

**THE HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF PLACE: MULTI-DISCIPLINARY  
RESEARCH AT LA 162**

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**ABSTRACT:** During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, LA 162, alternately known as Paa-ko and Mission San Pedro, was both an ancestral Pueblo village and a Spanish colonial mission site. Over the past decade, research in this setting has addressed colonial incorporation and transformation, the constitution of marginality in new social geographies, and the import of differential incorporative practices on each of these processes. Drawing on examples from paleoethnobotanical and metallurgical findings, this paper discusses the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to historic settings and examines the emergence of novel systems of production in colonial settings as an historical process.

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*“The Southwest... comprises those parts ...which are or were formerly inhabited by Indians of Pueblo Culture... These fascinating communities preserve the ancient culture of the Southwest in almost its aboriginal purity ... little more than veneered by European civilization.”* (Kidder 1924).

From the seminal moment of professional archaeology in the North American Southwest, the period between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries has served as both a methodological and substantive bridge between history and prehistory. Beginning with a presupposition of stability and continuity, Southwestern archaeologists have from the outset used their knowledge of documentary history, ethnography, and contemporary material culture as the basis for archaeological inference. Both Kidder (1924, 1958) and Nelson (1914c) chose known mission locations to implement their stratigraphic excavations and to develop their chronological projects. Each used this research as a basis for remarkably similar areal syntheses and programmatic statements (Kidder 1924; Nelson 1919a). Using what would come to be known as the direct historic approach (Wedel 1938; Steward 1942), the prehistoric, and not coincidentally pre-colonial, was defined through the lens of colonial incorporation.

Here, the period spanning late prehistory to European colonization, literally the *Proto-*historic in a developmental sense (Kidder 1927), might be seen, if implicitly, as one in which indigenous cultures are in the process of becoming historic, or taking on the configuration of traits documented by the first literate observers in the region. If, however, it is not the case that the indigenous peoples of the Rio Grande were developing into subjects of an overseas imperial polity, embedded within non-local civil, jural, and ecclesiastical structures, and with mediated access to colonial livestock, crops, technologies, and markets, then indigenous communities are

more appropriately viewed as the situational and contextual outcomes of historical process and incorporation must, itself, be problematized.

For the indigenous inhabitants of colonial New Mexico, the context of community came to be defined by the spread of the mission system. At any given point in the seventeenth century, the indigenous landscape might be made up of fully incorporated missions subject to resident Spaniards, less populous and less central *visitas*, formerly missionized places, and displaced refugee communities. 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, 2004a, nd).

We view our contribution to this understanding as an historical anthropology of place. History might be taken to refer to a periodization, a subject matter, a disciplinary context, or an evidentiary source (see e.g. Morrison and Lycett 1997), but here we refer to our understanding of process and analytical units as contingent and processual, "...not as fixed entities, but as problematic, shaped, reshaped, and changing over time" (Wolf 1990:590). Accordingly, our understanding of place focuses on the relationship between occupational history and place-making (Basso 1996; Lycett 2002a, 2004a; Morrison nd). In our view, this work would be historical independently of its setting or source material. In the remainder of this paper, however, we concentrate on the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to historic settings.

Documentary sources provide only a partial understanding of the heterogeneity and complexity of colonial incorporation in seventeenth century New Mexico. Archaeological research in the variety of spatial and institutional settings that made up this colony has the potential to provide a more detailed and, crucially in our view, situated understanding of different

communities and their articulations. Our recent work at LA 162, alternately known as Paa-ko or Mission San Pedro, provides an example of one such situation. We draw on paleoethnobotanical and metallurgical analyses from this project to illustrate our focus on combining disparate but imbricated data sources in historical research.

## **LA 162**

LA 162, is one of a small number of *visita* contexts with both a long history of research and recent excavations. Located at the head of the San Pedro Valley, one of three major drainage systems on the eastern slope of the Sandia Mountains, this site lay outside of any of the major settlement clusters or “provinces” identified by Spanish colonists. It was a small scale, intermittently occupied, and partially incorporated place. While part of the mission system, it never had a resident friar, a monumental church, or a convento complex. It was a place where some kinds of Spanish technologies and productive systems became important while others did not. It was a place whose inhabitants were differentially involved in colonial social and economic networks, and involved in different ways than some of the larger, more fully and continuously incorporated mission sites.

Over the past 90 years, several large scale excavation projects have been conducted at this site (Lambert 1954; Lycett 2002b, 2004b; Nelson 1914a, 1914b). Recent 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.

The site appears in the documentary record as early as 1598 (Hammond and Rey 1953).

One document suggests that this *visita* had been abandoned and subsequently resettled during the mid-seventeenth century (Scholes 1929). There is no documentary or archaeological evidence of indigenous occupation later than 1660 (Chávez 1954).

Both surface documentation and excavation suggest that the occupational history and construction sequence of LA 162 is complex. Nelson (1914b, 1914c) 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. 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, occupied space contracted to the southeastern roomblocks of this plaza group (Lycett 2002a) Features associated with this colonial period occupation include, soil and water control facilities, corral enclosures, and a copper smelting facility.

### **Vegetation History and Paleobotany**

Our analyses of vegetation history employ macrobotanical remains (Trigg 1999), stratigraphic pollen from core and column samples (Morrison, Arendt, and Barger 2002), and horizontal distributions of pollen imbedded in two superimposed, seventeenth century plaza surfaces (Morrison and Truran 1998). Introduced plant taxa fall into three broad categories: staple grains, garden and orchard cultivars, and weeds. In each of these categories, both

European species and species from other parts of the Americas were introduced into New Mexico during the colonial period (Ford 1987). Wheat (*Triticum* sp.) and to a lesser extent barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) were important both to the subsistence of the colonists and as resource for redistribution by the missions. Documentary sources suggest that the distribution of European grains was limited to irrigable areas and that the Franciscans controlled their production and distribution in mission contexts. These grains occur in both Hispanic settlements and mission contexts, as do a variety of garden crops (Ford 1987; Toulouse 1949; Trigg 1999). At La 162, which lacks irrigation facilities, these grains would likely be introduced as a foodstuff rather than a cultivar.

Wheat, like corn, is a grass (Poaceae) whose presence in pollen assemblages can only be inferred from its size distribution relative to wild grasses. In our studies of grass pollen size distributions from field location, there was no evidence of cultivated grasses other than corn being grown at the site (Arendt 2000; Morrison, Arendt, and Barger 2002; Morrison and Truran 1998). A single kernel of wheat has been recovered from the site, suggesting periodic but relatively limited access to this grain. No other European domestic plants occur in either macrobotanical or pollen assemblages (Trigg 1999; Arendt 2000).

Macrobotanical and pollen remains from seventeenth century contexts indicate continued use of a wide array of indigenous cultivated and wild plants (Trigg 1999; Morrison and Truran 1998). In contrast, European field weeds, including noxious taxa like bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) and goat head (*Tribulus terrestris*), are relatively common in pollen assemblages from these plaza surfaces (Morrison and Truran 1998). Although produce was being drawn off for use of colonists, agricultural and gathering practices remained predominately local and indigenous.

At the same time, however, local environments were already transformed by European introductions.

## **Metallurgy**

Discussions of the largely untapped potential of mineral wealth are ubiquitous in colonial descriptions of New Mexico from the sixteenth century onward. Documentary sources suggest that iron, copper, and other metals of every day necessity were relatively scarce in the seventeenth century colony (Hackett 1937), and it has generally been assumed that all metal in colonial period New Mexico was imported from New Spain (Dickey 1949; Kidder 1932; Simmons and Turley 1980). While this supposition may be true for much of the material recovered in colonial period assemblages, strong evidence of metal production has been found in a few Hispanic contexts (Warren and Webber 1979; Ramenofsky et al. 1997) and from the missions of San Pedro and San Marcos (Vaughan 2001).

Seven seasons of excavation at LA 162 have exposed a series of well-defined features used in or ancillary to copper smelting and other metal working activities (Thomas and Lycett 2001). These facilities, radiocarbon dated to the early to mid-seventeenth century, were repeatedly used for metal production with several superimposed and interdigitated features created by periodic episodes of use, maintenance, and reconstruction. Samples of the ores, slags and metals recovered from these excavations have been examined as polished sections or as petrographic thin sections, using both optical and scanning electron microscopy, and the qualitative chemical composition of the various phases noted has been obtained with the x-ray analysis unit attached to the scanning electron microscope. X-ray diffraction analysis has also

been used to identify minerals in the ores. Preliminary analysis suggests a number of important patterns in the organization and development of metal technologies at the site. Spatial segregation of technological processes and activities is coupled with a diversity of ore bodies, metals, and products, and shifts in the use of facilities and processes to create a complex mosaic of emergent experimentation in novel and hybrid technologies (Thomas 2002, 2004; Killick and Thomas 2003).

While some of these process were spectacularly unsuccessful (Killick and Thomas 2003), copper metallurgy appears to have been the predominant focus of the technology employed on the terrace over time. This may represent the culmination of an evolution of experimentation shaped by the requirements of colonial tribute demands, locally available resources, indigenous knowledge and practice, and frontier exchange relationships.

The most common form of manufactured copper in these samples is sheet copper, occurring as both manufacturing debris and finished artifacts (Lambert 1954; Lycett 1999; Nelson 1914b). Sheet copper commonly occurs in other mission assemblages (Hayes 1981; Kidder 1932; Nelson 1914c; Van Valkenburgh 1964), although there is no evidence of copper production or its by-products from any of these sites. Copper, in distinction to silver, was a metal of relatively little value in the exchange networks of colonial New Spain (Barrett 1987), but copper ornaments were a novelty in the Rio Grande valley in the seventeenth century, circulating in partially overlapping systems of value defined by both colonizer and colonized. Metallurgical practices may have been simultaneously understood as forms of production, disciplinary instruments of the missionary project, and an idiom of Christian and indigenous identity formation.

## **Conclusion**

The emergence of novel forms of production in colonial settings is an historical process marked by complexity, heterogeneity, and variation. While we have only been able to briefly sketch some aspects of the particular trajectory of this process at LA 162, it is evident that access to and involvement with European technologies and domesticates was complexly mediated in seventeenth century New Mexico. Some of this complexity is revealed in archaeological patterning that escapes documentary notice, however, we do not wish to argue that archaeology is necessary to or privileged in relation to textual evidence. We do not suggest that there is a past produced by history that can be compared with a past produced by archaeology in order to adjudge the truth value of either narrative. Instead, we believe that multiple, independently constituted lines of evidence brought to bear on these problems provide for particularly powerful analyses of past events and processes. Such analyses force us to think about some kinds of observations, positions, and knowledge in terms of others and lead us to ask more interesting incisive questions. In particular, our technical knowledge of the materials, manufacture, form, function, deposition, and recycling of non-textual forms of evidence can be powerfully combined with text based understandings of the contexts and relations of production and circulation in colonial settings. In practice, any historical anthropology must be a multi-disciplinary project.

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