



Following the yellow brick road: Yellow slip clays and the production of Rio Grande Glaze Ware in north central New Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This provenance study of yellow-firing clays in north central New Mexico examines whether clays recovered in the vicinity of Tunique Pueblo (LA 240) may have been used as slip clays at contemporaneous San Marcos Pueblo (LA 98). A sample of 72 ceramic sherds, bricks, and clays were analyzed through chemical characterization using laser-ablation inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS). We argue that Tunique potters were using a subset of clays available at their village to produce pottery. Although San Marcos potters appear to have possibly been using clay from Tunique Pueblo to slip their vessels, these clays were not the same as those used by Tunique potters. Given San Marcos potters' apparent reliance on this slip clay over time, we argue our findings demonstrate that extremely stable social networks were developed and sustained among Rio Grande Pueblo households and communities across north central New Mexico during the late prehispanic and early colonial periods (1400–1680 CE).

1. Introduction

Among ethnohistoric potters, the raw materials used to make pottery often come from a variety of locations. Some resources such as clay or temper are widely available and are typically obtained close to the area of production (Arnold, 1985). Other resources, such as slip clays or pigments, are more limited in their availability and potters may travel longer distances to obtain these materials (Dillingham, 1992; Najohai and Phelps, 1998; Parsons, 1932). Acquisition of these more specialized materials are embedded within social and economic networks of varying scales; this may have also been the case in the past (Herhahn, 2006; Huntley et al., 2012; Nelson and Habicht-Mauche, 2006). In this study, we are specifically examining the provenance of yellow-firing clays used in the production of Ancestral Pueblo glaze-painted pottery at two villages in north central New Mexico.

The majority of ceramic provenance studies in the Southwest United States have focused either on mineralogical analyses (Capone, 2006; Eckert, 2008; Habicht-Mauche, 1993, 2002; Shepard, 1942) or bulk chemical compositional techniques (Crown, 1994; Glowacki et al., 1998; Huntley, 2008). However, the development of numerous chemical compositional techniques has provided multiple avenues for archaeologists to explore the provenance of specific clays, tempers, slips, and paints (e.g., Duwe and Neff, 2007; Habicht-Mauche et al., 2000).

This research focuses on understanding the provenance of the yellow-firing clay used as slip on glaze-decorated pottery produced during the 14th through 17th centuries in north central New Mexico (Fig. 1). Specifically, we collected chemical signatures derived from laser ablation-inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS) of historic bricks, clay samples, and ceramic sherds from Tunique Pueblo (LA 240) and San Marcos Pueblo (LA 98). We interpret these data to explore the distribution of raw materials required to make pottery and to discuss social networks that may have facilitated the movement of these materials.

Our goals were threefold. First, we wanted to identify which of the clays available in the vicinity of Tunique Pueblo were used by late prehispanic and early colonial (1400–1680 CE) potters to produce yellow-slipped glaze-painted pottery. Not surprisingly, we found that Tunique Pueblo potters were using a selection of the yellow-firing clays available near their village. Second, we wanted to explore whether or not the clays available at Tunique Pueblo were used by potters at San Marcos Pueblo, located about 30 km to the northeast. We argue that San Marcos potters were probably using yellow-firing clays from Tunique Pueblo to slip at least some of their vessels, however these slip clays were not the same as those used by Tunique potters for the body of their vessels. Third, we explore what these data tell us about the nature of social networks among villages during the late prehispanic and early

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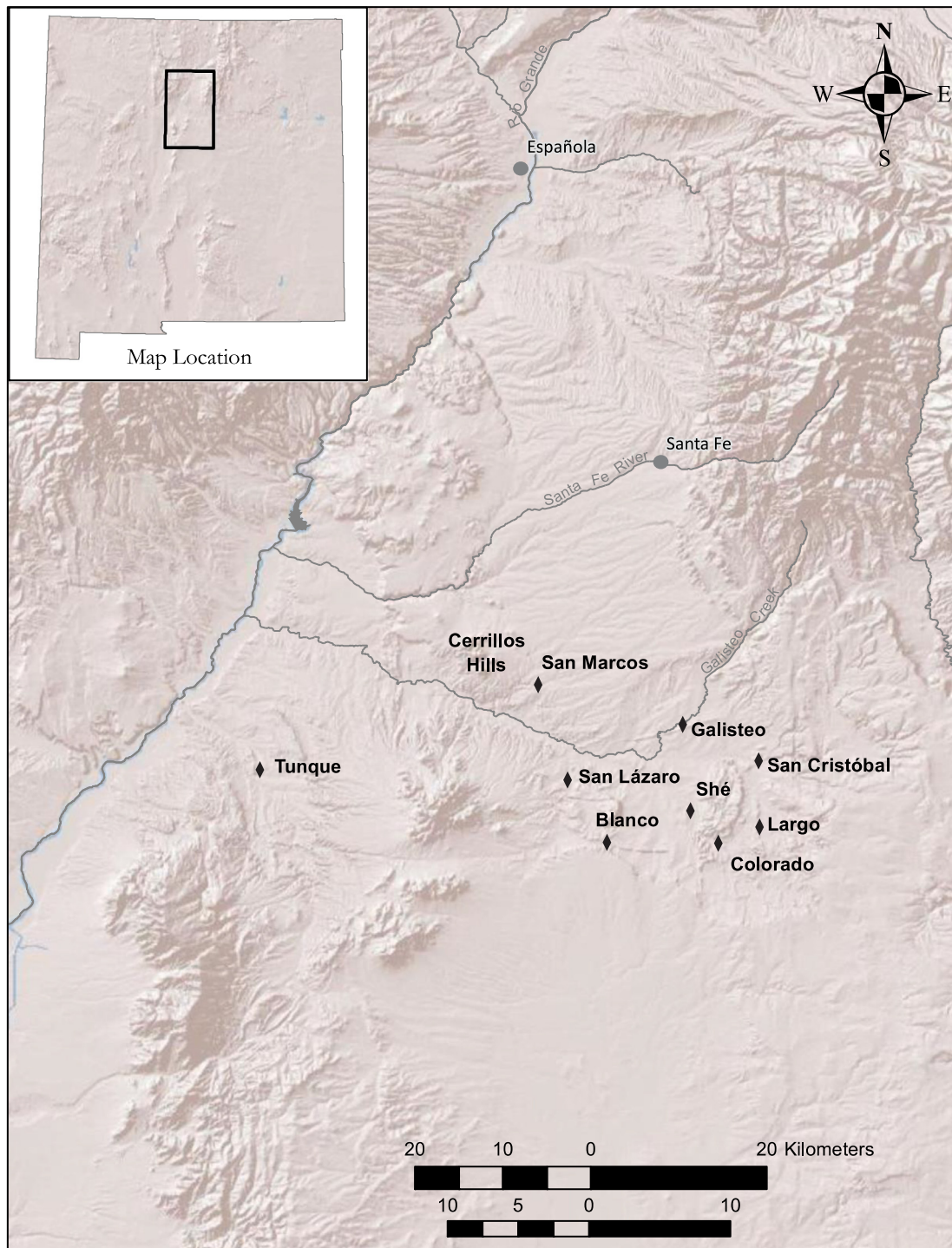


Fig. 1. Map of north central New Mexico, showing location of Tunque and San Marcos Pueblos, as well as other large, contemporaneous villages in the Galisteo Basin (map by Grant Coffey).

colonial periods in north central New Mexico. We argue that it is more appropriate in the context of our study to discuss how strategies of resource acquisition built enduring social relationships between specific households and villages within this region rather than to discuss ‘local’ versus ‘nonlocal’ pottery production per se.

1.1. The archaeological setting

Early in the fourteenth century, major demographic shifts occurred in north central New Mexico including a significant population increase

(Snead et al., 2004). Villages built at this time were much larger than previously dispersed settlements (Crown et al., 1996). The rapid construction of so many large villages has led researchers to suggest various models of social reorganization including tribalization (Habicht-Mauche, 1993), clustered confederacies (Spielmann, 1994), and alliances (Creamer, 2000; Creamer and Haas, 1998; Wilcox, 1991). Archaeologists have recognized changes in other social dynamics that are associated with these settlement shifts, including new ritual systems, expansion of exchange networks, and dramatic changes in ceramic production traditions (Eckert, 2008; Habicht-Mauche, 1993; Habicht-

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