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Distinguishing and Modeling Site Types in the Tiguex Province, New Mexico

Moho, Alcanfor, and the Struggle
for Northern New Spain (1540–1542)

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By the early spring of 1542, the nearly two-year *entrada* of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado in Tierra Nueva was coming to a close. Not only had this expedition's efforts failed to identify another Inca- or Aztec-like polity in Northern New Spain, but its aim to locate large population centers—with agricultural surpluses and compliant Native labor forces—had similarly met with failure. As the expedition prepared to return home to Mexico, the high costs and profound consequences of their activities on Spain's northern frontier were becoming increasingly manifest to expedition members (European, Native Mexican, and African), their benefactors, the Spanish Crown, and most pointedly, the Pueblo communities of New Mexico's Middle Río Grande Valley. These costs and consequences were profound, ranging from the health and fortunes of *entrada* participants and Native communities, to the geopolitical trajectories of empires. For nearly two centuries, archaeologists and historians have wrestled with the challenge of understanding these shattering events, as well as the sites and lives associated with them.

By the latter part of 1540 the base of operations for the Vázquez de Coronado expedition had been established among the Southern Tiwa pueblos in what is now north-central New Mexico—an area known by sixteenth-century Spaniards as the “Tiguex Province.” Writing to King Carlos V in late October 1541, Vázquez de Coronado explained that after extensive re-

connaissance, the Tiguex area represented the “best [place]” within two hundred leagues (~527 miles/848 kilometers) or more of his original base of operations at Zuni (Cíbola) (Flint and Flint 2005: 321). What began with the expedition’s hopes of creating control and prosperity in Tiguex, however, ended with precisely the opposite. Shortly after their arrival in the Middle Río Grande Valley, and for more than a year afterward, the primary focus of the Vázquez de Coronado entrada in Tiguex was extracting resources (food, clothing, fuel, and shelter) from a Native population actively resistant to these demands. Many salient features of this entrada—including its large size, significant Native contingent (~70% Mexican auxiliaries), prolonged occupation in one localized area, and ferocious, large-scale, and extended conflict with Native communities—set it apart from other sixteenth-century expeditions in North America.

The Tiguex War, which pitted a large force of Spaniards and their Native Mexican allies against a dozen or more Southern Tiwa pueblos, involved sustained military conflict throughout the region. Arriving before the onset of winter, and representing the largest sixteenth-century expedition in North America, the Vázquez de Coronado entrada presented an immediate and lethal threat to Southern Tiwa communities whose territory they occupied and sought to control. According to 1544 trial testimony, provided two years after the expedition returned to Mexico City—trials relating to charges of misconduct by major expedition leaders—every Tiguex pueblo was burned or damaged (Flint 2002: 131). Many Natives were killed or wounded, together with an unknown number of Spaniards and their Native allies. As one Spanish expedition member, Diego López, indicated, the nature of the conflict in Tiguex was savage, “without mercy” (Flint 2002: 390, 395).

Despite the historical significance of this military confrontation, archaeological identification and analysis of major sites mentioned in sixteenth-century documents, and relating to the Tiguex War, have been problematic. For nearly 180 years speculation has been widespread regarding the whereabouts of Vázquez de Coronado sites in the Southwest, especially in the Tiguex area where the expedition spent the most time (Bandelier 1881; Barrett 2002; Flint 2011; Mathers 2011; Mathers and Marshall 2014; Riley 1995; Schmader 2011; Schroder 1992; Snow 1988; Ternaux-Compans 1838; Tichy 1940; Vierra 1992; Vierra and Hordes 1997; Vivian 1932). After this long period of investigation, however, definitive site identifications remained largely an objective, not a reality. Of special interest and importance for

archaeologists, historians, and others has been the desire to locate three major Tiguex sites, including:

Alcanfor (also known as Ghufoor, Coofer, Coofor, and Coafor): the primary base camp of Vázquez de Coronado in Tiguex from approximately late 1540 to early 1542;

Arenal: a Tiguex pueblo attacked by the expedition, probably in early 1541, and the scene of the penultimate major battle in the Tiguex War; and

Moho (also known as Tiguex, Pueblo de Mocha, and the Pueblo del Cerco): a Tiguex pueblo besieged by Vázquez de Coronado for about two months in early 1541, the last major battle in the Tiguex conflict, and the site of the longest siege in Native–European warfare in sixteenth-century North America.

A Brief History of Research

Early efforts to define the geographic boundaries of the Tiguex region began in the nineteenth century with research and fieldwork undertaken by Adolf Bandelier and his colleague, Charles Lummis (Bandelier 1881: 18–20; Lange and Riley 1966: 311–316; Lummis 1893: 467). Both Bandelier and Lummis speculated that the Bernalillo region, north of what is now the Albuquerque metropolitan area, in north-central New Mexico, was the likely location of the primary base camp of the expedition (Alcanfor). However, no detailed historical or archaeological evidence was offered, at that time, to bolster these claims. Further, neither Bandelier nor Lummis provided clues to any distinctive physical or material attributes that might help identify the archaeological remains of major sites such as Alcanfor, Arenal, or Moho.

Later archaeological and historical work in the Albuquerque area built on the suggestions of Bandelier and Lummis, particularly the investigations sponsored by Edgar Hewett, and undertaken by his associates, in advance of the four hundredth anniversary of Vázquez de Coronado's arrival in the Middle Río Grande Valley (e.g., Fisher 1931; Kelley 1934; Luhrs and Ely 1939; Tichy 1939; Vivian 1932, 1934b). Hewett and his colleagues focused their attention on the excavation of two relatively undisturbed Southern Tiwa villages: Kuaua (LA 187) and Santiago (LA 326, also known as Bandelier's Puaray). Both sites were located in the northern portion of the Tiguex area, on the west bank of the Río Grande, near the modern town of Bernalillo.

Survey work in the Middle Río Grande Valley prior to Hewett's 1934–1939 excavations suggested that pueblo sites in the southern portion of Tiguex were greatly damaged by looting—such as Piedras Marcadas (Fisher 1931: site 7, n.p.); badly damaged by the extraction of fill for road construction—such as Alameda Pueblo (LA 421) (Fisher 1931: site 10, n.p., Cordero 2013: 25–26); or adversely affected by canal construction—including Piedras Marcadas, Calabacillas (LA 289), and Alameda.

The focus of excavations by Hewett and his collaborators in the northern portion of Tiguex appears to have been influenced by the work of Bandelier and Lummis—who emphasized northern Tiguex as the principal geographic focus of Vázquez de Coronado encampments in the region. Hewett's research also appears to have been impacted by the damage and destruction of sites in southern Tiguex, situated nearer to the developing center of pre-WWII Albuquerque and its expanding infrastructure.

While the Hewett-sponsored 1934–1939 excavations reported no Vázquez de Coronado objects at Kuaua Pueblo (Dutton 1963; Kelley 1934; Luhrs and Ely 1939; Sinclair 1951; Tichy 1935), investigations at nearby Santiago Pueblo (Tichy 1935, 1939; Vivian 1934b) did produce materials later linked with the Vázquez de Coronado entrada. These objects include copper crossbow quarrels (Ellis 1957), mail armor (Tichy 1939: 162), long copper “tubes” or lace chapes, and a caret-head nail (Mathers and Marshall 2014), axes and a possible lance head (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture 2014), as well as fragments of a sword (Maxwell Museum 1936). Unfortunately, none of the excavators of Santiago Pueblo recognized the historical significance of these materials. Excavations undertaken by Pooler (1940) at Piedras Marcadas Pueblo in southern Tiguex also failed to identify any Vázquez de Coronado presence, despite the large quantity of materiel from that entrada discovered at the site subsequently (Mathers et al. 2007, 2008; Schmader 2011, 2016). Consequently, it was some two decades or more after the excavations at Santiago and Piedras Marcadas before any objects from the Tiguex area were recognized and properly attributed to early Spanish-sponsored entradas (see Ellis 1957). Some modest progress was made in the decades following the Santiago and Piedras Marcadas excavations to establish objects (such as crossbow quarrels) as diagnostic of the Vázquez de Coronado expedition. However, no efforts were made before the late 1980s to characterize the types of sites produced by this entrada, the range of materials likely to be associated with them, or the distinguishing features of different site types (e.g., battles vs. major or minor encampments).