilities, corral enclosures, a copper smelting facility, and a small chapel situated within the seventeenth century plaza.

Beyond its setting, this relatively small and simple adobe chapel differs in placement, layout, scale, and elaboration when compared to the monumental church and convento complexes at Pecos, Abo, or Quarai, for example (Johansen 2002; Lycett 2004). As might be expected in a *visita* context, it lacks the range of structures and facilities that comprise the *convento*. Nevertheless, this structure was key to the radical reconfiguration of public space at that followed colonial incorporation. Plazas and other mundane interstitial spaces are important common areas and ritual settings in Pueblo society and our work suggests regular use of plazas in routine domestic activities throughout the occupation of LA 162. Shifts in the organization of work, including procurement, processing, and manufacture are well represented in the diverse array of features preserved on seventeenth century plaza surfaces. During the later part of the

occupation, a kiva was deliberately filled, and the southwestern quarter of the plaza was leveled to provide the foundation for the chapel of San Pedro.

While the structure itself both materially and symbolically obliterates existing spatial forms and relations, the process of its production is also implicated in the trajectory of colonial place-making. The means by which the Franciscans recruited, mobilized, and organized Pueblo social labor and resources in the production of this collective work itself created social and economic relations that stretched beyond the immediate project. Once emplaced, the chapel entered into networks of social and historical relationships and became a material claim to authority, history, and posterity. While such claims are always ambiguous and situational, open to an indefinite multiplicity of meanings, contest, and negotiation, the mere presence of chapel creates a context for interpretation (cf. Lefebvre 1991). One does not have to be a convert to be affected by living under the bell.

Colonial technologies and forms of organization repositioned social space, through the construction of corrals, smelters, and threshing floors, as well the production of public architecture. The complex sequence of successive reconfiguration of plazas at LA 162 includes construction of two successive corral systems (Lycett 2002b, 2004; Seddon 2002). The first, represented by a line of postholes, may have been roughly contemporaneous with the chapel. The construction of these corrals late in the residential occupation removed nearly one fourth of the available plaza surface from human use and probably prevented occupation of the portions of the roomblocks adjacent to the animal pen itself.

The prominent and more extensive masonry corrals that replaced them were part of a post-residential, reconfiguration of LA 162 as a pastoral camp. Villages abandoned in the seventeenth century commonly took on new roles as logistical elements in an emerging mixed

pastoral and agricultural land use system (Ferguson 1996; Lycett 2002a). Residential abandonment does not necessarily signal a loss of place, but rather a reconfiguration of the its role and historical associations. Settlements like LA 162 became campsites, corrals, raw material sources, and markers for social memory and place-making in the transformed landscapes of the colonial Southwest.

The occupational history of open space is one key to understanding how places are made and reconfigured through time. At LA 162, this history suggests an intensive and spatially differentiated use and restructuring of extramural space attendant upon colonial incorporation. During the seventeenth century this setting was incorporated into Spanish economic, legal, administrative, and social networks. New technologies, domesticates, and foreign biota were introduced and at least partially incorporated into existing landscapes and economies. Historic and archaeological data suggest discontinuous occupation, contraction of residential space, reconfiguration of extramural space, and construction of new and sometimes novel facilities at the site. The complex history of plaza construction and use during this period is integrally tied to these changes in the conditions and practices of daily life.

It is through such practices and contexts that place-making is materially produced. The mission, as setting and process, is formed in its construction, inhabitation, and interpretation as much as in the institutional logic of conversion, indoctrination, and subjugation. While the reconfiguration of physical and social spaces is clearly important to this process, it does not exhaust the possibilities for approaching colonial contexts through situated histories in any one setting or diminish the importance of comparison between settings. The larger point, that missions are themselves historical phenomena, suggests that attention to variation in context, practice, and trajectory are crucial to understanding the process of colonial incorporation.

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